

# A lack of joined up IT Puts Scotland on the wrong track!



I recently made what I thought would be a simple journey using public transport: including a 25-minute train into Glasgow, followed by a 10-minute tube to Govan. This type of journey is probably taken by thousands in Glasgow every day but one I'd not done myself since the Commonwealth Games back in 2014.

I have always felt Scotland has been lagging behind the rest of the country when it comes to cashless/ticketless train tickets but I was completely bemused when I arrived at the subway station in Glasgow to find my ticket from Hamilton to Govan didn't really work. I quickly realised that over ground train tickets are not compatible with the Glasgow underground ticket barriers and I had to report to the ticket office to have my train ticket manually validated and another subway ticket issued.



During subsequent discussions with colleagues, I then learned that SPT were informally offered introductions to TFL (Transport for London) back in 2012 and therefore two years before the Commonwealth Games. This opportunity to consider something simple, effective and that works was not followed up by SPT, who suggested Scotland would get something much better than London's Oyster Card in time for the Games.



How much better can it get? London's Oyster card was first issued in June 2003 and today (15 Years on) we simply tap our contactless credit/debit cards getting on the train, bus or tube and sometime within the 48-hours following tapping off, your card gets charged at the lowest cost available for your trip(s) that day!

I'm therefore left asking myself: why do far too many Scottish politicians and civil servants think they can do better? In 2018 when the government wants us to get out of our cars and use public transport, why is it made so difficult? We just have to look at the Edinburgh Trams: Their app penalises travellers if they do not use tier pre-paid tickets in time and YES: it's yet another app for us all to download and manage! I find this utterly ridiculous in 2018, when millions can transit the south of east of England without killing another Amazonian rain forest, without standing in line to buy tickets and without interacting with manual and inefficient human-led processes; Scotland remains stuck somewhere in the 1980's when they had the opportunity to look south, even to Europe for solutions that are superb and have been around for decades.

I wrote last month about the lack of joined up thinking when it comes to Public Sector IT in Scotland and this is yet another example of Scotland's public sector failing to modernise, failing to become efficient and deliver lower cost services to the majority. Lowering the cost of access to public services also frees up resources to be spent helping those in our society who need public services the most or who need face-to-face assistance. Scotland needs to press the re-set button, drive an entrepreneurial mind-set in a new generation of public servants who can understand that the public demand joined up services with a heavy element of enabling technologies. We live in a consumer society where consumers determine the services they use through market choice and innovation. Scotland will never be the world leader we all crave if we continue to seek to re-invent the wheel such as the example of non-joined-up ticketless/paperless travel. Today, there are many examples of innovative technology firms in Scotland but there are many more tried and tested technology solutions out there that serve our insatiable demand for better, cheaper public services. We can be smart by linking local innovation and support to the bigger solution providers that are active in Scotland but we need to do much better than has been the case. Technology Innovation is sometimes not about inventing a new product but about developing an existing product to meet particular needs or defining a set of services around a product that suits local conditions. I believe all Scottish politicians, civil servants and dedicated employees have got to stop thinking that they run organisations which are different and need highly tailored solutions. Simply put: the public purse in Scotland cannot afford: "BLEEDING EDGE!" Time to recognise the joys and £££ costs savings of becoming Fast Followers.

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