



Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme – Ticketing Enhancements

Date of meeting 30 September 2022

Date of report 12 September 2022

Report by Treasurer

1. Object of report

To recommend the Joint Committee approves the introduction of digital enhancements to Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme (SCTS) ticketing on eligible Caledonian MacBrayne (CalMac) ferry routes; and to update the Joint Committee on work to improve ticket accessibility at ScotRail stations across the region.

2. Background

Over 5 million SCTS journeys are made each year on rail, Subway, and ferry routes in the west of Scotland¹ with around 600,000 National Entitlement Card (NEC) holders in Strathclyde qualifying for SCTS travel discounts. It is only island and peninsula residents who qualify for discounted ferry travel on named routes by using a Strathclyde Ferry Card, which can be applied for via their local post office. There are an estimated 15,000 Ferry Cards in circulation.

In order for customers to make SCTS journeys, they are first required to present their NEC or Ferry Card to rail, subway and ferry staff for visual inspection at point of ticket purchase each time they travel. By doing so, this ensures that only those who are eligible for concessionary travel discounts receive them. Furthermore, SCTS permits only the sale of single or return tickets for same day travel only. These measures are necessary in order to provide a revenue protection safeguard and minimise opportunity for card and ticket misuse, which could place greater financial pressures on the Scheme.

When SCTS users purchase single or returns, these are, in the main, issued as disposable paper tickets. However, in 2019, the Joint Committee approved proposals that enabled SCTS Subway customers to be able to load Pay As You Go (PAYG) credit directly to their NEC smartcard and allowed for the discontinuation of disposable tickets for Subway concessions². This was seen as a positive step towards improving customer convenience and reducing paper usage while streamlining operational processes. However, this left around 4million SCTS journeys each year on rail and ferry still relying on paper tickets.

In recent years, however, ticketing has been improved by technology that provides better opportunities to improve the travel experience whilst still being able to ensure appropriate safeguards. SPT has recently been working with CalMac and ScotRail to identify opportunities to enhance the ticket offering for SCTS customers. Furthermore, in recent years SPT and both operators have seen steady increases in the number of complaints from customers over current ticketing arrangements. Complaints have centred around difficulties

¹ Pre-Covid Patronage Levels

² https://www.spt.co.uk/media/bczbgjfe/sctsjc080319_agenda7.pdf

purchasing tickets when travelling, and the inability to purchase advanced or multi-journey tickets.

3. *Ar Turas* (CalMac Ticketing Project)

Ferries are an essential part of Scotland's transport network and the discounted fares offered by the Scheme enable eligible residents living on some of our most remote rural communities in the west of Scotland to affordably access the mainland and therefore a range of essential services often not available locally.

SCTS fares are available to island and peninsula residents who are disabled or over 60 on 22 CalMac-operated Clyde and Hebrides ferry routes and each year around 450,000 SCTS journeys are made on these routes.

3.1. Current ticketing constraints and issues

The ticketing and booking method for SCTS ferry users has had several longstanding issues, with complaints and comments coming from customers, community groups and elected representatives regarding current arrangements and travel experiences. Main issues reported include:

- Customers being required to visit and queue at the port of departure for each journey in order to purchase their ticket, unlike customers purchasing standard tickets who are able to purchase tickets in advance;
- No 'E-Ticket' or 'Print at Home' capability, meaning customers always require to visit the port office;
- Changes to bookings cannot be made; and
- Eligible SPT concession holders are often not using the Scheme, as their preferred ticket option is not available at a suitable time (e.g. port office opening hours).

Furthermore, SPT is aware of long-standing issues on the Largs - Cumbrae ferry route, whereby due to current infrastructure constraints, customers cannot remain in their vehicle when purchasing tickets. This is unlike all other ferry routes in Strathclyde which provide this functionality. Additionally, because SCTS rules prohibit sale of advanced multi-journey tickets, it means that some journeys made on this route can be challenging especially for older and disabled SCTS customers.

3.2. *Ar Turas* Ticketing Proposal

In January this year, CalMac announced plans to introduce a brand new modern digital ticketing and booking system across its entire ferry network called '*Ar Turas*' (Our Journey), offering ferry customers an improved digital booking and travel experience, replacing its life expired systems.

Ar Turas is due to launch in winter 2022, and during its development over the past year, SPT and CalMac have worked collaboratively in order to identify opportunities to integrate SCTS ticketing into the new digital booking system, whilst at the same time ensuring that necessary safeguards can be maintained or enhanced.

Under proposals, *Ar Turas* functionality would be offered to SCTS ferry card customers on all of CalMac's Strathclyde routes³. This means SCTS customers could register their ferry card with CalMac and, for the first time, be able to book tickets in advance online for travel on their named ferry route. Customers would then simply present either their smart device or printed paper ticket displaying a unique QR booking code at the point of travel which would then be scanned and verified by port or vessel staff using handheld readers. Customers choosing not to book online would, as normal, be able to purchase tickets through a port office, or on vessel where applicable.

3.3. Benefits

Ar Turas will offer several benefits for SCTS customers and the Scheme with the addition of this new digital option, including:

- Advanced booking on all routes with E-Ticket availability (reduces environmental impact of printing paper tickets);
- Save time queueing at ports;
- Booking amendments can be made online, self-service;
- Communications about service disruption which affects their booking can be issued directly to customers via email or SMS;
- Ability for customers including for older and disabled passengers to remain in a vehicle when travelling;
- Certainty of travel as customers will receive an immediate confirmation of their booking;
- Customer insight gathering opportunities to further improve the service;
- Future opportunity to relay bespoke SCTS messaging to customers; and,
- Improved data management systems, providing SPT with a greater level of information around ticket sales, travel patterns (by island, time of day/day of week etc.)

3.4. Revenue Protection Safeguards

The new digital process will offer several safeguards to ensure that revenue is protected; namely:

- Physical inspections of ferry cards on each and every journey as part of embarkation / ticketing procedures across all routes;
- Warning prompts on scanners ensure that CalMac staff are following the correct process, by which staff will be required to positively confirm visual inspection of valid ticket and Ferry Card;
- Regular updates to the CalMac Company Management System & Fares Rules Manual to remind processes to staff;
- Mystery Passenger opportunities, to ensure the process is robustly tested;
- Enhanced real-time monitoring and reporting;
- System controls meaning that a ticket can only be used once irrespective of ticket format. Each QR code is unique;

³ See Appendix 1 for a list of eligible routes

- Controls over product configuration and release to the public with ability to add/remove any products and turn off sales channels;
- Future opportunity to relay bespoke SCTS messaging to customers;
- Option to cap number of tickets that can be stored digitally at any one time;
- Expiry date on tickets; and,
- Reimbursement will only be claimed for journeys made and not purchased.

Existing revenue protection safeguards would remain for face-to-face sales, whereby a customer can choose to purchase an SCTS ticket through a port office, or on a vessel where applicable. This process will continue whereby the customer is required to show their card at the time of ticket purchase and will be validated manually by CalMac staff.

SPT will continue to engage CalMac up until the launch of *Ar Turas*. Post implementation, SPT will work closely with CalMac and seek regular updates over performance, ticket sales, customer feedback and any other SCTS related matters to ensure that the expected positive outcomes for SCTS customers are being delivered.

4. ScotRail Ticket Vending Machine Project

SPT has, in recent years, seen an increase in the number of requests asking that current rules prohibiting Ticket Vending Machine (TVM) concessions be reconsidered. The basis for these requests focusses largely on concerns that many rail stations are unstaffed or have limited opening hours, meaning SCTS tickets can only be purchased on-board trains where a ticket examiner is present or at staffed destination stations.

This results in either simply not being able to purchase a ticket, or in cases where a ticket must be purchased in order to exit a station, with SCTS customers feeling they are unfairly inconvenienced, and should be able to use TVMs in common with other rail customers. The reason for this rule, as highlighted earlier in this report, is that a visual inspection of an NEC must be made in order to determine eligibility for SCTS discounts. Similarly, certain of ScotRail's own discounted commercial products cannot be bought from TVMs as a revenue protection measure.

In light of these requests, SPT met recently with ScotRail to discuss the opportunity to jointly review current rules and to carry out an examination of options. The consensus from both parties was that allowing TVM concessions would be viewed positively by customers, would make rail journeys easier and more attractive and would contribute positively to improving equality outcomes for older and disabled users. While it is acknowledged that use of TVM concessions could increase risk of ticket misuse, there is opportunity to work together to mitigate this.

Smartcard may present the opportunity to allow the introduction of TVM concessions with products being loaded directly onto the NEC, thereby removing the need for paper concession tickets. However, there needs to be a more detailed understanding of current ticketing technology capability and whether this could meet the requirements of SPT, ScotRail and concession customers.

SPT and ScotRail have committed to working together to:

- Undertake an assessment of opportunity, risk and mitigation;
- Confirm Smartcard ticketing capability and understand current technologies;

- Understand cost implications, if any; and
- Develop a route map and timeline for delivering a potential solution.

An update on progress will be given at the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

5. Conclusions

Whilst current ticketing systems remain workable and operational, these are now considered outdated and require to be upgraded in parallel with new ticketing advances. SPT, on behalf of the Joint Committee, is taking the opportunity to work with CalMac and ScotRail to improve the concession ticketing offer. Changes are designed to benefit users and operators alike as well as provide the Scheme with clearer information regarding ticket use and improved data to best understand the needs of the user.

6. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to:

- (i) approve the introduction of enhancements to Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme ticketing on eligible Caledonian MacBrayne (CalMac) ferry routes; and
- (ii) note the ongoing work between SPT and ScotRail to seek ticketing enhancements.

7. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>The Scheme will continue to meet the RTS Objective "Access for All".</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>Changes would contribute positively to improving equality outcomes for older and disabled users.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>None at present.</i>
Climate Change, Adaptation & Carbon consequences	<i>A reduction in paper ticket use will contribute positively to the environment.</i>

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Strathclyde Concessionary Travel Scheme Joint Committee

For further information, please contact *Martin Breen*, Senior Transport Planner on martin.breen@spt.co.uk

Appendix 1 – SPT Concession Scheme Eligibility & Rates

Route	Eligibility	Rate Applied
Dunoon – Gourock	Cowal Peninsula Resident	Under 10 miles
Rothesay – Wemyss Bay	Bute Resident	Under 10 miles
Rhubodach – Colintraive	Bute Resident and Cowal Peninsula Resident	Under 10 miles
Cumbræ Slip – Largs	Cumbræ Resident	Under 10 miles
Brodick – Ardrossan	Arran Resident	Over 10 miles
Lochranza – Claonaig	Arran Resident	Under 10 miles
Lochranza – Tarbert (LF)	Arran Resident	Over 10 miles
Islay – Kennacraig	Islay Resident	Over 10 miles
Gigha – Tayinloan	Gigha Resident	Under 10 miles
Portavadie – Tarbert (LF)	Cowal Peninsula Resident	Under 10 miles
Colonsay – Kennacraig	Colonsay Resident	Over 10 miles
Craignure – Oban	Mull Resident	Under 10 miles
Fionnphort – Iona	Mull Resident & Iona Resident	Under 10 miles
Fishnish – Lochaline	Mull Resident	Under 10 miles
Tobermory – Kilchoan	Mull Resident	Under 10 miles
Colonsay – Oban	Colonsay Resident	Over 10 miles
Islay – Oban	Islay Resident	Over 10 miles
Coll – Oban	Coll Resident	Over 10 miles
Tiree – Oban	Tiree Resident	Over 10 miles
Lismore – Oban	Lismore Resident	Under 10 miles
Islay – Colonsay	Islay Resident & Colonsay Resident	Over 10 miles