

## Future of UK Rail

Sir:- Unfortunately, the DOO 'guard or no guard' dispute that has been allowed to drag on for years (and now, seemingly, suddenly resolved) has blurred this subject.

The need or otherwise for an on-board person (let us ignore the role of the person for the moment) depends on a number of issues. The trade unions have, *comme d'habitude*, played the safety card to death. Safety is an important point, but, despite my personal misgivings, no one seems to have been killed or seriously injured as a consequence of drivers opening and closing doors on trains. OK, one should say 'so far'.

The issues for a guard for safe door operations depends on the time of day, the day of the week, the curvature/ geometry/lighting of the platform and its effect on the platform/train interface, the need for security of passengers, revenue and customer relations. In some cases, for example, I think train despatch should be decided by the platform staff, who should have resort to an 'abort departure' button for emergency use. The points Malcolm Pheasey raised in his second paragraph fit here.

Of course, there is another issue, highlighted by the recent derailment in Scotland as to what happens if the driver is incapacitated. Are the passengers to be left to fend for themselves? Dangerous, as they may get run down by another train or be electrocuted if they get out of the train, as well they might.

In terms of an overall appraisal of the need for a second person on a train and in what will need an individual route, individual platform and even individual train assessment. Not easy, and we know Joe Public, politicians and the unions prefer simple answers.

Of course, if we returned to multifunctional trains, as of yore, where trains carried parcels (why not?), there would be more work for the second person to do whilst on the train and then be seen to be more - gainfully employed. The following extract about train in Scotland in the 1960s might amuse and give food for thought.

'(A) survey on the 6.40am from Inverness to the north in about 1962... gives a fascinating insight into what had probably held good over decades. The train consisted of nine vehicles... Two out of the four vans were brakes, one of which was used by the guard as a working or road van, from which he could pick up and drop off parcels and so on along the way and do his "admin". There was a lot of mail to be put off. The load with the guard included two calves, four boxes of day-old chicks, a stubborn goat (who refused to leave the train) and a sheepdog pup, the last presumably on its way to its first place of employment. The guard was thus kept very busy. Passenger accommodation was a Brake Second and a Composite for Wick and the same for Thurso, plus a... Restaurant Car... which at that time was transferred to the southbound working at Kinbrace .. . There was a travelling ticket inspector (TTI) and the... survey included a report of some of the

conversations between him and the numerous "regulars" breakfasting in the Restaurant Car.

The TTI seemed to know virtually every passenger, they him, and he was an intermediary between them and other people in the area! The TT! would be available for basic revenue protection, but I suspect he was also there to assist the busy guard, take note of the request stops where passengers wished to alight (to advise the loco crew of same) and collect any fares as necessary. But this was a line where staff had to work well together. The surveyor of this trip commented that the railway revenue from the non-passenger complement far outweighed that from the human cargo!

I wonder where we will go from here. Eric Stuart CMILT