Ticket Machines
Mystery Shopping Report

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Ticket Machines

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

As part of Passengers Focus remit to monitor and improve rail travel services to passengers a mystery shopping programme was undertaken to measure the performance of the following aspects of the rail service:

- ticket machines
- ticket offices
- on train provision of tickets
- telesales

The results of the ticket machines service are provided in this report. The findings for the other services are provided under separate cover.

1.2. Methodology

All mystery shopping at the stations was carried out between mid-October and mid-November 2006. In total 53 shoppers worked on the project and a total of 423 shops to stations were made. Quotas by station size category (A, B, C, D, E, and F)[1] were imposed on the sample to ensure sufficient numbers of the larger stations were included in the sample. This meant that for the larger stations more than one shop was made. For the smaller category D, E and F stations only one shop to an individual station was made. Likewise quotas by day of week and time of day were imposed to ensure sufficient weekend days and peak-time weekday travel times (especially Monday and Fridays) were included. The sample in Scotland was also boosted. A full copy of the data tabulations has been provided to Passenger Focus under separate cover.

It should be noted that some of the sub-sample base sizes are too small to report percentages. For this reason numbers are used instead as these are more reliable and indicate that statistical caution should be observed.

[1] Network Rail categorises stations into six groups (A-F) on the basis of both size and facilities. Category A stations are the largest (e.g. Victoria), with F being the smallest (e.g. Taffs Well).

2. MAIN FINDINGS

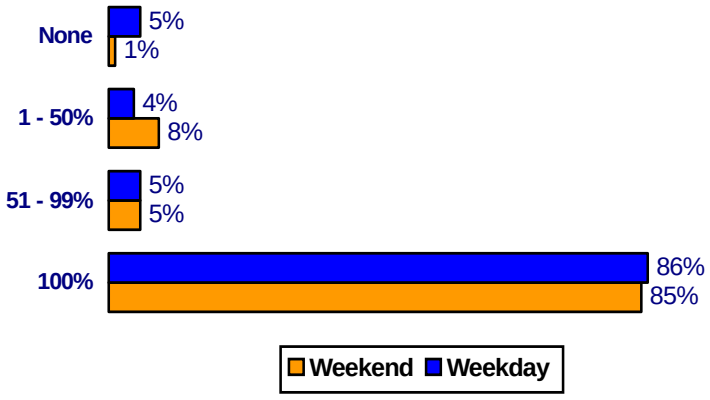
2.1. Presence of ticket machines at a station

Of the total 423 visits made by our mystery shoppers, ticket machines were observed in 70% of stations. As expected the larger category stations were much more likely to have ticket machines than the smaller stations: at category A stations 100%, down to 3% at category F stations.

2.2. Ticket machines in working order

Of the 296 shops where ticket machines were at the station, most had **one or more** machines that were in working order (96%). To further explore the working order of machines the shopper noted how many machines in total were at a station and then also noted how many were in working order. By cross-analysing both these pieces of data an overall percentage of how many machines in total were in working order was calculated. This is shown in table 1 for both the visits made on a weekday and at the weekend.

Table 1: total proportion of ticket machines in working order on a weekday and at the weekend



Base: 296 station visits

From this it can be seen that similar proportions of machines were working during the week as there were at the weekend. It was also further calculated that of all the

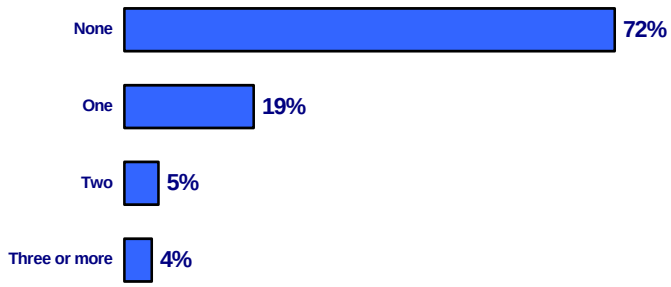
machines observed by shoppers across both peak and off-peak periods[2], an average of 92% were in working order.

A high proportion of working ticket machines was found at category A stations (97%). This dropped slightly for the B sized stations to 93% and to 86% for category C stations. The number of D, E and F sized stations with machines was too small to make reliable statistical conclusions.

2.3. Queuing – number in queue

For nearly three quarters of our shoppers (72%), nobody was in the queue in front of them.

Table 2: proportion of people in front of you in ticket machine queue



Base: 285 station visits with working ticket machines

There was slightly more chance of someone being in front of you at a ticket machine on a weekend (32%) than if you was queuing on a weekday (27%).

2.4. Queuing times

Most stations had all ticket machines working. The queuing time was short in most instances: 87% only queued for 1 minute or less.

The queuing times for ticket machines by peak and off-peak times, as well as by station category, are shown in the following tables.

[2] For the purposes of this study, peak hours were defined as: 0700-1000 and 1600-1900, Monday to Friday. Off peak hours are defined as all other hours.

Table 3: peak and off-peak queue times

Queuing time	Weekday Peak times	All off peak times
(Base)	(66)	(219)
Up to 1 min	87%	87%
Over 1 up to 3 mins	13%	10%
Over 3 up to 5 mins	0%	2%
Over 5 mins	0%	1%
Average length	***0.3 mins***	***0.5 mins***

Base: All visits with working ticket machines / shading reflects where targets have not been met.

Table 4 reflects off-peak visits in more detail and compares the queue times during off-peak periods on a weekday to the queue times that occurred at the weekend. For both these off-peak periods the number queuing over 3 minutes is low, especially compared to the queuing times at ticket offices (reported under separate cover).

Table 4: weekday and weekend off-peak queue times

Queuing time	Weekday off -peak	Weekend off peak
(Base)	(131)	(88)
Up to 1 min	88%	86%
Over 1 to 3 mins	10%	9%
Over 3 to 5 mins	2%	2%
Over 5 mins	0%	3%
Average length	***0.3 mins***	***0.7 mins***

Base: All visits with working ticket machines / shading reflects where targets have not been met.

The queue times do vary by category of station; in particular category B stations had slightly longer queue times than the other stations. Table's 5a and 5b show what these are during both weekday peak times (Table 5a) and off-peak periods (table 5b).

Table 5a: peak period queue times by category of station

Queuing time	A	B	C	DEF
(Base)	(21)	(26)	(16)	(3)
Up to 1 min	95%	73%	94%	100%
Over 1 to 3 mins	5%	27%	6%	0%
Over 3 to 5 mins	0%	0%	0%	0%
Over 5 mins	0%	0%	0%	0%
Average length	***0.3 mins***	***0.5 mins***	***0.2 mins***	***0 mins***

Base: All visits with working ticket machines / shading reflects where targets have not been met.

From table 5a it can be seen that no shoppers needed to queue for over 5 minutes at peak periods.

Table 5b: off-peak period queue times by category of station

Queuing time	A	B	C	DEF
(Base)	(52)	(92)	(66)	(9)
Up to 1 min	84%	84%	93%	89%
Over 1 to 3 mins	14%	11%	5%	11%
Over 3 to 5 mins	0%	3%	2%	0%
Over 5 mins	2%	2%	0%	0%
Average length	***0.6 mins***	***0.6 mins***	***0.2 mins***	***0.2 mins***

Base: All visits with working ticket machines / shading reflects where targets have not been met.

During off-peak periods (which include the weekends), once again it is the category B stations that experienced the longest queue times: 5% of shoppers needed to queue for over 3 minutes, whereas for the other categories it was 2% or less.

2.5. Instructions or contact details on machine

The instructions and contact details observed by shoppers on the machines were

- Contact details for the train operating company (74%)
- Instruction to contact any member of staff (39%)
- Phone number to contact (4%)
- Contact ticket office (1%)
- ***None/no instructions*** ***(4%)***

In 4% of cases (11 station visits) no instructions were found. Of these 11 visits most were either at GNER stations (6) or Southeastern stations (4).

2.6. Type of ticket machine used

The vast majority of machines used by shoppers (94%) were where the options for destinations and ticket types were displayed on a screen. The remaining 6% used machines that had individual buttons for each pre-determined destination. Little difference was observed between category of station and the type of machine available.

Table 6: off-peak queue times by category of station

Queuing time	A	B	C	DEF
(Base)	(71)	(114)	(81)	(12)
Options displayed on screen	94%	92%	96%	92%
No screen/buttons only	6%	8%	4%	8%

Base: All visits with working ticket machines

The vast majority of machines allowed payment by card (96%). The coin and note options were more available in stations in the smaller category C type stations than the larger A and B ones (as shown in table 7 below).

Table 7: Payment options available at ticket machine

	All	Station Category		
		A	B	C
(base)	***(278)***	***(71)***	***(116)***	***(79)***
Coins	72%	52%	67%	92%
Notes	72%	49%	68%	94%
Cards	96%	94%	95%	97%

Base: all visits where ticket machine used 278

2.7. Ease of use

A scale of 1 to 5 was used to measure how easy or difficult it was to use the machines as follows:

1 = no instructions/unable to use
2 = very complicated
3 = fairly complicated
4 = fairly easy to use
5 = extremely easy to use

As already commented, most shoppers used the type of machine that displayed the options on screen. Table 8 below compares the experiences of those using the 'screen display' machines to those using the 'individual button' type machines. Although only 16 people used the latter, there is an indication that the 'button' type machines were more difficult to use. Only 19% said these were extremely easy to use compared with 29% for the 'on screen display' machines.

Table 8: rating of using different types of ticket machine

Ease of use score	Options displayed on screen machine	Individual destination button machine
(base)	*(233)*	*(16)*
no instructions/unable to use	1%	0%
very complicated	3%	6%
fairly complicated	10%	13%
fairly easy to use	58%	63%
extremely easy to use	29%	19%

Base: All using machine and giving a score

2.8. Overall comments

The final part of the mystery shop asked the shoppers to note down any comments they had regarding their experience of using the ticket machines. Areas comments tended to cover were:

Frustration if machine was out of order

"A large notice was stuck all over the machine saying it was not working. This notice obscured details of what to do." (Alternative place/way to purchase a ticket).

"The ticket office was closed. The permit to travel machine had a red light on it indicating that the purchaser should go to the ticket office."

"The station was very busy. There was only one ticket window open and the ticket machine was out of action. People were missing their trains as they had to queue. There was another retail person in the office, but she was doing other things that I am sure could have been put aside until the queue was shorter."

Payment problems

"It seemed to take a very long time to return my card"

"I put card in slot then couldn't get it back. I had to wait for someone who knew how to use it to get my card back"

"Machine would only take coins so there was a long queue for tickets at the window."

"I lost £1.40 in the machine. The screen did not respond easily, it seemed sticky. I had to go to a second machine and pay by card. I did not inform South West Trains of loss as the ticket office was closed.

Different ticket selections

"I could not find out how to use the discount ticket option"

"I wrote down the different fare options which slowed me up and the screen went off too quickly."

"The machine did not provide for railcards despite stating that this facility was available."

Screen Issues

"Screen moved too fast"

"The screen was very difficult to use as the sun shines directly on to it. You virtually had to guess some fares"

*** END ***