

Press release: Swifter justice for London fare dodgers

The new paperless process, in operation at Lavender Hill Magistrates' Court, means thousands of offenders caught dodging fares or using fraudulent tickets can now be punished more swiftly and effectively.

The system has been developed by HM Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) in partnership with Transport for London (TfL). It means TfL no longer have to manually process and physically deliver case papers to the court. Instead, prosecution evidence is now electronically transferred directly to the court. These cases are then considered by a magistrate and legal advisor on a laptop – freeing up court time to focus on more serious crimes.

Under the new system, Transport for London can prosecute some 18,000 commuter crimes a year in the capital more quickly and efficiently.

Justice Minister Dominic Raab said:

Using smart technology to punish fare dodgers swiftly and effectively is just one example of how our courts' reform programme will strengthen the justice system.

We are investing £1 billion to digitise the justice system – making it more accessible for all citizens, more sensitive for witnesses, and delivering better value for taxpayers' money.

Siwan Hayward, TfL's Head of Transport Policing, said:

We use the courts to tackle the minority of people who purposefully avoid paying their fares, licensed drivers and private hire operators who break the law, and companies who obstruct the pavements and streets.

That's why we have worked with HMCTS to streamline what has historically been a labour intensive, paper heavy process. The real-time aspect of the system results in court notices being issued within weeks of an offence and prosecutions are concluded sooner so individuals and businesses receive a faster resolution.

The new system enables our Investigations and Prosecutions team more time to target illegal behaviour and bring those who break the law to justice.

The system has already:

- processed around 4,200 cases since April 2017 and returned 3,000 sentences
- removed the need for documents to be physically transported by staff between TfL and the court
- allowed results of cases to be obtained by TfL immediately
- made enforcement faster.

Future developments will include speeding up the process for those guilty pleas which can be fast tracked, and eventually for an online system to replace the paper based system, further improving response times. Plans are also in place to offer the system to other large public service organisations who prosecute thousands of cases a year where the potential benefits would then be magnified.

Note to editors:

Evidence shows offering people the chance to plead online in these kinds of cases actually means more respond than when we ask for pleas on paper. The process will mostly replace letters (that don't work very well), and court hearings where the person doesn't turn up, not physical court appearances.