

# “IF YOU WANT SOMETHING NEW, YOU HAVE TO STOP DOING SOMETHING OLD”

So said management guru, Peter Drucker. This could also describe the spirit of innovation that is sweeping the ground transport space, with the emergence of online cab booking platforms and apps from train companies amongst many initiatives striving to offer greater efficiency for transport suppliers and end users.

Of course, the spotlight on such innovation is often taken up by privately funded entities such as trainline, minicabit and Uber, the latter proudly touting itself as a ‘disruptor’, not just an ‘innovator’. But what of the public transport sector, is it being left behind?

For nine years, I was Head of Marketing Strategy at Transport for London (TfL) where I saw a tremendous amount of innovation then and since. As a reminder, TfL is one of the largest public sector organisations in the UK with around 28,000 staff. Yet despite its scale, there are clear examples where it chose to embrace technological trends in order, one could argue, to disrupt itself. A well known example is its implementation of contactless payment technology, notably with the launch of its Oyster card since the early 2000’s. The long term implications have been significant:

- TfL removed established payment methods and products such as cash on buses, and many period tickets, and then has reduced the need to produce its own ticket media or even for customers to consider ticket products in advance of travel via the adoption of contactless bankcards. In partnership with the banking industry, TfL has expedited the adoption of contactless bankcards across the UK economy. This has also enabled new contactless devices such as contactless enabled smartphones, watches, and fobs to be used a payment means on transport in London.

The consequential changes to the rest of the public transport business in London are extensive. The role of local ticket stops has been reduced on one hand as contactless bankcards do not require “topping up”, whereas bus users must have some form of pass or contactless card before boarding the vehicle. Bus travel is arguably much faster and more efficiently operated in a cashless environment. The role of the Underground station ticket hall continues to evolve as staff are no longer needed to sell tickets via a window and can be deployed to directly engage with customers in the hall area. There are numerous other ongoing changes.

- Consequently, as of June 2015, one in ten contactless bankcard transactions in the UK are made on TfL’s network, with over 100 million contactless bankcard trips having been made via its services since September 2014. Over 4 million unique credit or debit cards have been used on TfL, and more than 1.2 million contactless transactions are made each day on TfL services.

So, it’s not just the agile startups that can innovate or disrupt the status quo!

Indeed, the public transport sector in other cities around the world is also undergoing such change. The City of Paris has a strong design-led culture in public spaces, services and public transport. For example, the classic Art Nouveau Metro entrance from the early 1900’s remains a design icon. In order to provide a more modern and effective bus infrastructure in the city, local authorities have been rolling out a new design of bus stop that includes features such as an iconic and visible design, integrated lighting, a range of sizes for various types of street locations, an integrated overall design that includes information panels and even USB charging points.

The traditional taxi industry faces similar challenges of maintaining, if not attracting, customers who are being enticed to consider a widening range of mobility options. How can the taxi sector provide a level of service to customers that encourages them to consider the classic taxi service as a first choice regardless of perhaps cheaper or digitally designed alternatives?



While the initiative in Paris clearly has benefits for the local bus user, the city has used the same overall initiative to roll out up to 120 dedicated taxi access points across the city for users of official city registered taxis. This also has the advantage of more closely visually aligning the official taxi services as a core part of the integrated transport infrastructure alongside buses, metro, rail, and in Paris, cycle and car hire. The new taxi access points also encourage taxis to wait for customers in designated and considered locations that are visible, well lit and provide sufficient space for several vehicles without blocking access for other road users. The initiative is also being used to highlight a general taxi service app for authorised taxi services in the city.

## Features of the new taxi points include:

- Dedicated information about the service offered by an official Paris taxi;
- Integrated seating, shelter and lighting;
- Information on local operators;
- Capabilities for green roofs, solar panels or interactive touch screens.

A more limited design of taxi point is likely also offered for locations where there is insufficient room for the larger unit. The taxi units are fairly widespread, highly visible and offer clearly defined taxi access more widely than at the traditional hotel and railway station hubs.

On a recent visit to Paris, I noticed some of the local taxi operators are now reconsidering customer service further and offering visitors dedicated, free in-vehicle city maps with useful local information. While not revolutionary in themselves, they do again provide indications of an industry looking to provide extra service to customers. In Brussels, a site of substantial driver protests in 2015 regarding new taxi models, similar initiatives to the Paris case have also been noticed.

These initiatives should not be seen in isolation, but as part of a competitive response from the industry in France, as well as supported by the local authorities, to reinforce, if not re-establish the role and the level of service offered by the classic taxi operator within the mix of mobility options. It is only a start, but does indicate that public authorities and private operators can look to improving service, provide clear and appealing street presence and in vehicle services as a means of evolving their offer to customers in a fast changing world. It’s a lesson from which the UK cab sector could well benefit.

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