

Engagement to withdraw Day Travelcards

Submitted via the Transport for London 'Have your Say' website.

I am writing on behalf of Transport Focus to object to the proposal to withdraw Day Travelcards.

Transport Focus is an independent, statutory consumer watchdog promoting the interests of transport users. Our remit covers rail passengers throughout Great Britain, bus, coach and tram passengers in England outside London, and users of the motorways and major 'A' roads managed by National Highways. We work with our colleagues at London TravelWatch to ensure that the rail passengers' voice is heard.

Our focus in this letter is on 'out-boundary' Day Travelcards. If these are withdrawn, then people will have to use contactless payment or an Oyster card instead. We believe that this would be detrimental to many passengers wanting to travel to London. It will result in some passengers paying more for travel (at a time when rail is already struggling to grow the market back to pre-pandemic levels and during a cost-of-living crisis) while also making travel less convenient and inclusive. If this results in fewer people travelling to London, then it could also impact on the wider London economy.

Passengers outside the London zones can currently add a travelcard onto their rail ticket. These add-ons are often sold at a discounted rate. For example, a Brighton to London Victoria Off Peak Day Travelcard costs an extra £5.50 on the price of the return ticket. This is less than the equivalent Pay-As-You-Go (PAYG) daily price cap – meaning passengers making more than minimal use of the travelcard element will pay more. For instance, in the Brighton example above, anyone making more than two Zone 1 tube journeys would pay more than before. The same would apply to many other stations outside the Transport for London area.

Day Travelcards also allow child fare discounts to be applied. This is also possible under PAYG but only when using Oyster rather than contactless payment. Children / families without an oyster card would now have to register for a card, pay a set-up fee, and then top the card up with funds. For example, to get a child discount for a 14 year old would require families to register for an 11-15 Zip Oyster card, something which can only be done online, pay a £15 admin fee, and then wait for it to be issued. This is more expensive and considerably less convenient than buying a Child Day Travelcard at the station on the day of travel.

Similarly, some (but not all) railcard discounts can only be applied to Oyster rather than bank cards. If people do not already have an Oyster card they will have to register in advance and pay the relevant fee. Once again, this will make the process more expensive and less convenient than buying a Day Travelcard at the station on the day.

A similar disincentive also applies to group travel. You can get a group Off Peak Travelcard that offers a discounted price if you are travelling with ten or more passengers – something that might suit school parties etc. A PAYG option would require everyone to have a bankcard or everyone to apply in advance for an Oyster card (with the consequent need for registration and admin fees).

Removing Day Travelcards risks adding cost and friction to what is currently a simple transaction. We know from our research that cost and convenience are the two biggest barriers to travel amongst non- or lapsed users (Footnote 1) . As a result, we believe that removing Day Travelcards will deter some people from travelling.

In addition to the potential cost, Day Travelcards are also a more inclusive product. They do not require the use of the internet to register for an Oyster card or that someone has a bank account (or sufficient bankcards for all members of a family travelling together). The Financial Conduct Authority Research estimated that 1.2 million adults were ‘unbanked’ in February 2020 (2). The groups most likely to be unbanked include the unemployed (11%), adults with no educational qualifications (7%), those who work in the gig economy (7%) and those who are digitally excluded (7%). In addition, our colleagues at London TravelWatch estimate that some 260,000 people in London do not have a bank account (3). In contrast, Day Travelcards can simply be bought in cash on the day of travel – making them a more inclusive and accessible product for some people.

It is for these reasons that we strongly oppose plans to remove Day Travelcards. At a time when public transport needs to win back customers, it is hard to see a reason to make their experience more difficult. We do not believe this to be in passengers’ interests and urge you to not to proceed with this option.

Mike Hewitson
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Transport Focus

Sources:

(1) Williams Rail Review – Barriers to travel: How to make rail more attractive to infrequent and non-users. Transport Focus. 2019

(2) Financial Lives 2020 survey. Financial Conduct Authority. February 2021

(3) Left behind Londoners. London TravelWatch. March 2023