

by 30%

and upon traditional customer service centres to ensure that the need to change does not become an inconvenience," the aid. It highlighted that new technology should be used to provide up to date change information during journeys, and attention should be paid to ensuring all customers feel confident about using the aid.

The government's plans for the franchise have attracted strong criticism from the Association of Operating Companies which told the DfT "the case for changing the current service is unproven" and urged it to reconsider. It complained that new structure delivered significant new capacity at Cross Country's Birmingham hub, while the increased demand for connections could create new difficulties. It added that the withdrawal of some services is contrary to the DfT's objectives for the franchise.

Network Rail meanwhile warned that complications could arise from the decision to transfer the Manchester-Glasgow route to TransPennine Express. It was concerned at potential overcrowding from replacing five-car Tranziers with three-car Desiros, and about the possible impact on West Coast punctuality of replacing 125mph trains with 100mph trains. It also pointed out that TPE's Desiros are not yet cleared north of Oxenholme.

Renegotiate with GNER

which could accept a lower profit margin than would be expected if the contract was re-let on the open market. It is understood that this could benefit DfT by over £100m.

A DfT spokesman refused to issue a clear rejection of the MPs' interpretation of Alexander's letter, explaining: "I don't want to get into a spat with the Transport Select Committee." However, he pointed out that the DfT has always been consistent when asked about the possibility of renegotiating GNER's franchise. "We don't renegotiate contracts and we have always said that," he repeated.

In an attempt to get a clearer response, *Transit* contacted an experienced political analyst who suggested the MPs had been "a bit naughty". "It's all to do with the way civil servants word things and never saying never. The bit about the public purse could mean anything," he said.

Smartcards for Midlands franchises

Smartcard ticketing will be made available on East and West Midlands services by 2010. The Department for Transport has listed 17 main East Midlands stations where the new operator will have to sell, accept and validate ITSO smartcard tickets. On the West Midlands franchise, bidders have been told to draw up plans to provide smartcard ticket issuing equipment, readers/validators and appropriate gating throughout the franchise area.

Meanwhile, the new Cross Country franchise will have infrastructure in place to accept ITSO compatible tickets from Basingstoke to Bournemouth and at Guildford in time for the introduction of smartcards at the South Western franchise from January 2009. Bidders must also submit plans to introduce smartcard ticketing more widely at a later date.

Bidders must meet security standards

Considerable security improvements will be made to stations on the new East and West Midlands franchises. The new operators will be expected to upgrade stations used by 80% of its passengers so that they achieve Secure Station Accreditation (SSA). Bidders for the franchises can also submit plans to achieve SSA at stations used by 95% of passengers for the Department for Transport to evaluate.

5 years ago

■ Virgin Trains and Railtrack have reached a deal that will see plans to run 140mph trains abandoned and 125mph operation postponed.

■ The government's Urban Bus Challenge initiative has awarded million of pounds to demand responsive transport schemes.

■ Stagecoach is considering legal action against the T&G union over a strike at its Hastings bus business.

10 years ago

■ FirstBus is to acquire a 24.5% stake in Great Western Holdings ahead of bids being submitted for the Great Western Trains franchise.