



The Bullroarer - Wednesday 23 January 2008

Posted by [Big Gav](#) on January 23, 2008 - 6:38am in [The Oil Drum: Australia/New Zealand](#)

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Our transport companies could learn a lot from the Japanese. OF ALL the wonders of the Tokyo subway and train network, by far the greatest are the ticket machines. The Shinkansen, or bullet train, the labyrinth that is the Tokyo subway system and the punctuality of the trains are all amazing feats of human ingenuity, design and organisation. Next to the ticket machines, though, they pale by comparison.

The machines I have in mind aren't technically ticket machines at all, since they don't even dispense tickets. Rather, they enable travellers to add value to their tickets. They're called "fare-adjustment" machines and they're located just inside the barrier gates of almost every station. You enter your ticket into the machine and it tells you how much credit you need to add to go through the station exit barriers.

The genius of the fare adjustment machine doesn't lie in the technology itself. No doubt manufacturers of ticket machines could knock one together in an afternoon. Rather, the genius of the fare-adjustment machine is the culture of which it is a product. The lowly fare adjustment machine is a concrete expression of a culture that is determined to serve customers and help them to do the right thing. The fare-adjustment machine doesn't make any presumptions about why you didn't purchase the correct ticket in the first place. You could be trying to cheat the system or you could be a clueless tourist who's struggling with the sensory overload of Tokyo and innocently bought the wrong ticket.

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