CFlisi
Jul 25 · 5 min read ★ ·
Listen

A Moving Experience: The technology tik-tok

by C.Flisi

It's all about being trapped at a metro station. Left stranded by a cancelled train. Stuck in a closed car on a hot day. Life today is supposed to represent the apotheosis of technological development but recent history suggests that the opposite is happening.

Get unlimited access

Search

CFlisi
206 Followers

writer, PR professional, mother, dog-lover, traveler. See more at www.paroleanima.com

Edit profile

More from Medium

OrbitSoft
How we test systems at OrbitSoft:...

Durlabhk...
Negative sum

Minal Ch...
Till the offer lasts!

Amy Willis
Austin

I was returning from Washington D.C. on the Metro at 9:30 pm. Summertime so there was still some light and more than a handful of fellow passengers exiting at my stop. I whipped out my card to activate the turnstile doors and nothing happened. A flashing red message instructed me to “contact manager.” Unperturbed, I tried another turnstile. And another. All of them gave me the same advice. Although I had topped up my card that morning and knew there were sufficient funds to cover my fare, I next tried the card machine beside the exit, thinking to add whatever would open the turnstile. But that machine, too, advised me to “contact manager.” The supervisor’s booth by the exit was empty.

Now I was concerned. The hour wasn’t late but the other passengers had gone and the station looked empty. The situation didn’t feel good — hanging around by myself, a short, vulnerable person of a certain age. I pushed the button at the booth to “call manager.”

Help Status Writers Blog
Careers Privacy Terms About
Knowable

While waiting for a response (none forthcoming), a bland bespectacled man appeared on the other side of the turnstiles. He looked innocuous enough but reminded me of Dennis Rader (aka BTK). Fortunately, he had an official Metro employee badge around his neck.

I explained my situation. He used his badge to open the turnstile. That wasn't enough for me. "Why did this happen? What if it happens again? What do I do if a supervisor isn't around? Like . . . late at night?"

He shrugged. "Technology works until it doesn't. When it doesn't, look for a supervisor. If there is no supervisor, just climb over the turnstile and let us know later."

"Great," I thought. "Note to self: do not wear tight jean when taking the Metro."

My clothes had no impact on another transportation snafu, but technology

would have made a difference. I had to travel from Inverness in Scotland to St. Andrews, about 150 miles away. There were no direct routes; the fastest routing called for three trains and a bus. I wasn't happy, given the frequent strikes on ScotRail during this period, but had no choice.

The first two trains were on time. My third stop left me at a tiny town called Ladybank (population 1,500) with one platform, no stationmaster, a shuttered station (the oldest unaltered station in Scotland, I later learned), and not a soul in sight. The only sign of animation was the electronic platform display, which announced clearly that the train I was supposed to catch had been CANCELLED. No hint of substitutions, no phone number, no contact information, and no WiFi signal. I was in a Twilight Zone of remoteness and, to add to my desperation, it began to rain.

About five minutes later a red-headed lass happened by with phone in hand. I

explained my plight and begged for assistance. She scrolled and advised me to take a local bus to St. Andrews. The nearest bus stop was a manageable distance from the station (albeit in the rain) and the driver accepted cash (not all of them do anymore).

Since ScotRail is so technology-dependent, why don't they have a way for travelers to contact them from remote stations without personnel? Why don't they have WiFi on the trains AND the stations? Even Italy offers that, not that the WiFi works all the time.

And speaking of connectivity that doesn't connect, what about my recent attempt to access my university mailbox? I hadn't accessed my portal from graduate school for over two months. When I tried to do so, the algorithm decided to block my access, telling me I had to re-register from scratch. I wasn't inclined to jump through *that* hoop and wrote to a couple of tech people at the university.

One responded immediately, instructing me to re-register. The other replied a day later, suggesting a route as complicated and indirect as my train itinerary had been from Inverness to St. Andrews. I opted for an old-fashioned approach and called (not pinged or messaged) yet another individual, who provided an easy fix in two minutes. But the whole process took more than 60 minutes over the course of two days for something that should have taken 20 seconds total. So much for technological efficiency.

And while they are working on efficiency, why don't the texperts think of a way to protect babies and pets in hot cars? Emerging from the supermarket on a blazing hot summer day, I saw a car illegally parked in the fire lane at the entrance. One rear window was opened a squidge; inside was a large dog, panting, tongue lolling, obviously uncomfortable. A dog can die in minutes in a hot vehicle, so I immediately ran back into the supermarket and flagged the manager,

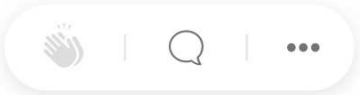
asking him to page whoever was responsible. Then I came out again, wondering how long it would take and whether I should smash the car window to ensure the dog's well-being. A 30-something couple was now standing by the car, looking as distressed as I felt. The guy was strong enough to break the window, if necessary, so the woman and I began to look around for something that would do the trick. Then a flustered young woman emerged from the store, clutching a bag with prescriptions. She looked at us looking at her and said, "No problem. The AC is running in my car."

Then she got in, turned on the car (of course the AC had NOT been running), and drove away quickly. The couple and I were relieved that the dog was (arguably if temporarily) safe, and realized that we should have taken a picture of the culprit's license plate. But why can't cars be equipped with sensors to sound an alarm when interiors overheat with living creatures

inside? Why can’t fire lanes alert store managers when access is inappropriately blocked?

Why doesn’t technology focus on helping normal people with everyday problems instead of tik-toking our lives away?

###



Get an email whenever CFlisi publishes.

You cannot subscribe to yourself