

Digital ID Revolution for UK Supermarket Shopping

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A significant shift is underway for shoppers at Tesco, Asda, and other major UK supermarkets as the Government continues to trial a new digital ID system. From early next year, customers may be able to store a digital version of their driving licence or other identification on their smartphones via the Gov.uk App and Wallet, subject to the outcome of current pilot programmes, to streamline age verification for restricted purchases like alcohol or tobacco.

The initiative, announced in January 2025, promises to modernise how Britons interact with everyday services. Government officials claim the broader adoption of digital identities across multiple sectors could save the economy £45 billion by reducing administrative burdens and enhancing efficiency, though no specific estimate has been given for supermarket use alone. Unlike the current Labour Government's broader agenda, which has drawn criticism for overreach, this policy focuses on practical innovation, allowing shoppers to present digital IDs at supermarket checkouts with the same validity as traditional plastic licences.

For those wary of digital transitions, physical licences remain valid, and there's no mandate to switch. The Gov.uk Wallet offers additional perks: drivers can check their driving record, penalty points, endorsements, and even renew their licence directly through the app.

Security is a priority, with encryption and two-factor authentication designed to thwart forgery attempts, ensuring robust protection of personal data. In a January statement, the Government emphasised that the app's single sign-on system simplifies access to services, saving time for individuals and businesses alike.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander, in a recent interview with The Times, described the change as transformative: "This puts convenience and control back in people's hands, making routine tasks quicker and more secure." While the sentiment aligns with public demand for efficiency, sceptics question whether the £45 billion savings figure is realistic, given the Government's track record of overpromising on tech-driven projects.

The pilot schemes are expected to ease the burden on supermarket staff, who often face challenges verifying IDs manually. Shoppers, too, will benefit from faster transactions, particularly younger customers accustomed to digital solutions. However, concerns linger about accessibility for older or less tech-savvy individuals, who may struggle with smartphone-based systems.

The digital ID system reflects a broader push towards modernising public services, though it's not without risks. Data privacy advocates have raised questions about the security of centralised digital records, despite the Government's assurances of stringent safeguards. The app's success will hinge on its reliability and public trust, areas where previous Labour initiatives have faltered.

As supermarkets prepare to integrate the system, the move signals a step towards a digital-first future. For now, it offers a practical choice: stick with the familiar plastic licence or embrace the convenience of a smartphone-based ID.