

TravelWatch NORTHWEST

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Winner of CILT award for best practice in passenger transport

promoting quality public transport.....

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 Office of Rail Regulation
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21st March 2014

Dear Siobhan,

Retail market review for selling tickets

1. Introduction.

TravelWatch NorthWest (TWNW) is an independent Community Interest Company representing all public transport users in NW England. In June 2012 we responded to the DfT on its rail fares and ticketing review – this is attached. Our comments on this review are as follows. We have focussed on two themes – ticket sales and products.

2. Sale of Tickets

Station ticket offices

2.1 Whilst the growth of alternative outlets for ticket sales is welcomed it must be remembered that in many cases the purchase of a rail ticket is often linked with the provision and requirement of information. At places where casual travellers are commencing journeys, such as tourist destinations, it is not unusual for the customer to be requesting information and travel options at the same time as buying the ticket. Consequently, any attempt to reduce ticket office hours could be counter-productive.

2.2 There is scope for making station ticket offices a lot more attractive and encompassing the station shop format. The M2Go model of retail found at Merseyrail stations appears to be a very successful format and it also creates a less intimidating experience for the casual traveller. There is something about the Spar Shop or Grocery style retail environment that seems to put

people more at ease compared with a retail environment that is as rigid in function and form as the traditional ticket office or booking hall. Buying a ticket at a rail station can be a daunting experience whether this is from a ticket sales clerk sat behind a screen or a ticket machine. It is not of course always practicable but where possible the ability to sit down in a coffee-shop style environment with a member of staff to receive advice and appropriate tickets would be a valuable asset for passengers. The extension of this concept would enable operators to close uneconomic booking offices whilst still providing a ticketing service. We would like to see M2Go or similar rolled out more widely.

2.3 It is important that the most appropriate ticket (e.g. cheapest) is sold to passengers in an impartial way without favouring the company running the ticket office. This may not always be the case now.

Outside Retailers and Agents

2.4 This operates well in Europe with tickets often available at News stands and is well understood by passengers. The more outlets the better and it could lead to large retailers using the facility of train ticket sales as an "add-on" promotion for their products. It could also be attractive to libraries or post offices. Train operators could have a High street presence especially where the city centre retail area is some distance from the station/interchange.

2.5 We have had reports of ATOC imposing barriers on those wishing to sell rail tickets from Information Centres with excessive costs of purchasing the necessary hardware and constantly having to further purchase updates and new machinery. One contact gave up after a few months as the costs and returns could not be sustained and the operation quickly became loss making. His impression was that it was designed to discourage sales from external outlets. This may explain why there are so few such outlets.

3. Products

Advance fares

3.1 Advance fares are a great success both in value and filling of peak trains and must be retained. Some effort should be made to ensure they are available where a journey covers a change of operator. At present most members of the public do not consider buying two tickets for one journey and often pay an unnecessarily high price as a result.

Carnet tickets

3.2 We have long pressed for the availability of multi journey tickets over a consistent set of routes. They do this on the continent quite well with "10 journey" tickets that can be used flexibly by the holder for her/his own set of journeys or for a group travelling together.

Duo tickets

3.3 This is a good promotion but with limited and selective availability at present. Most leisure passengers travel in pairs (by whatever mode) so the rail industry needs to "meet the market" by offering such an option. As most companies now claim that some 70% of travellers are in the leisure sector it really is a "no brainer."

Discount promotions

3.4 Occasional offers such as newspaper vouchers (e.g. anywhere for £5/£10) are a good incentive but being limited to single TOCs do cause some complaint where the operator offering the promotion only runs limited services over certain sectors of their area. For example a recent Northern promotion looked very good on paper but where it was promoted in the local press there were large gaps in their services as another TOC dominated the route. This led to passengers being disgruntled as they often boarded the wrong colour train and were told that their tickets were invalid and faced secondary charging for that particular leg.

Smartcards

3.5 Looking to the future the expansion of ITSO compliant smart ticketing will revolutionise ticket sales methodology. The application of smart ticketing should be seen in the context of moving towards a fully integrated public transport system and there are some signs that this is the ultimate aim. It must be remembered though that smart ticketing is simply a means to purchase ticketing product types and those products have some way to develop before we see comprehensive multi modal/integrated ticketing in this country.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond.

Yours faithfully

John A Moorhouse

John Moorhouse
Company Secretary