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Transport for London

TFL self-service ticketing

There are few tougher challenges in design than mass transit systems. Get it right and you improve the daily lives of millions of people. Get it wrong and… well, you can't get it wrong.

Improving the daily lives of millions of people

TfL asked us to help improve the user experience of their self-service ticket machines. While the hardware itself would stay the same, we were tasked with improving the touchscreen user interface, helping more people serve themselves at ticket machines in every station in the capital and its transport catchment.

TfL's network is used by millions of Londoners every day, from schoolchildren to commuters to pensioners. It's also used by most of London's visitors who come from the rest of the UK and from every other country in the world. To make things harder, buying tickets can often happen under stress: the noise and bustle of the station, unfamiliarity with the ticketing and payment options, and the impatience of the person behind you in the line.

The work

Using insights gained from user-testing with a self-service kiosk prototype, we created high-fidelity concept designs of key user journeys

Our process

When designing for an audience of this breadth and diversity, consistency is key. It was essential we devised a set of patterns which users could quickly understand. The vast range of purchase options and travel routes available meant that nothing less than meticulous attention to detail would ensure we created a consistent experience which lowered the barriers to use.

We conducted thirty, ninety-minute interviews at the TfL testing centre with people from across London, ensuring that we included users of every underground and overground line plus bus travellers, paper ticket and oyster card users. In order to capture the spectrum of TfL customers we recruited a wide range of demographics, taking into consideration varying levels of literacy as well as people with physical and cognitive disability.

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The technical limitations of the machines had an impact on our design thinking at this stage. We realised we needed to provide stronger directional cues to help guide the user off-screen towards other parts of the machine. We validated our low-fidelity prototypes through user research, using the insights gained to inform more detailed screen designs.

We then conducted user research with an interactive prototype. The prototype was presented on a touchscreen display and housed within a mocked-up ticket machine. We were then able to hand over detailed visual and interaction design specifications for development.

Keeping London moving

The new ticketing interface shows TfL's commitment to improving the customer experience. More people have a successful ticketing experience with the machines saving them time and stress in their journey. The new experience helps TfL keeps London moving, with wider benefits for the city and the national economy.