



02 August 2024

FEATURE ARTICLE

### Lessons We Can Learn from the Outgoing E-Ticketing System

Thousands of consumers travel in buses on a daily basis, proving it as a critical backbone for daily commuting in Fiji. With the introduction of the E-ticketing system and its full roll-out in 2017, the system was aimed at streamlining the process of fare collection and improving efficiency. However, this has not been the reality on the ground. Many consumers have faced a number of issues and since 2020, and have chosen to raise their concerns with the Council, resulting in 399 complaints against various aspects of the E-ticketing system. However, The Council believes that these complaints are only the tip of the ice-berg, as many complaints would have either been raised with other bodies, directly with the vendors, or not raised at all.

In November 2023, the government began the process of transitioning to a new e-ticketing system. Last month, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Communications, Honourable Manoa Kamikamica, announced that Vodafone Fiji was chosen as the successful vendor for this new system following a thorough tender process. Honourable Kamikamica mentioned that while negotiations with bus companies are still underway and anticipated to conclude soon, he has recognized the current system's ongoing challenges and is optimistic that “the new system promises significant improvements.”

The Council welcomes this change, and commends the Ministry’s commitment shown in addressing the issues raised by consumers in relation to the current system. As Fiji transitions to this new e-ticketing system, this article aims to highlight the current challenges, and opportunities for improvement offered by the new e-ticketing system.

#### Challenges with the Current E-Ticketing System

##### i) Unavailability of E-ticketing Service Agents

Commuters, especially those in rural and semi-urban areas, often express concerns about the lack of e-ticketing top-up agents. Consequently, they incur additional expenses and face the inconvenience of traveling to the nearest top-up locations.

Case Study: A complainant highlighted the unavailability of e-transport top-up agents in Olosara, Sigatoka. Previously, services were provided by agents like Lucky’s Milk Bar and Coral Coast Shopping Centre, but these services are no longer offered. When enquiries were made, the Council was informed by the vendor that the agents had opted to remove these

#### **Head Office**

Level 5 Vanua House  
Victoria Parade GPO, Suva  
Phone: 3300792/3310183  
CEO: 3305864  
Fax: 3300115  
Email: [complaints@consumersfiji.org](mailto:complaints@consumersfiji.org)

#### **Lautoka/West**

Suite 4 Popular Building  
Vidilo Street  
P.O. Box 5396, Lautoka  
Phone: 6664987  
Email: [consumerlwk@connect.com.fj](mailto:consumerlwk@connect.com.fj)

#### **Labasa/North**

Shop 2, Mudaliar Investment  
Sangam Avenue Street  
P.O. Box 64, Labasa  
Phone: 8812559  
Email: [colbs@connect.com.fj](mailto:colbs@connect.com.fj)



services because it was not lucrative enough for them as traders. As a result, the complainant had to make alternative arrangements for his card topup.

#### ii) Unavailability of Disposable E-ticketing Cards

Despite being mandated by Regulation 7A of the Electronic Fair Ticketing (Omnibus) (Amendment) Regulations 2017, disposable e-transport cards are no longer available to consumers. This unavailability has caused significant concern, as these cards were essential for emergency and one-time bus travel, as well as for tourists visiting Fiji. The discontinuation of disposable cards leaves consumers without alternatives in unforeseen situations like card loss and emergencies, potentially impacting the tourism industry.

International best practices suggest that public transport providers, including bus services, should offer disposable cards to tourists for convenient and affordable travel while exploring new destinations. For example, in London, tourists receive an Oyster travel card for ease of use, which is also available to regular commuters.

#### iii) Unjustified Increases in Minimum Top Up Amounts

Several consumers have complained about e-ticket agents increasing the minimum top-up amount to \$5.00 or more, rather than adhering to Vodafone's minimum limit of \$2.00. Our investigations indicate that agents avoid offering \$2.00 top-ups because they are not profitable for them. As a result, consumers are forced to pay more than necessary to top up their cards.

This issue is particularly concerning for rural residents, social welfare recipients, and those needing to travel for medical emergencies, who may only have as little as \$2.00 in cash. The imposition of higher minimum top-up limits by agents can prevent these individuals from traveling when they need to, creating significant challenges and hardship.

Case Study 2: A complainant lacked sufficient funds to travel from Newtown to Suva and went to Khalsa Dairy Shop, the sole e-ticketing agent on Khalsa Road, to top up her card with \$2.00, as stipulated by Vodafone's minimum top-up amount. However, she was denied service and informed that she would need to top up with \$3.00 or more, as this had been the standard practice for the past three years.

#### iv) On-board Redemption Issues

##### Head Office

Level 5 Vanua House  
Victoria Parade GPO, Suva  
Phone: 3300792/3310183  
CEO: 3305864  
Fax: 3300115  
Email: [complaints@consumersfiji.org](mailto:complaints@consumersfiji.org)

##### Lautoka/West

Suite 4 Popular Building  
Vidilo Street  
P.O. Box 5396, Lautoka  
Phone: 6664987  
Email: [consumerlkt@connect.com.fj](mailto:consumerlkt@connect.com.fj)

##### Labasa/North

Shop 2, Mudaliar Investment  
Sangam Avenue Street  
P.O. Box 64, Labasa  
Phone: 8812559  
Email: [colbs@connect.com.fj](mailto:colbs@connect.com.fj)



Another significant challenge is the on-board redemption process. Many passengers report that bus drivers often refuse to allow them to redeem top-ups while on the bus. This can lead to frustrating delays and, in some cases, passengers being unable to complete their journeys.

Moreover, the in-bus top-up functionality is frequently unreliable. When systems malfunction or fail to recognize top-ups, passengers are left without a means to pay for their rides, leading to further inconvenience and disruption. This is a concern that has also been raised with bus operators.

#### v) Redressal Mechanisms

Several consumers find it expensive in seeking refund for overcharged fares whereby they have to travel to a Vodafone outlet to seek refunds and redress – more costs incurred during the journey.

#### vi) Extra Charges Imposed for Top-Ups

Complaints have also revealed that certain traders are charging extra (approximately \$0.20 to \$0.50) for topping up e-transport cards.

### Council's Survey

Listed below are the key findings of previous surveys carried out by the Council on the subject of E-Ticketing:

- Most areas surveyed (81%) did not have access to authorized agents for top-up of e-transport cards. For example, all consumers surveyed in Sigatoka have to travel to the CBD to top-up their cards. This becomes particularly concerning as at times consumers do not have enough cash to travel to these agents to top-up their cards. Furthermore, in cases where consumers become ill and need to travel to seek medical attention, they do not have any means to travel when their e-transport cards do not have enough balance.
- Most bus companies (79%) that provide service to rural areas, where there is little to no e-transport agents, do not provide alternative payment methods to consumers to top up their e-transport card to commute. Unsurprisingly, 21% of consumers surveyed stated that bus operators accept cash payments, which is illegal, or consumers pay cash to bus drivers in exchange to tapping their e-transport cards.
- A total of 76.98% of consumers surveyed want disposable e-transport cards to be re-introduced.

#### **Head Office**

Level 5 Vanua House  
Victoria Parade GPO, Suva  
Phone: 3300792/3310183  
CEO: 3305864  
Fax: 3300115  
Email: [complaints@consumersfiji.org](mailto:complaints@consumersfiji.org)

#### **Lautoka/West**

Suite 4 Popular Building  
Vidilo Street  
P.O. Box 5396, Lautoka  
Phone: 6664987  
Email: [consumerlwk@connect.com.fj](mailto:consumerlwk@connect.com.fj)

#### **Labasa/North**

Shop 2, Mudaliar Investment  
Sangam Avenue Street  
P.O. Box 64, Labasa  
Phone: 8812559  
Email: [colbs@connect.com.fj](mailto:colbs@connect.com.fj)



## Consumer Impact

These challenges have a profound impact on daily commutes and financial planning for many Fijians. The inconvenience and uncertainty surrounding the E-ticketing system can lead to significant stress, particularly for those who rely on public transport for their livelihood. For instance, children and students may be denied travel if they have insufficient funds on their cards, leading to missed school days and educational disruptions.

The frustrations and inconveniences experienced by consumers highlight the urgent need for improvements. Long waits, denied travel, and the hassle of finding functioning top-up locations all contribute to a negative perception of the current E-ticketing system.

## Addressing Challenges in the New System

As Fiji prepares to transition to a new E-ticketing system under Vodafone, it is essential to learn from the shortcomings of the current setup. Consumers have clear expectations for the new system, which include:

- Widespread and accessible top-up options: Ensuring that top-up locations are conveniently located and well-distributed, particularly in rural areas.
- Reliable in-bus top-up functionalities: Guaranteeing that passengers can top up their cards on the bus without issues.
- Reintroduction of disposable cards: Providing solutions for occasional riders who do not need permanent cards.
- Inclusion strategies for the unbanked or underbanked population: Making sure that everyone, regardless of their banking status, can easily access and use E-ticket cards.
- Transparency on fees and charges: Implementing a clear tap-on, tap-off system with visible and understandable charges.

In summary, the current E-ticketing system in Fiji poses significant challenges for consumers, affecting their daily lives and financial planning. As the government transitions to a new provider, there is a critical opportunity to address these issues and implement a more efficient and user-friendly system. By focusing on widespread accessibility, reliable functionalities, and inclusive practices, the new E-ticketing system can better serve the needs of all Fijians.

The Consumer Council of Fiji will continue to advocate for consumer rights and push for improvements in public transportation services. With careful planning and consideration of

### Head Office

Level 5 Vanua House  
Victoria Parade GPO, Suva  
Phone: 3300792/3310183  
CEO: 3305864  
Fax: 3300115  
Email: [complaints@consumersfiji.org](mailto:complaints@consumersfiji.org)

### Lautoka/West

Suite 4 Popular Building  
Vidilo Street  
P.O. Box 5396, Lautoka  
Phone: 6664987  
Email: [consumerlwk@connect.com.fj](mailto:consumerlwk@connect.com.fj)

### Labasa/North

Shop 2, Mudaliar Investment  
Sangam Avenue Street  
P.O. Box 64, Labasa  
Phone: 8812559  
Email: [colbs@connect.com.fj](mailto:colbs@connect.com.fj)



@CCoFiji



Consumer Council of Fiji



[www.consumersfiji.org](http://www.consumersfiji.org)



Mobile App

---

consumer feedback, the new E-ticketing system has the potential to transform public transportation in Fiji, making it more convenient, reliable, and accessible for everyone.

---

**Head Office**

Level 5 Vanua House  
Victoria Parade GPO, Suva  
Phone: 3300792/3310183  
CEO: 3305864  
Fax: 3300115  
Email: [complaints@consumersfiji.org](mailto:complaints@consumersfiji.org)

**Lautoka/West**

Suite 4 Popular Building  
Vidilo Street  
P.O. Box 5396, Lautoka  
Phone: 6664987  
Email: [consumerltk@connect.com.fj](mailto:consumerltk@connect.com.fj)

**Labasa/North**

Shop 2, Mudaliar Investment  
Sangam Avenue Street  
P.O. Box 64, Labasa  
Phone: 8812559  
Email: [colbs@connect.com.fj](mailto:colbs@connect.com.fj)