

Public transport in the UK: Bodies on seats, Heads in the cloud

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Matters have moved very quickly since the 4th paper in this series (Horses for Courses) was published on 20th January, so this 5th paper has been added.

Here are some pointers to the way forward:

It is now very clear that 'bank card as authority to travel' (CAATT¹) *using pre-purchased tickets on the UK heavy rail network* is not only currently designed for just that one mode of travel (UK heavy rail) but also needs to be operated by a specific type of controlling body, of which TfL (Transport for London) is by far the largest of the necessary type that we have in public transport.

The dominant purpose of TfL is very different from that of the UK wide population of mainly franchised rail operators and company owned bus operators: it is essentially a public body, is there to move a huge numbers of people in the metropolis and its nearby hinterland without being too concerned about costs.

Franchised rail operators and corporate bus operators have to make a profit to satisfy their shareholders.

Bus operators have another, arguably stronger, straitjacket: they are constrained to make a profit on every route or hand back the keys to the government's Regulator (the Traffic Commissioners), i.e. must give up the licence for every route that loses money. Even the community interest operators have to at least break even – unless they have a properly funded contract to operate their route or routes, that is.

Trying to take CAATT to the wider environment runs into the problem of losing sight of all of the ancillary data: route, date and time for which the journey has been purchased, seat reservation, etc, etc. Customers (passengers) and operators of public transport need visibility of that data and the ability to manage it and use it.

The problem with the smart card is that you cannot see what is stored in it. We can try to develop kluges to help the passenger (e.g. station computers that you can interrogate at the station)², but what we really have to do is develop a new multi - modal management method and regime suitable for every traveller. We can of course move as much as possible into smartphones, and will do that, but that is only part of the solution.

¹ CAATT: Card As Authority To Travel, as described by the UKCards Association at their 28th January event.

² I have a Mondex cash card that still has money in it, and a Mondex battery operated viewer that allows me to see how much money is now inaccessible...

Transport Minister Claire Perry has written to the Rail Development Group company to ask for their proposals for the way forward on a revolution in ticketing and journey management on UK heavy rail services: delivering the 2022 vision³.

The previous 4 papers in this series introduced building blocks for not just a better organised heavy rail passenger network but also for realising the concept of seamless *multi-modal* public transport. For the 2022 target of all 32,000 buses outside London to be smart enabled, referred to in Claire Perry's speech on 26th January⁴, it is *multi-modal travel* that we should go for, not simply payment for the individual bus journey or series of journeys. This paper puts forward more about an idea of how to realise that.

First: think multi-modal and multi-operator all the time.

Next, we must plan and drive to deliver the 'Almost always connected' environment for the entirety of public transport.

Then: think multi-leg journeys.

Behind the scenes, we get started on moving the hosting of all of the data about the passenger's intentions and journey into a secure and resilient IT Cloud environment – that will be a national service.

Alongside all of that, we build systems that predict what the passenger intends the journey to be (that is management information for the operators of public transport), systems that can (and will, when the infrastructure is in place) *push* that information to all of the places where it is or may be required – that creates the personal data cloud in which the passenger travels, a cloud that leaves history data when and where it is required.

Alongside that, we make public transport 'Almost always connected' (papers 1 and 2 in this series), and we equip the operating staff appropriately.

Now of course there will be people who say that this is 'enabling big brother', so there must be very strong safeguards and oversight.

³ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2016-02-01/25119/>

⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-death-of-the-tangerine-ticket?dm_t=0,0,0,0