

Passengers feel a faint glow of technology

It's been a long time coming, but taxis and coaches are pioneering a revolution combining transport data and tracking to provide better information. And this is only the beginning



Some taxi passengers now have a much simpler life. By simply pressing a button on an app you can "hail" a cab.

No more ringing around minicab companies or waiting in the rain for a licensed taxi. You will instantly see where the cab is, its estimated time of arrival and (if you have an account) an estimate of the fare. Cab drivers benefit because they don't waste so much time and fuel cruising looking for fares, and minicabs reach more people.

Regulators are trying to catch up with this development in an industry which, as the *Financial Times* put it, is "ripe for disruption because it is highly regulated, based on principles reaching back several centuries, and bespoke". There are often good reasons for regulation, but here is technology that blends tracking, apps and mapping to the benefit of users.

You can start to see the potential for this. Instead of checking bus times you could check what options you have for travel and book in one swipe: public transport, car clubs, bike hire or whatever. Some providers are starting to use this technology well. National Express's Coach Tracker is transforming the company's understanding of the business, reducing costs and giving staff access to much better data.

It does not stop there. The app allows passengers to get hold of useful, accurate information. You don't need to huddle at the stop to be ready whenever the coach might arrive; you head to the stop when it is actually coming.

At last a relationship can start to be built up between passenger and providers. A link to Facebook acts as a single sign-in page. Valuable repeat business, in a market with occasional use, becomes easier to secure.

The app can supply data to the Traffic Commissioners. It

improves complaint handling, dramatically cutting response times. Claims for disruption can be checked in seconds. Comments about things like the temperature of the inside can be matched up.

We are only at the start of this revolution. Passenger Focus understand a number of bus companies are looking at this type of app: bring it on, we say. This type of technology brings to the otherwise potentially silent bus stop more information than you can currently find at rail stations. Plus the information is identical whichever way you choose to access it.

Fares and ticketing are another area where technology is finally starting to bite. Train operator East Coast has been

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investing and improving in this area.

It has introduced a one-hour "no quibble" guarantee when you book online. If you make a mistake, but phone web support within an hour, the booking will be changed free of charge. Any aspect of the booking can be changed.

There is more. Passengers can collect tickets from ticket vending machines using any card with their name on, not just the card used to book the ticket: great for parents.

East Coast has also recently introduced something that Passenger Focus has been going on about for ages. If you pick two single tickets that add up to more than the price of a return valid on the same trains, the website invites you to reconsider. Also, if you pick an Anytime

return when a cheaper return fare would do what you need, it also warns you, though less intrusively because it is possible that you have opted for that flexibility deliberately. All these are things that many industries might consider standard, but this is a great leap forward.

Passenger Focus's research on smart ticketing is, we hope, helping to guide this revolution and make sure these developments are passenger-focused. Initial work on the South East Flexible Ticketing project and an evaluation of the Oxford Smartzone from the passenger perspective have been published. Rail-based apps, a market study into the likelihood of passengers' adopting smart ticketing, and benchmarking of the Norfolk smartcard trial will follow.

Next year we may look at passengers and contactless payments, smartcard branding, more work on rail-based smart ticketing, how innovation can lead to improvements for passengers and integrating ticketing across rail and bus. Tell me if you think these are the right or wrong things to focus on.

Our work shows that passengers want some clear, straightforward things from any smartcard development:

- Trusted – if things go wrong passengers want to know who to complain to
- A value for money improvement over paper ticketing
- Simple
- Secure
- Flexible
- Tailored to their needs
- Involving new technology
- Easy to use.

Sticking to these principles will help ensure that developments are adopted and loved by passengers.

The white heat of technology? No, but things are warming up!

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