

Quit while you're ahead: 'Modern-day fare dodgers' are leaving a trail of digital breadcrumbs says Northern's 'Digital Fraud Squad'

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Northern has warned so-called 'modern-day fare dodgers' on its network they are leaving a trail of digital breadcrumbs for their investigators to follow.

The term refers to people who *do* buy a ticket for travel but then fraudulently attempt to claim their money back after their journey. Likewise, customers who only buy tickets for part of their journey or for those stations with ticket gatelines in place.

But with 67% of tickets for Northern services now bought via digital platforms, their Digital Fraud Investigations Team is able to look into the circumstances of attempted fare evasion in much more detail.

Mark Powles, commercial and customer director at Northern, said: "The old-school fare evader still exists, but there's a new generation who try to outsmart the system through a complex process of fraudulent

refund requests, delay repay claims and a process known as 'short faring'.

"What these individuals might not realise is that, as with any electronic transaction, our systems are able to identify suspicious activity and bring it to the attention of our specialist investigators."

The Digital Fraud Investigations Team was established in 2021 in response to the surge in digital ticketing post-pandemic. They form part of Northern's Debt Recovery & Prosecutions Unit which, in the 2022/23 financial year, investigated 108,681 reports of attempted fare evasion, issued 53,344 Penalty Fare Notices, attended 301 court sittings, helped secure 14,072 convictions and recouped £2.9m (£2,851,883) of lost revenue for the taxpayer.

Powles added: "Once our investigators are on the case, they can review all ticket transactions by that individual over several years and build a case if they believe there is a pattern of criminal behaviour.

"One fraudulent claim today might uncover a backlog of similar activity that our team *will* pursue. Our message to those people is 'quit while you're ahead'."

Members of the Digital Fraud Investigations Team have backgrounds in the legal profession and statistical analysis.

Northern has invested in the largest network of digital ticket infrastructure of any train operator in the country, making it easier than ever to buy a ticket via their app, website or one of more than 600 ticket machines across the network.

Fare evaders are prosecuted under the provisions of the Regulation of Railways Act 1889 and the Railway Byelaws made pursuant to the Transport Act 2000. In cases of ticket fraud, perpetrators are prosecuted under the Fraud Act 2006. Northern is the second largest train operator in the UK, with nearly 2,500 services a day to more than 500 stations across the North of England.