

Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 03/13

Date: 13 February 2014

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Regeneration, Community and Culture
Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Purpose:

To inform Members of information on the Medway and Kent Smart card project arising from discussion at the meeting on 12 December 2013 on 2013/14 Q2 Performance Monitoring.

Medway and Kent Smart Card project

Introduction

Medway Council and Kent County Council are working in partnership to promote interoperable transport smart cards beginning with a pilot in the Maidstone area in April this year of a transport e-purse to the national specification known as Stored-Travel Rights (STR).

A smart ticketing system will not only speed up boarding times and dwell times at bus stops with obvious benefits to traffic and service reliability, the reduction in the use of cash is likely to encourage bus usage as it removes the need for passengers to have the correct money which can be a deterrent to travel.

The first phase involves working with Arriva to allow the STR to purchase ordinary paper tickets and then move towards the purchase of smart products. The second phase will offer auto top-up and other enhanced retailing options and the third a Medway/Kent wide multi-operator scheme.

Whilst this will be similar to the London Oyster card, it will be more flexible as it will enable additional applications to be added, eg, contactless payments, car park charging, cycle hire (eg Brompton Docks), etc. Transport For London is now moving away from Oyster as they view it as quite limited in its application compared with the new emerging technology so there is little point in any Authority now implementing a scheme which mirrors Oyster.

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Phase 1 – On-bus, Travel Shop and On-line facilities

In Phase 1 a customer can order a smart card on-line or in a Travel Shop and use the STR to buy tickets on-bus. They might be able to buy a product (such as a period pass) in smart form with STR (or cash) and add it to the card. This involves empty/expired products being placed on the card at the outset via the web or in the Travelshop, as products cannot be created through the bus ticket-machine, only topped-up/renewed.

The customer proposition and operational imperative is to ensure, as a minimum, that bus boardings speed up – this is achieved in the worst-case scenario of moving from multiple cash transactions with change-giving to periodic STR top-ups (for more rounded sums eg £10, £20) and then a number of cash less payments (say from between 5 in 6 to 11 in 12 depending on cash fare quantum and top-up amount).

Phase 2 – Auto top-up and other enhanced retailing options

This will also involve a mechanism to establish the credit-worthiness of the passenger and the authorisation for an automatic top-up to be carried on the card, removing the uncertainty for the customer for the communications link working reliably and to a deadline. To limit exposure to the Authorities, the auto top-up is reduced to one day's potential travel. A number of auto top-up trials (notably Centro and Wales) have been implemented successfully.

Other emerging offers will include mobile phones with 'near field/contactless' smart-card emulation with their own top-up technology inbuilt. Also a number of schemes are trialling Remote-Ticket Download (RTD) approaches to STR top-ups and ticket product renewals.

Phase 3 – Multi-operator ticketing

This will see the scheme rolled out across Medway and Kent with the participation of all local bus operators and will enable any passenger to use any bus, regardless of operator.

A back-office system, similar to the reimbursement of concessionary fares, will ensure that the revenue resulting from the purchase of any multi-operator ticket will be shared among those operators according to the usage made of particular operators' services.

The Back Office system will be operated independently of any bus operator, eg KCC or a specialist consultant. It is difficult to be more precise about a timescale as we do not know what the findings and issues will be from the trial and how long these may take to resolve

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Costs

Costs have still to be determined but, to date, the only cost incurred by Medway Council is officer time, approximately, an average of 5 hours per month for the past 12 months.

In summary;

- a trial is to take place, on-bus, in Maidstone in April 2014
- a move to auto top-up and extended retail facilities once the trial has been completed
- a move to multi-operator ticketing once all of the above have been implemented

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