

Smart ticketing in Brighton: what do passengers think?

Summary report



Foreword from
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We have already seen in other parts of the country how smart ticketing can make public transport more convenient. It can also offer greater flexibility and a better choice of products for passengers.

Extending an existing smartcard scheme to additional operators in Brighton is another example of this. With passengers feeling the benefits of convenience and flexibility from the start.

Drivers and operators involved in the project are also seeing the advantages of moving to smart.



Benefits include less cash handling and better information on passenger numbers across their smart-enabled routes.

Transport Focus is pleased to be able to report on this pilot in Brighton. We hope it can now be used as a case study for other areas.

Background

The key smartcard has been available on Go-Ahead's Brighton & Hove buses for several years now, but other smaller operators there did not until recently have smart capabilities.

The Department for Transport funded a pilot with Brighton and Hove City Council to provide smart ticketing equipment for two smaller bus companies operating subsidised services in the city: Big Lemon and Compass.

Big Lemon and Compass were supplied with smart ticketing equipment with Go-Ahead providing the back office function.

In August 2015 Big Lemon and Compass buses started accepting the key smartcard on their services. **This meant 98 per cent of Brighton's bus passengers were now able to access smart ticketing.**

What we wanted to find out

- The impact on passengers and bus drivers of introducing the key on Big Lemon and Compass services.

Specifically:

- Are bus passengers likely to use Big Lemon/Compass services more?
- Are bus passengers more satisfied with bus travel in Brighton overall?
- Has the introduction of the key impacted the driver's experience?

How we did it

Before the pilot:

- 16 detailed interviews with passengers
- Six detailed interviews with bus drivers.

After the introduction of the key:

- Eight detailed interviews with passengers
- Six detailed interviews with bus drivers
- Two days on-board Compass and Big Lemon services interviewing passengers as well as a short questionnaire with 49 passengers.

All our smarter travel research can be found at:
www.transportfocus.org.uk/research/smarter-travel

This is the latest report from our joint programme with the Department for Transport exploring passenger needs from smart ticketing.

Key findings: Before the pilot

Passengers' views before the pilot

Brighton's relatively youthful, technologically-literate community of bus users tend to be savvy about bus use. Many use the Go-Ahead app on their smartphones to plan journeys, check progress, and frequently to pay for travel.

A generally eco-conscious population, many are proud to be green and the premium on parking in the town is widely seen as positive as it reduces congestion and minimises pollution.

Existing scheme

Brighton already has an advanced smart ticketing scheme in place, compared to many other areas. The key smartcard has been available for use on the city's Go-Ahead Group buses for a number of years. However, two smaller operators that ran supported services in the area were only able to take paper tickets. Big Lemon and Compass buses were not smart-enabled, meaning passengers using the key smartcard were required to buy a separate paper ticket if they wanted to use these services. This often led to confusion and complaint among passengers and possibly reduced demand for these operators.



Positivity about bus travel in Brighton

Smart ticketing aside, the vast majority of bus users we spoke to in Brighton were positive about using bus services there. They could see obvious benefits of buses over other methods of transport, especially driving. Most saw using the bus to get into town as eco-friendly, especially when compared to driving (and the cost and difficulty of parking). The Transport Focus Bus Passenger Survey shows Go-Ahead services already have high levels of overall passenger satisfaction (90 per cent in 2015). Passengers thought bus services were regular in the centre of Brighton, and that the information provided at bus stops was of a high standard. They also felt the Go-Ahead bus times app was useful for real-time updates of services, and being able to plan exactly when to set out to catch a bus.

Although satisfaction with local services was generally high, passengers felt the introduction of the key on Compass and Big Lemon buses would be a very welcome improvement to bus travel within Brighton.

"Even if it improves bus travel by one per cent, it is still a step forward and in the right direction for Brighton."



"It's one of those things that once you have it you just don't look back, you would never go back."

Advantages of extending the scheme

The main advantages of this change were seen as ease of boarding, removing the need for the correct fare, and being able to travel on a range of services without needing separate or additional tickets. Passengers struggled to see any drawbacks of the introduction, with most of Brighton's eco-conscious and technologically-competent passengers keen to embrace this step forward.

Passengers who already used the key on Go-Ahead's services were generally pleased with how it worked. Many commented on how much more convenient it makes their experience of travelling by bus over paper ticketing, particularly in terms of not having to use cash. With some tickets being cheaper on the key there were additional benefits in terms of value for money. It also meant passengers could organise tickets before leaving the house, which led to a smoother experience when boarding the bus and also allowed them to spontaneously use the bus without having to plan for it.

"Nowadays everyone is all about saving time, so the efficiency that these smartcards will bring to bus travel in Brighton will be welcomed by everyone."

Bus drivers' views before the pilot

The Compass and Big Lemon drivers we spoke to, like passengers, felt the bus network in Brighton was already of a high standard. However, many drivers suggested the introduction of a smart ticketing system such as the key, primarily to minimise the need for cash. The drivers liked the ease and speed that cashless fares and pre-paid travel brings to bus driving, with most experiencing SAVER and concessionary permit holders daily.

Cashless fares remove the pressure for drivers to ensure passengers buy the correct ticket, which can be a complicated process. When buses are busy or when people just flash their ticket on boarding, the drivers said it was often difficult to check validity of paper tickets. They felt the key would help to remove this issue.

"Cashless fares take away so much of the grief you usually get from the old ticket."

"I wouldn't miss people getting on with only a ten pound note...or counting out every 5 and 10p!"

"It is embarrassing and hard to turn people away who have the key; often you get sarcastic and rude responses."



"The better the ticketing system is, the better a day the driver's going to have."

Awareness of smart technology

Just like the passengers we spoke to, the Compass and Big Lemon drivers were also aware of smart technology and generally understood it well. All knew of the key and how it worked as payment for travel. Some drivers learned about the key when passengers tried to use it on their services. This would put drivers in an awkward situation when they had to tell passengers they could not use the smartcard on their service.

All six drivers thought smartcard technology on buses was a good idea. One driver had experience of driving buses in London and noted the difference in amount of change he would have to carry from £200-£300 before the Oyster card introduction to £10-£15 after. Safety was a concern for drivers as well, and some felt the introduction of the key would make them less of a target for robbery.

However, drivers felt that the use of smartcards on buses would only be as good as the technology, therefore reliable equipment was very important. Some said that if issues arose it could cause more complications than currently experienced with paper tickets on bus services, especially if on a remote route.



Since the key was extended in Brighton

Summary of findings over time

Before this pilot, passengers were already positive about their experience of bus travel in Brighton. Our research shows the introduction of the smartcard on these services has only improved experiences for passengers.

Drivers have also seen positive changes to their experience since the introduction, with services being busier, less cash handling, and fewer altercations with passengers.

Passenger and driver opinions over time

	Before introduction	During	After introduction
Passengers	Those already using the key are highly satisfied with it; eagerly anticipated across a wider range of routes and services.	Very few issues. Existing key users delighted to have more choice of services; Big Lemon and Compass passengers happy to have a choice but no pressure to use.	Awareness of the key is increasing and satisfaction high. Compass and Big Lemon services are now being used more frequently or instead of alternatives.
Drivers	All aware of the key on Go-Ahead's buses; most keen to see it on Big Lemon and Compass services with few concerns.	Training and installation of the key went smoothly, and drivers felt confident with the technology straight away.	Transition has been painless and boarding processes improved, with services seeming busier and passengers happy.

Passengers: in their own words...

"I've had my key card for years, it's just nice to know I can now use it in the weekdays when I'm going to school."

"I've always thought Big Lemon was an exclusive bus for students, so it's nice to see they've opened up by accepting the key."

"I've actually got on a Compass bus before and had to get off because I wasn't about to pay again, so I've been waiting for this really."



"Now when I'm at the bus stop I can basically jump on the first bus I see, which often is a Compass!"

"Once my yearly citySAVER ticket runs out I'm going straight to the 1 Stop Shop and getting myself a key."



Passenger benefits

Being able to use the key across three different bus services is a significant benefit to passengers, making bus travel within Brighton:

- **more economical** – no need to buy separate paper tickets, which is more expensive, for Compass and Big Lemon bus journeys
- **standardised** – one form of payment and price across bus services within Brighton
- **easier to access** – a wider range of bus services can be used for a particular journey, both when planning and en-route.

Being able to choose whichever bus arrives first, regardless of operator, is the stand-out benefit for the passengers we spoke to. However, many seem to be choosing the newly enabled Compass and Big Lemon buses over Go-Ahead's services, particularly at the weekend for leisure journeys. These passengers told us Compass and Big Lemon buses are less busy leading to a happier and calmer environment.

Drivers: in their own words...

"It's made a big difference revenue-wise, without a doubt."

"If you're running late and need to make up time, you can easily do so now. In general it's just an easier life for the driver than before."

"It's quicker, simpler, better for the passenger, and better for the driver."

"Cash has dropped right off - gone are the days of carrying fifty quid's worth of change around with us."

"Once they see the red light of no acceptance from the machine they don't question it, and there are no arguments, it's so much easier than before."

Driver benefits

The main benefits from the driver perspective were very similar to those expected ahead of implementation:

- **improved driver sense of safety** – not carrying significant amounts of cash
- **easier and quicker boarding** of passengers
- **fewer complications and altercations with passengers** caused by having to issue or accept paper tickets or deal with incorrect change.

All this allows bus drivers to focus on driving their route, maintaining a calm and friendly atmosphere, and improving the day-to-day experience for passengers.



Getting the word out

The passengers we spoke to were largely aware of the key because of:

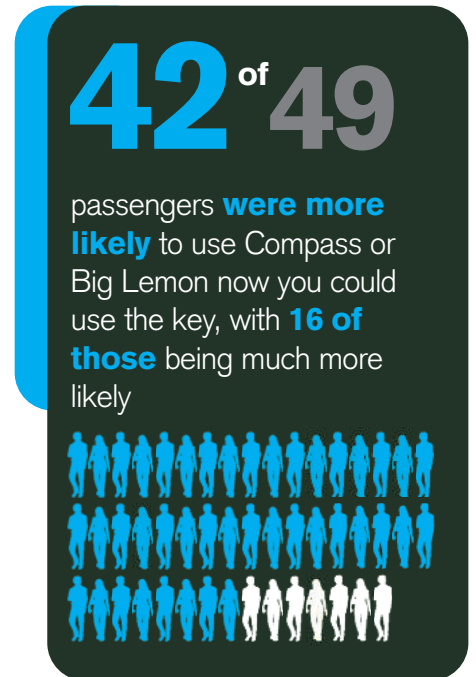
- **friends and family**
- **asking bus drivers**
- **social media – friends posting on Facebook.**

No passengers reported noticing or responding to adverts, either on board relevant buses or within the local area. The relevant buses usually displayed signage showing the key was now accepted, but passengers said this was hard to spot or read when they were boarding a bus. It was not obvious to most passengers who was behind the extension of the key, and they were not aware of Brighton & Hove City Council being involved.

Big Lemon and Compass also began accepting Go-Ahead's m-tickets in August 2015. These are tickets purchased via an app and shown to the driver on a mobile phone.

Passenger opinions in numbers

After the key was introduced we carried out a short survey with 49 passengers using Big Lemon or Compass services. What they told us was overwhelmingly positive, with almost all satisfied with using the key on each of the operators.



This research is part of the joint Department for Transport/Transport Focus smarter-travel research programme. This research project was carried out by Illuminas.

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What's the verdict?

As a result of multi-operator ticketing, already high levels of satisfaction with the Brighton bus network have improved further. Bus users now feel they have more:

- **choice**
- **flexibility**
- **freedom**
- **and better value for money.**

Passengers enjoy using Compass and Big Lemon's services, and with the introduction of the key card, they are pleased to be able to choose these services more often. Most passengers expect they will use these operators more as a result of the change.

Drivers were positive about how smooth the introduction of the key onto their buses had been, and the difference it had made to their driving experience already. They were confident there would be an increase in passenger numbers as a result, with some already having seen this.