London Oyster Card

In November 2002, TranSys, Transport for London, and London Underground began rolling out smart cards as part of a £1.2 billion world-class ticketing system designed to make travel in the capital faster, easier, and more convenient for London's commuters.

As of November 2002, 6,000 buses and 255 Tube stations were equipped to accept the new contactless cards, and a comprehensive data acquisition and control system is installed to support ongoing operations, revenue management, and reporting. After months of field testing, the card, called Oyster, was given to almost 80,000 Tube and bus staff in August 2002. In May 2003, a limited public introduction was made to 200 users. Success with each of these stages led to a June 2003 launch with cards available for sale through the Oyster card web site. Web support also includes online purchases of monthly, annual, and weekly passes which are electronically delivered to in-the-field Oyster cards via a directed auto-load and the fare processing device. In September 2003, ticket office sales were introduced. As of September 10, 2003, 26,000 cards had been issued. Fare policies will be introduced in January, providing incentives for Oyster card use on bus routes. It is anticipated that upon stabilized penetration more than 5 million cards will be issued in the greater London area. There are over 16,000 Oyster card-enabled terminals spread throughout the greater London area.

The credit card-sized Oyster cards need simply to be touched on the card readers on buses or at gates. For some travelers, the Oyster card will carry a period ticket, while others will use the card for a new PrePay ("pay-as-you-go") facility. The cards can currently be reloaded via the on-line facilities and at ticket offices. Functionality coming online includes load capability at ticket vending machines and via merchant terminals in a network of over 2,300 merchants called PASS agents.

The Oyster card is more secure than the previous magnetic stripe ticket and will speed travel by reducing the number of people paying cash to a bus driver and the number of trips travelers must make to the ticket office. The cards will also make it easier to switch between different modes of transportation. Ultimately they will operate across the network, including on trams and Docklands Light Railway as well as on buses and the Tube. Future plans include building a London-wide payment system that could be used for parking and other services.