

Midlands' oyster-style' smart ticketing system 'essential part of levelling-up agenda' say MPs

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MPs have urged the Government to invest in a Midlands-wide 'tap and cap' smart ticketing system for public transport, to boost passenger numbers, convenience and safety post-COVID-19.

New research by transport body Midlands Connect, which helped to develop the plans, showed that nine out of ten people surveyed supported the scheme, while 61 per cent of respondents questioned said that having a smart ticketing system in place would make them more likely to use public transport.

Set to cost £20million, the 'tap and cap' system will allow passengers to travel seamlessly across the whole region, paying for journeys on buses, trams and trains via one smart device, mobile phone or credit card.

Although smart ticketing initiatives exist in some form in Nottingham, via the Robin Hood travel card and in parts of the West Midlands via 'Swift', the UK's second biggest public transport payment system after London's Oyster scheme, this new platform would be the first to function at a Midlands-wide level, and encompass all public transport operators and modes. In future the initiative could also be rolled out to cover travel via electric bike hire and e-scooter initiatives.

Post COVID-19, new payment models are seen as essential in supporting more flexible work and travel patterns, with season tickets likely to represent poor value for money for many commuters. This new contactless system would also make payments completely touch free. It is hoped this scheme will help to tackle climate change by encouraging more people to use public transport.

The development of the smart ticketing platform, will be led by Transport for West Midlands (TfWM) with initial delivery being led by TfWM and Nottingham City Council. Strategic regional transport body Midlands Connect then will work with other local authorities across the region to integrate more areas into the scheme, which could be operational by 2022 in Nottingham and the West Midlands Combined Authority area, and across the whole Midlands region by 2024.

Nicola Richards, MP for West Bromwich East, said: "It's been 17 years since the oyster card was introduced in London; it's about time the Midlands had a smart ticketing system of its own. With everything else that's going on, we must not delay efforts to decarbonise the economy – we're in the midst of a climate emergency, and it's essential we give passengers the tools they need to return post-pandemic to a convenient, cost-effective and safe public transport network, in greater numbers than ever before.

"This scheme represents great value for money, has the backing of local communities, and is an essential step in levelling up. I hope the Chancellor gives us the green light to turn these plans into reality."

Lilian Greenwood, MP for Nottingham South, and former chair of the Transport Select Committee, said: "The UK regions need truly 'smart' ticketing systems, just like those enjoyed by Londoners. These plans will give Midlanders a transport network fit for the future; no more fussing with change, or paper tickets, just a seamless, convenient customer experience. We must give passengers the convenience and affordability they need to leave their cars at home.

"Pre-pandemic, public transport use was sky-rocketing across the Midlands region, we have a limited window of opportunity to welcome back both old and new customers post-COVID. An investment in smart ticketing and public transport will be a decisive sign that Government is serious about tackling climate change. I sincerely hope the Chancellor funds this essential project in his Budget."

Photo credit: Midlands Connect