

Public transport ticketing

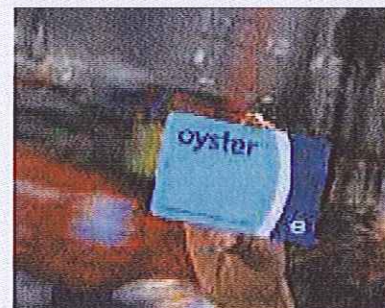
The smartcard is coming... but what will you be able to do with it?

From April next year a new national pass will be issued to everybody who is entitled to concessionary travel on public transport and this pass will come in the form of a smartcard with a standard national (ITSO compliant) design. Issuing the approximately 8 million passes is, of course, a huge task but ITSO sees the process as just the start of a process, rather than the end of one. "There are very good business case reasons why the April deadline should be seen as the first step in a path leading to fully smart transport systems and then onwards to 'citizen' cards," the organisation's new guide for English travel concession authorities says.

The key question, of course, is how fast the major public transport operators, who have had a smartcard system for concessionary fares imposed upon them, will embrace the concept for its other customers. "Most of the big bus operators are already quite interested," says Peter Stoddart, who wrote the ITSO guide. "This is because most of them are also train operators." What this means is that new train franchises issued by the Government come with an obligation to install smartcard ticketing infrastructure, which

means significant expenditure on back office systems. The thinking is, therefore, that bus passengers can be added into the system with relatively less effort than if the bus companies were required to go it alone. This will take time, however, with Stoddart noting that equipping some 20,000 buses with smartcard readers by April 2008 "is impossible" (the 'smart' passes issued will initially be used as 'flash' passes subject to visual rather than machine inspection).

But some authorities in England are starting to look harder at smartcard ticketing applications and not just for transport. Stoddart is, for example, currently working with the Tyne & Wear PTE, Nexus, to examine the potential for non-transport applications to be piggybacked on the organisation's smartcards. The ultimate intention of many smartcard enthusiasts is for most if not all of the population to carry a single 'citizens' smartcard that could have, amongst many other applications, transport ticketing functions. Here, Stoddart concedes that England is not moving as fast as Scotland, where a national entitlement smartcard programme is already underway.



London's Oystercard remains primarily a transport smartcard but Iain Sherriff of JMP sees transport as just one application of many on Scotland's citizen smartcard

"The NEC is just one element in a wider Scottish Executive sponsored programme called Customer First, which aims to encourage all local authorities to share resources and create efficiencies to ensure that Scottish citizens have easier access to services and facilities," explains Iain Sherriff, a director of consultant JMP based in Scot-



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land. "The programme involves a unified, national approach in partnership between the Scottish Executive, all 32 councils and other organisations such as Young Scot, the Registrar General and Transport Scotland. The entitlement card scheme enhances provision of services to key council client groups – the current priorities being young people aged 12-25 as well as the elderly and mobility impaired. To date nearly 1.5m citizens have

Transport for London is currently trialling Oystercard ticketing via mobile phone technology (see p5)



been issued with a smartcard and there is a growing portfolio of applications. There is also the potential for commercial public transport applications being hosted on these cards."

"The programme underpins the key Scottish Executive policies of Scotland-wide free bus travel for the elderly and mobility impaired and for concessionary bus, rail and ferry travel for 16-18 year olds by including the relevant ITSO product on the chip," Sherriff adds. "All cards for the 12-25 year olds can be co-branded with the Young Scot/Dialogue Youth and Euro under-26 schemes. This gives card holders access to a wide range of services including 42,000 discounts in Europe."

Sherriff notes that transport applications are

key to the uptake of the card. "Transport is seen as the application that generates high demand," he notes. "It makes the smartcard the card that everybody wants to have and also provides a vital audit trail for concessionary fare data."

He also believes that the public transport operators are starting to see the benefits of smartcard technology, with at least one operator, Lothian Buses, implementing smartcard ticketing even before the Scottish Executive required them to. Furthermore, Sherriff suggests that it might not be too long before even the train operators, which have traditionally been the least keen on smartcard ticketing, come onboard. "Once a critical mass [of users]

is achieved then it becomes almost irresistible for them to join in," he notes. "The potential for commercial transport applications to piggyback on the citizens card is almost limitless."

Sherriff points out that local authorities at present have something like 17 different points of contact with the public and simplifying the process of dialogue by focusing these points within a single card has obvious scope for efficiency gains.

"London's Oyster scheme has developed from the commercial incentives provided for people to sign up," Sherriff concludes (because Oystercard travel tickets are cheaper than 'paper' ones). "But in Scotland transport is just one option of many."

It's about smart media, not jut smart ticketing

English train operating company Chiltern Railways has begun to trial a system whereby passengers can buy a rail ticket direct from their mobile and travel; in January Chiltern Railways was the first major rail operator to begin to supply passengers with tickets delivered to their mobile phones.

The new development, produced in collaboration with secure mobile applications company Masabi is claimed to deliver the only complete end-to-end mobile rail ticketing system in the world using EncryptME, the world's first NIST certified mobile security software validated by BT. Fifty passengers have

been selected to take part in this pioneering trial which will allow them to simply, securely and quickly purchase and display train tickets on their mobile phone.

David Whitley, marketing planning manager at Chiltern Railways, says, "This pioneering technology means that our passengers will be able to securely buy a ticket from their mobile and receive it in seconds and, as the majority of our passengers all carry mobile phones, this really does mean that passengers will be able to walk up and travel anywhere, any time."

"People are very familiar with mobiles," Whitley adds, discussing why Chiltern has gone for mobile phone barcoding ticketing before smartcard options. "And the set up costs are very low compared with smartcards because there are no real infrastructure costs. We have worked with Cubic, who provide our gating technology, to provide trial barcode scanners that are very cheap and easy to install on existing gating equipment."

"Barcoding is not a panacea," Whitley says. "Mobile ticketing is just part of a suite of ways that we are developing ticketing options. We are working on smart media ticketing, not just smartcard ticketing. Barcoding could be 20% of transactions in the future, especially if and when we add NFC (near field communication) functions."

Smartcards for train ticketing have their limitations, he notes, particularly for longer distance travel. "Birmingham to London is not sensible for smartcards because prepay customers would have to preload the ticket with so much cash," he points out.

Chiltern estimates that some 20% of its tickets could one day be sold via mobile phones

