

Global trends in metro station organisation and management

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Short summary abstract

Increased uptake of smart ticketing, mass availability of personal information technology, and roll-out of 4G and WiFi coverage within metropolitan railway systems, are leading metros to change the way they manage stations.

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Increased uptake of smart ticketing, mass availability of personal information technology, and roll-out of 4G and WiFi coverage within metro systems, are leading metros to change the way they manage stations. We worked with a group of urban rail and metro operators to understand global trends and identify industry best practices in relation to station management and staffing, and investment in technology to support staff and station operations.

The objectives for the study were to understand what changes other metros are developing or implementing with respect to the control and operation of stations, in particular where there is a focus on improving customer service and the greater use of technology to support staff. This included the use of communication systems and mobile technologies to monitor and remotely control the station and improve customer service, and the use of smart mobile devices and applications in station operations.

The Community of Metros (CoMET) is an international research consortium comprising 32 urban rail and metro operators that share information to research good practice in metro operations, facilitated by the Railway and Transport Strategy Centre (RTSC) at Imperial College London. Participating European operators include Barcelona TMB, Brussels STIB, Metro Lisboa, London Underground and Docklands Light Railway, Metro de Madrid, Newcastle Nexus, and Paris RATP. Honest and open sharing of data is enabled by a confidentiality agreement, which means research results are presented in an anonymised form.

We used questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with metros of the CoMET and Nova benchmarking groups to assemble evidence for how stations are classified, managed, and staffed – and how this links with the way customers are served, and the supporting role of technology.

A key trend identified is that ticketing staff are moving from a role focused largely on helping passengers to purchase travel to a wider role improving the customer experience.

This includes a physical shift, moving from inside a ticket office to outside around the station and also a shift in philosophy toward providing customers support and assistance.

Improvements in both personal and railway technology means that many tasks are becoming simpler for the user. For example, modern trains on lines with Automatic Train Operation (ATO) require less expertise to drive than older trains on manually-driven lines. This means that staff are able to carry out a wider variety of tasks. Metros are using the simplification of tasks to extend the numbers and capabilities of their multi-functional staff.

Improving communications mean that metros reported wider use of roaming staff, with staff deployed at strategic locations throughout the network rather than at a fixed location. This allows more flexibility in deploying resources appropriately, as well as adding variety for staff.

More metros are introducing zonal management of small groups of stations. This is associated with a rise in combined management staff responsible for both station assets and customer service in those groups of stations. These changes are reported to improve staff camaraderie, break up operational silos, and ensure staff have better local knowledge of stations and their passengers.

We conclude that improved customer service is possible through investment in station technologies including smart ticketing, and remote and/or mobile station control mechanisms. This enables staff to take on more customer-visible and multi-functional roles, ensuring that station staff costs provide the greatest value to customers.

Keywords:

Rail, operations, station investment, technology, smart ticketing