

ABC tickets a smart solution for Dundee



Summary

Local authority:
Dundee City Council



In September 2016, Dundee City Council and the city's bus operators launched an integrated ticketing scheme that provides travellers with unlimited travel on any Dundee bus for a fixed daily or weekly price.

Branded as ABC (All Bus Companies), these smart-card tickets can be used on all bus services within a defined area, which includes Dundee and a wider catchment.

Initially, sales of ABC tickets grew, but by Christmas 2017, they had plateaued. On this basis, Dundee City Council agreed to part-fund a PR campaign, using part of its Smarter Choices, Smarter Places (SCSP) funding allocation for 2017/18. Importantly, SCSP funding was also used to offset a planned increase in ticket prices, to help ensure ABC tickets remained a cost-effective option for travellers. Alongside SCSP funding, the bus companies offered 'in-kind' support, by making the rear of six buses available for a year for ABC advertising.

Whilst ticketing data shows patronage has not increased markedly, market research suggests the promotion of the ABC ticketing scheme has helped to generate more positive views about the value and convenience offered by bus travel in Dundee. In time, this may help encourage other Dundee residents to take advantage of this innovative scheme.

This project received funding through the *Smarter Choices, Smarter Places* programme, which is administered by Paths for All and funded by Transport Scotland.



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Launched in September 2016, the All Bus Companies (ABC) integrated ticketing initiative offers travellers the opportunity to purchase unlimited bus travel at a fixed daily or weekly price. Key target markets for the ABC initiative include Dundee residents who do not usually have access to a car; regular bus users; as well as commuters.

The scheme has been made possible via a partnership between Dundee City Council and the city's three bus operators - Stagecoach, Xplore Dundee or Moffatt & Williamson. One of the Council's key roles in the partnership is to act as an 'honest broker', to redistribute fares gathered via ABC tickets back to the operators.

Weekly adult ABC tickets (7 days) cost just £14.50 (a child's ticket is £9.50) and adult day ticket costs £4.20 (a child's ticket is £2.90). Child tickets are valid for customers aged 5-15 years old, with children under 5 travelling for free on all bus services (when accompanied by an adult).

Sold as a smart-card product, ABC tickets can be used on any Stagecoach, Xplore Dundee or Moffatt & Williamson bus services, anywhere within Dundee, as well as on a range of wider services, within a defined catchment.

Passengers buy ABC tickets on board from any bus driver at the start of their journey.

The ABC ticket product is then loaded onto a current smartcard, whether it's an Xplore Dundee Discover card, a StagecoachSmart card or a National Entitlement card. ABC products can also be purchased from Dundee bus station or the travel shop on Commercial Street in Dundee. Paper-based ABC tickets are not available.

Using the smart-card is as simple as placing it onto the ticket machine as you board the bus and telling the driver where you're going.

Over the first 14 months, sales of ABC tickets grew. However, by Christmas 2017, sales appeared to have plateaued. On this basis, Dundee City Council agreed to part-fund a promotional campaign, using part of its Smarter Choices, Smarter Places (SCSP) funding allocation for 2017/18.

Alongside this, all 3 bus companies offered 'in-kind' support, by making the rear of buses available for a year for ABC advertising. SCSP funding was used for design and creation of the associated artwork, as well as to pay for radio advertising, set up of an ABC website, create social media content and create and distribute posters. A key learning point from this is that posters and social media have been particularly effective ways of advertising the ABC initiative, although, as public awareness grows, it may be that other media – such as the website - grow in importance.

Importantly, SCSP funding was also used to offset a planned increase in ticket prices.

Although bus companies were considering increasing prices, the Council asked them to freeze ticket prices and agreed to make up the difference of the proposed rise from SCSP funding. This subsidy offset the need for operators to pass on the pending price rise to passengers. This was considered to be important, partly because any price rise is likely to unduly impact on the 43% of Dundee households who rely on public transport because they do not have access to a car, including commuters.

Since its launch, monitoring shows that, after an initial period of growth, there has been a relatively steady rate of ABC ticket sales. Over the same period, there has been a notable increase in awareness of the ABC ticketing product and an improvement in the perception of the cost of bus travel when compared with other modes.

In combination, these results suggest demand has plateaued, possibly because the current market potential has been reached. However, this does not necessarily mean the market for ABC ticketing cannot grow. Rather, it suggests that it may be harder to 'break into' new market segments.

However, related market research suggests promotion of the ABC ticketing scheme has been effective, in that it has helped to generate more positive views about the value and convenience offered by bus travel in Dundee. This should make the task of widening the base of users easier than it might be otherwise and help to retain existing users.

“ I live quite far out and use the ABC ticket weekly. It makes things easier using different buses companies cause some give change and some don't. So I can hop on the first bus that comes instead of waiting for one I've got enough change for. ”

Dundee bus passenger

In numbers

59%

of 100 members of public surveyed in 2017/18 had heard of the ABC ticket before and 41% had not



ABC ticket sales rose from 363,000 passenger trips in 2017/18 to 403,000 in 2018/19



ABC tickets were successfully promoted via social media, on-bus wraps, posters, radio advertising and an ABC website (www.abcbustickets.com)

6

buses (two from each bus operator) have been advertising the ABC with mega-rear promotions

2.5%

of ticket sales is used to fund on-going marketing of ABC



ABC East Fife launched on 3 June 2019

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“ The ABC offer is good, especially for people that live further away, who can spend a fortune on loads of buses. ”

Dundee resident



“ When you buy a ticket that commits you to travel with a single bus company, it can be very frustrating when another company arrives at your stop first. With the ABC ticket, you can use any bus that is going your way and you know you have the whole bus network to choose from. ”

Dundee bus passenger