

LETTERS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR, NET

1. SUMMARY OF ISSUES

- 1.1. It was reported to the Committee at the meeting of 15th June that a letter had been received from a member of the public complaining about the confiscation of his daughter's Easy Rider card by a tram conductor when she was travelling to school. Following a response by the Committee Chair, the correspondent has written again expressing his dissatisfaction.
- 1.2. A letter has also been received from a tram user complaining that the time shown on his ticket was inaccurate and that, as a consequence, he may have been wrongly charged for his ticket.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. It is RECOMMENDED that the Committee considers the contents of the report and advises on any actions to be taken.

3. CORRESPONDENT A (see Appendix A)

- 3.1. Correspondent A originally wrote to the Committee in March complaining that his daughter, whilst travelling to school, had her Easy Rider card confiscated by the tram conductor because it would not scan correctly on the ticket machine (see Letter A1). It was subsequently established by the tram operator (Nottingham Tram Consortium (NTC)) that there had been a fault with the ticket machine which had recorded the pass as being lost or stolen.
- 3.2. Following discussion at the last meeting of the Committee, the Chair wrote to the correspondent, explaining what had occurred (see Letter A2). The correspondent has written again to the Chair to complain that he has not received an adequate response to his questions (Letter A3), specifically how the card could be "hot-listed" when it bears a photograph of the user, how the confiscation of a young child's bus pass can be justified and questioning NTC's policy of leaving a young person stranded in the city centre.
- 3.3. The Chair has written back to the correspondent (Letter A4) stating that, whilst the Committee takes very seriously all incidents on NET that place members of the public, and particularly children, at risk it is not responsible for setting operational policy or for the tram conductors or their equipment. Whilst confirming that the matter will be raised again at this meeting, it is suggested that the correspondent contacts the tram operator again for further explanations.

3.4. Further to the above, the General Manager of NTC has stated that he considers that the original response provided to the complainant provides the answers to the questions raised and he has reiterated the following points:

- NTC has acknowledged that the ticket machine was faulty and therefore showed the pass as hot-listed. They do not know why the pass showed as hot-listed at the time of first presentation. The conductor carried out the proper procedure in confiscating the pass regardless of there being a photo of the passenger. This was explained to the complainant.
- Regardless of the age of the passenger, the pass would have been confiscated. As explained NTC do differentiate between minors and adults in that minors are not asked to leave the tram and are allowed to complete their journey.
- The conductor would not necessarily have known that the girl had other journeys to make after leaving the tram and was therefore not in a position to make a judgement about whether the child could complete her journey or not.
- From speaking to the complainant and from the e-mail exchange between him and the company it was believed at the time that the reason for the withdrawal of the pass had been accepted as had NTC's apology.

4. CORRESPONDENT B (see Appendix B)

4.1. Correspondent B holds a Nottinghamshire Senior Citizen Concessionary Pass which allows free travel before 4.00pm with half-fare being payable after this time (see Letter B1). The correspondent claims that he caught the tram at about 4.00pm at Old Market Square but was issued with a ticket with a time of issue of 16.13 hours printed on it. The conductor allegedly admitted that the clock on the ticket machine was fast but that the ticket was actually issued at three minutes past four. The correspondent considers it unacceptable that County concessionary fare holders were being improperly charged for a period prior to 4.00pm and considers it important that clocks are checked at least at the start of each shift. He also believes that he should not have been charged the 70 pence fare.

4.2. NTC have responded direct to the correspondent (see Letter B2). The General Manager of NTC confirmed that the electronic ticket machines are connected to a computer every night and the time on the ticket machines is synchronises daily with an atomic clock. NTC acknowledged that individual ticket machines' clocks could gain or lose time during the day. However the operational data confirmed that tram was the scheduled to arrive at 16:02, and as such the concessionary pass would not have been acceptable on this journey from this tramstop. In light of this NTC believe that the correspondent was charged the correct fare.

5. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS OTHER THAN PUBLISHED WORKS OR THOSE DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT INFORMATION

5.1. None

6. PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT

6.1. None

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LETTER A1

17th March 2010

Dear Sir / Madam

First of all I'd like to congratulate you on providing a great and outstanding tram service. I am a parent of two young children aged 15 and 13 years old who use the tram and bus to go to school. I always pay for 3 month Easy Rider 18 cards which cost me £140 every 90 days. This is the best option for us because they don't have to carry cash all the time and the card has a Photo ID which is proof they are the owner of the card. Usually the 3 months lasts from school term to school term. I like to keep a track of the days used so I can renew automatically and in advance. They currently have 23 days remaining credit up to 7th April 2010.

The reason I am writing this letter is to bring to your attention an unfortunate incident that occurred on your tram with one of your members of staff. I find it hard to believe and have to question the reason why this happened at all. I still find it very difficult to comprehend.

Imagine my shock and distress when my daughter [redacted] aged 13 told me what happened to her on the 7.30 am tram on Wednesday 17th March 2010. Apparently the female conductor told [redacted] the Easy Rider card is not working and questioned her about having any credit on the card. The conductor then warned her that she will "let it go this one time" but she will be taking her card off her and then gave her this 'NET customer comment card' instead. My daughter pleaded with the conductor that there was sufficient credit on the card and she needed her card to get the bus to school on the next leg of her journey and also to get back home from school later that day. She does not carry extra cash for transport with her because there is no need. This was obviously ignored and the card confiscated. The card has a clear photo ID of [redacted] so what could be the problem?

Nevertheless, my 13 year old daughter was left terribly embarrassed on a packed tram, made to feel like a 'fare dodger' and then left totally stranded in the city centre with not enough cash to get to school, let alone try to get home. What on earth is going on here? She then had to ring her mum at home, who was just about to leave to go to work and ask her to come and rescue her in the city centre. I was at work and not available which was probably a good thing as I would have been most unhappy, very much as I am now.

I found this experience quite disturbing and distressing and wrote an email to Wilkinson Street to retrieve her card because [redacted] needs the card to get to school and I know there is credit remaining. Your Customer Service said the reason the card was confiscated is because it was 'hot listed'. This I believe means lost or stolen, but surely the photo ID clearly shows it is my daughter and the owner of the card. The scanner was apparently at fault was the outcome of our communication.

The next day I collected the card and accepted the 2 complimentary tickets because I did not want to make a fuss. However, I would question your practice and policy where you can leave a vulnerable 13 year old girl, 7.40 am, stranded in the city centre without means of getting anywhere and placed in a predicament that she totally unprepared for? What if it was a younger schoolgirl and she had no means of contacting anyone because her parents were on their way to work? Surely this would be any parent's worst nightmare and that is why I felt the need to write to you.

I honestly hope that this incident can be avoided in the future and maybe you could prevent this from ever happening again.

LETTER A2

Cabinet Member for
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R./AH/DU

30th June 2010

Dear [REDACTED],

Letter to GNLRT Advisory Committee

Thank you for your letter of 21st March 2010, the contents of which were reported to the meeting of the GNLRT Advisory Committee held on 15th June. Your comments congratulating the tram on its great and outstanding service are much appreciated.

The Committee was concerned to hear of your daughter's unfortunate experience when travelling on the tram. We understand that the tram operating consortium, NTC, has written to you explaining that the Easyrider card was taken by the conductor because of an error in the data held on the ticket machine and that you have been sent vouchers for travel on the tram by way of an apology. We have been assured by the General Manager of NTC that it is extremely rare for such a fault to occur.

I hope that this experience will not deter you and your family from using the tram in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Richard Jackson
Chair
Greater Nottingham Light Rapid Transit Advisory Committee

18th July 2010

Re: RJ/AH/DU - 30th June 2010

Dear Councillor Richard Jackson

Letter to GNLRT Advisory Committee

Thank you for responding to my letter, but what was the outcome of this committee meeting that you held? Yes, you have already given me the following excuses of data error, hot lists and faulty machines.

However, you have failed to give me an adequate explanation for my main questions.

- 1) The card has a clear photo ID of [REDACTED], so how can it be 'hot listed' as stolen? There was certainly sufficient credit on the card so what could be the problem in the first place?
- 2) How do you warrant the confiscation of a 13 year old child's bus pass? Come on please?
- 3) Finally, I must question your practice and policy where you can leave a vulnerable 13 year old girl, 7.40 am, stranded in the city centre without means of getting anywhere and placed in a predicament that she totally unprepared for?

If this was someone else's child or if anything would have happened to [REDACTED], I'm sure your response would not be as casual? All I want is an honest explanation. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

LETTER A4

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RJ/RD/DU

30th July 2010

Letter to GNLRT Advisory Committee

I refer to your follow-up letter of the 18th July 2010 concerning our previous correspondence regarding the unfortunate incident experienced by your daughter, when travelling on the tram.

In the first instance I want to assure you that I and this Committee take very seriously all incidents on NET – Line One which place members of the public, and particularly children, at risk. The regrettable incident concerning your daughter was therefore raised with the Nottingham Tram Consortium (NTC) - the operating consortium, at the next available meeting of the GNLRT Committee.

It should be understood, however, that this Committee is only an advisory body made up of Councillors and independent members representing public transport user groups and other organisations that have an interest in the operation of NET Line One. The tram system is operated by a private sector consortium (NTC) with which the City and County Councils have a contractual relationship (under the Private Finance Initiative). This Committee is not responsible for setting operational policy nor is it responsible for the tram conductors (or their equipment).

In your letter you raise a number of detailed points about the incident which I suggest you take up directly with the operating consortium (NTC) for any further explanations.

Your letter will however, be reported to the next meeting of this Committee, due to be held on 14th September, and the comments of the tram operator will again be sought to try to ensure that future incidents of this nature do not occur again.

Yours sincerely

Councillor Richard Jackson
Chair – Greater Nottingham Light Rapid Transit Advisory Committee

LETTER B1

GNLRT Advisory Committee
 C/o NET Project Office
 Lawrence House
 Talbot Street
 Nottingham
 NG1 5NT

26th July 2010

Dear Sir/Madam,

Accuracy of Time Clocks on Tram Ticket Issuing Machines

Today, I travelled on the Tram from Old Market Square to Station Street at about 16.00 hours.

Because I have a Nottinghamshire Senior Citizen Concessionary Pass, I was charged a fare of 70p for travelling after 16.00 hours. The ticket which was issued to me is attached.

I paid the fare without argument, but then I noticed that the time on the ticket was 16.13 hrs, and this meant that the clock on the ticket-issuing machine was 10 - 15 minutes fast.

When I spoke to the conductor who had issued the ticket on the tram, he said that he had no discretion but to issue the ticket once his machine 'clicked over'. He admitted that the clock on his ticket machine was fast, but said that it had been 16.03 on his wristwatch when the ticket was issued. However, I am not convinced that his wristwatch was that accurate.

I should also point out that I waited about 5 minutes at the tram stop before the tram arrived, and then there was a short time interval from the time I boarded the tram to the time that the conductor approached me and issued the ticket. I would presume that the time waiting at the tram stop did not count, unless of course the tram was running late.

This also means that for a period of about 10 to 15 minutes before 16.00 hours, concessionary fare-holders were being improperly charged for travelling after the cut-off period. This is quite unacceptable.

It is important that clocks on ticket issuing machines are checked at least at the start of each shift.

In the circumstances, I do not believe that I should have been charged a fare of 70p.

Yours faithfully,



Ticket Type:
 City Con Evesgl
 From:
 Phoenix Park
 Valid as far as:
 Station Street

Valid until:

26 JUL 2010 17:13

Fare Paid

£00.70

www.thetram.net

LETTER B2

1 September 2010

Dear

Accuracy of Time clocks on Tram Ticket Issuing Machines

Thank you for your letter sent to the GNLRT Advisory Committee regarding your journey on 26th July. I apologise for the delayed response to your letter. Unfortunately the holiday season got in the way of my carrying out a thorough investigation.

NET uses electronic ticket machines which are connected to a computer every night in order to download sales information. At the same time, the computer time is uploaded to each machine. This master computer synchronises daily with an atomic clock and so the time at the point of uploading is accurate. However, that is not to say that individual ticket machines' clocks will not gain or lose time during the day as appears to have happened on the machine which issued your ticket. We have today checked the time on all ticket machines and this has been found to be accurate. Thank you for bringing this inaccuracy to our attention.

As you point out the conductor also consulted his own watch to ascertain the time. Unfortunately, I do not know whether or not his watch was accurate. However, I have checked the data log for the tram you travelled on and can report that the tram was slightly late against the scheduled time.

Throughout the tram system the time that a tram appears at particular points is recorded. There is such a point at Old Market Square and this shows that tram arriving at that point at 36 seconds late against a scheduled arrival time of 16:02. Given that this was the scheduled time for this tram, your concessionary pass would not have been acceptable on this journey from this tramstop in any event. I am afraid that these are the rules of the scheme which apply to boarding time and which both the company and concession card holders sign up to.

It would appear from your letter that you may have just missed the previous tram (as they are scheduled to run every 6 or 7 minutes at this time of day) on which tram, your pass would have been accepted. On checking the data log for this journey, it arrived at the Old Market Square tramstop approximately 22 seconds before its scheduled time of 1555.

I realise that our application of the rules may appear to be over restrictive and that some leeway around the boarding time should be given particularly as the conductors may not be issuing you with a ticket immediately on boarding. (Had you boarded the same tram at Royal Centre, your pass would have been accepted.) In training, conductors are instructed to apply a certain element of discretion, but as the scheduled time of that tram from Old Market Square is outside of the free travel period, I am not sure how far that discretion

could have been extended. In the circumstances, given you boarded a tram scheduled from that stop after the cut off point, I believe that you were charged the correct fare.

As we have not received any further complaints that concession card holders were denied free travel, I do not believe that there is a major problem regarding this issue.

I trust that this answers your enquiry.

Yours sincerely

Neil Wood
General Manager