

Train operator deploys new kit to detect 'chancers' using the wrong ticket at station barriers

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Automated ticket checks at barriers in Northern-managed stations are about to get 'smarter' thanks to new technology that will alert staff to potential 'chancers' using an incorrect ticket.

The new technology will quickly and accurately check that a ticket is valid, but also alert staff if that validity requires additional checks such as presentation of the appropriate railcard.

Staff will then confirm the ticket is being used correctly, taking the necessary action if it isn't.

With over 300,000 people using automated barriers across its network every day, checking the credentials of every ticket is a huge task – particularly at the larger stations during rush hour.

Some tickets are only valid with a railcard, while others are discounted for customers of a particular age group, such as those for children

In a trial at Manchester Victoria earlier this month, the technology was used during a revenue protection exercise where it helped to detect 180 people in one day alone, with almost 900 caught during the full length of the trial.

Those attempting to travel using a ticket they were not eligible to use, included:

- 52 people benefitting from a railcard discount they were not able to present for inspection
- 24 adults travelling on a children's ticket

As a result, the train operator was able to issue 79 penalty fares worth over £1,500 and launch 101 investigations into various ticket irregularities – the process by which Northern recovers money for the taxpayer lost by fraudulent travel.

Mark Powles, customer and commercial director at Northern, said: “This technology will be invaluable for our gate line and revenue protection colleagues whose job it is to ensure ticket checks are carried out quickly and efficiently.

“Unfortunately, we know that a small minority of customers try to exploit the automated nature of barrier checks to travel on tickets they know they're not eligible to use.

“The kit is very easy to install and can be deployed to known hotspots across the whole network to help tackle this fraudulent activity.”

Northern has worked with The Ticket Keeper (TTK) – an organisation that specialises in the development, marketing and roll-out of ticketing systems for the UK rail industry – on the new technology.

Tim Handel, managing director of TTK, said: “TTK's collaboration with Northern draws on our years of expertise at the forefront of rail ticket validation enabling us to bring innovative and cost-effective solutions to the industry.

“Our motivation is to enable Northern to identify and prevent fraudulent rail travel and we are pleased to continue our work with them to further develop the TTK 'T-Val' technology and build on the already considerable success born out of this partnership.”

Northern is the second largest train operator in the UK, with nearly 2,000 services a day to more than 500 stations across the North of England.

On Sunday, 11 December Northern's new timetable comes into effect and all customers, especially those who have made regular journeys on the same train times, are advised to check online journey planners before they travel to ensure their service operates at the same time and calls at the same stations.

Northern Trains Limited is owned by the Department for Transport's public sector owning group, DfT OLR Holdings Limited (DOHL).

Photo credit: Northern