

## 60 Seconds with Pippa Ambrose, Senior Project Manager, Transport for the North

### **Hi Pippa, please tell us a bit about your role and your involvement with smart ticketing?**

I am Pippa Ambrose, and I am the Senior Project Manager on Phase One of Transport for the North's [Integrated and Smart Travel](#) programme. This project has overseen the rollout of ITSO smartcards for rail season ticket holders across TransPennine Express and Northern's networks and the enhancement of Merseyrail's smart ticketing proposition.

I have been responsible for coordinating the collaboration between Northern, TransPennine Express and Merseyrail. I have also led on engagement with the Department for Transport's Smart Ticketing on National Rail programme, making sure we are aligned with the efforts of other rail operators across the country who were delivering their own smart initiatives.

This project is one of the first key deliverables for Transport for the North, and is a first step in our much bigger, 30-year [strategic plan](#) to transform transport across our region. Smart ticketing is important in this as it will help make public transport a more easy and preferable way to travel, and help create consistency in the customer proposition for passengers commuting and travelling across the North.

### **What do you see as the key benefits of smart ticketing for rail customers?**

Well smart ticketing is a broad term, so I'll focus on the particular benefits of smartcards. As a commuter, I see being able to buy a ticket when and where I want as a massive benefit.

Northern and TransPennine Express smartcard customers can now buy their season tickets online, at any of their ticket vending machine or at any of their station ticket office windows. And that choice is great, as it means we are meeting the needs of a wide range of different passenger types.

Personally, I don't want to have to join ticket offices queue on dark, wet, winter mornings. And when I am rushing to get my kids up and out to school before my own journey to work begins, I really am keen for any time I can win back for myself! I love that I can now buy my weekly ticket online, on a Sunday evening, and just have it fulfilled to my smartcard as I pass through the station the next day. It's one less thing I have to think about on a Monday morning and helps take the pressure off.

Smartcards are certainly more convenient for me and I think, judging by take-up numbers, other passengers are realising this too. We have seen some real evidence of behaviour change in terms of when and where passengers are buying their tickets.

**What do you see as the biggest challenge to realising these benefits?**

I think consistency is the biggest challenge. Getting customers to switch, and change their behaviour, requires a simple offer that they can be confident using. An inconsistent offer can be a big barrier to encouraging change. No one wants to be told you can use a smartcard under circumstances A and B, not under X and Y, and sometimes under Z.

However, delivering a simple ticketing system is hard when we are working across a complex network. The primary challenge for me – and I think it was managed pretty successfully – was ensuring consistency between Northern and TransPennine’s offers. We did not want any confusion for customers who regularly switch between services run by these two operators.

Wider still, for this project to be a success we needed to integrate with all operators who run through the Transport for the North’s region. I have to say there was a fantastic industry-wide effort to introduce and promote smart. The Transport for the North managed Cross-TOC meetings showed a real appetite for coming together, learning from each other and sharing best practice. This broad coordination of efforts certainly helped support the customer. I hope the industry will keep working in this way moving forwards.

**As a customer, what would be the one piece of innovation you'd like to see in the rail industry and why?**

Focussing on the customer experience, I would like to see the introduction of more technology to improve rail’s accessibility for disabled people. We actually recently received great feedback from a visually impaired customer who wanted to thank us for introducing smartcards and expressed how ‘brilliant’ they are. But I would like to see that go further with innovations that make the whole end to end journey seamless for passengers who currently encounter many little barriers and points of difficulty when they use our existing public transport system.