

Last month, transport minister Norman Baker was in his Lewes constituency to launch the latest phase of Go-Ahead's roll-out of the Key, the company's innovative smartcard ticket.

Mr Baker has long been an advocate of smart ticketing, calling for operators to help fulfil the Government's vision of a transport system where passengers can enjoy seamless travel on one smartcard. ITSO technology has been the Government's chosen specification for public transport smartcards. Go-Ahead has responded to these challenges by embracing smartcards across its bus and rail operations, and achieving several industry firsts along the way – including the introduction of the first interoperable commercial ITSO smartcard scheme in Oxford.

At the heart of Go-Ahead's approach is the firm belief that despite difficult economic conditions, we can still increase patronage on our trains and buses by using smartcards to build a compelling proposition for our services. Smartcards mean we can:

- Generate additional journeys by offering more attractive products and ticket types to better match today's changing journey patterns
- Promote multi-modal travel by providing joined-up ticketing between bus and rail
- Offer passengers the best fare if they buy online and use their smartcard
- Reduce waste by cutting back on paper tickets, and
- Improve boarding times on buses and queuing times at stations.

Go-Ahead's smartcard is known as

**The consistent smartcard name is designed to give passengers the message that, with the card in their hand, they possess a nationally accepted smartcard**



Go-Ahead's smartcard scheme, winner in the technology sector, is being extended over its rail and bus operations to offer seamless travel.



the Key. We've given it a distinctive brand which can be adapted by each of our bus and rail companies to enable them to maintain their own individual identities – an approach which is in line with our devolved approach to operating our businesses. But the consistent smartcard name is designed to give passengers the message that, with the card in their hand, they possess a nationally-accepted smartcard.

Our commitment to introducing smartcards on our operations dates back to 2007, when Go-Ahead and Keolis, bidding as Govia, were awarded the London Midland rail franchise. The franchise agreement included a commitment to introduce an ITSO smartcard scheme.

In 2009, we began to prepare for the London Midland smartcard pilot by establishing our in-house smartcard introduction team. The team's first task was to set up a proof of concept test room so that all elements of the system could be tested before the pilot was launched. That year, we also took the decision to invest in smartcard ticket



...tion of this year's National Transport awards, seamless travel, says **Gillian Singh**

machines for each of our 2000 buses outside London (all buses in London already have Oyster readers), and we placed a £2.8m order for smartcard bus ticket machines – one of the largest orders for this equipment ever seen in the UK.

Early the following year we were ready to go with our initial pilot of the Key, launching the first ITSO smartcard on rail outside London and the South East. At the heart of this small West Midlands trial was a fully-integrated, self-service web ticket sales engine providing customers with the ability to make easy online ticket purchases and to collect the tickets at the station by simply touching their smartcard on the Key reader.

In June 2010 we launched the first bus division ITSO smartcard scheme in Go North East. We undertook the pilot on a standard ITSO platform, and decided to use the same tried and tested solution across the rest of our operating companies.

In autumn last year, we put into operation one of Britain's largest com-

**Left: Smartcard's launch on London Midland was a first for rail outside the South East**  
**Above: Norman Baker flanked by Southern's Riz Wahid and Chris Burchell at last week's launch**  
**Right: Oxford card is interoperable with Stagecoach services**



mercial ITSO smartcard schemes in Oxford. This scheme, for the Oxford Bus Company, initially included 22,000 Key cards, as well as the ability to validate concessionary travelcards. Some 64,000 cards are now in circulation in Oxford, and passengers can buy a range of products using the Key, either online or at the city centre's Debenhams store.

Introduction of the Key has continued apace this year. Smartcard ticket machines have been installed on nearly 2000 buses in Go-Ahead's fleet, and the Go North East pilot has been extended to full operations across the company. In the first week alone, some 60,000 journeys were made each day, a figure that has now risen to nearly 100,000. In November, the Key's launch won best North East PR event in the Chartered Institute of Public Relations annual Pride awards.

In Oxford, Go-Ahead has worked in partnership with Stagecoach to launch the Oxford SmartZone, a multi-operator scheme enabling passengers to use the Key to travel on both Go-Ahead and Stagecoach buses in the city. This is another UK bus industry first.

Plymouth Citybus and Brighton & Hove Buses have both launched the Key this year. In Plymouth, 13,000 cards have been issued and 8,000 journeys are made using the smartcard each day; in Brighton and Hove, 3,000 passengers are now using it to make their journeys around the city. In both cities, the Key is available from travel shops as well as online.

This year will conclude with the commercial launch of the Key on Metrobus and Thames Travel. In the New Year, the team will focus on the full introduction of the scheme by London Midland on the Snow Hill lines in Birmingham and also on introducing the Key in the operating companies within Go South Coast, including Wilts & Dorset and Blue Star. In future, pas-

sengers using Brighton & Hove Buses, Metrobus and Southern rail services will be able to use the Key when travelling on all three companies.

The Southern pilot includes innovative commitments for widespread adoption of the Key across the franchise area, including multi-modal pay as you go smartcard ticketing, new ticket types including three-day season tickets, off-peak season tickets, early bird and cashback ticket options and carnet multi-trip products for services into London.

Speaking at the Southern pilot launch in November, Norman Baker said that smart ticketing was already beginning to make a positive impact across the country, giving passengers the confidence to get out of their cars and on to public transport.

Passenger Focus manager Sharon Hedges added that smartcard ticketing "is an exciting development for passengers, with great potential. Passengers will look forward to seeing the benefits that innovation can bring, such as reducing costs and increasing ease of access to the rail network."

For Go-Ahead, our commitment to smartcard ticketing has taken us a long way in the past few years and we were delighted that our efforts were recognised this year at the National Transport Awards. As group chief executive David Brown said at the time: "The award recognises our desire to continue to innovate and meet the needs of our passengers, and acknowledges the fantastic teamwork which has delivered this significant new initiative."

In future, we will continue to focus on making travel easier and cheaper for our passengers: by 2013 we expect to see 500,000 of our passengers using the Key on our bus and rail networks.

**Gillian Singh is marketing director of Go-Ahead**