




Entitlements and Identity: Three Cards Compared

The table below compares the properties of three cards:

1. The Edinburgh City Bus Pass as used by pensioners and the disabled until early 2006.
2. The Scottish National Entitlement Card which replaced the bus pass on 1 April 2006. A variant of this card, the Young Scot Card, was introduced to school students for travel use in January 2007.
3. The UK Identity Card: introduced 2006 and abolished 2010.

Card Properties	Former Edinburgh City Bus Pass	Scottish National Entitlement Card	UK Identity Card
			
Popular name	"bus pass"	"bus pass"	"ID card"
Industry name [1]	"bus pass"	"inter-operable smartcard"	"inter-operable smartcard"
Base material	cardboard	plastic	plastic
Onboard RFID electronic chip	✗	✓	✓
Multi-function use [2]	✗	✓	✓
Integral national database [3]	✗	✓	✓
Unique person numbering [4]	✗	✓	✓
Card use monitoring capability	✗	✓	✓
Coercive rollout [5]	✗	✓	✓

Notes

1. The Scottish National Entitlement Card (SNEC) is an inter-operable smartcard designed to an ITSO specification. (ITSO = Integrated Transport Smartcards Organisation. See: <http://www.itso.org.uk/>)
2. The SNEC card is already being used for transport, library and leisure services throughout Scotland. In addition, the Young Scot Card is being used widely both for travel and for school meals payment.

3. SNEC cards link to a centralised national database, otherwise referred to as “Citizens’ Accounts”. This directly parallels the link between UK Identity Cards (UKIDC) and the once proposed National Identity Register.
4. Each SNEC card holder is allocated a unique 19 digit reference birth number (supplied by General Register House), which can be used to facilitate cross-linkage between the many state databases. This parallels the National Identity Register Number (NIRN) which it was intended to allocate to each UKIDC card holder at registration. The use of such so-called ‘persistent identifiers’ was cautioned against in Section 4.6 of the Scottish Government’s *Identity Management and Privacy Principles* document, Version 1.0, published in December 2010.
5. Both the UKIDC and SNEC cards have been described as “voluntary”, but a coercive rollout was implicit in their evolution. Thus it was decided that people would not be able to renew their passports unless they registered for a UKIDC card. Likewise pensioners and the disabled lose their free national bus entitlement unless they register for a SNEC card. Meanwhile, many school students have been forced to register for a Young Scot Card to obtain school meals, despite this being clearly against a Scottish Government ruling. Furthermore, at one point the Scottish Grocers’ Federation recently called on the Scottish Parliament to make the SNEC card compulsory for all young people aged 12 to 26, so as to provide a proof of age capability.

Conclusions

Even a cursory examination of the above table will reveal that the former Edinburgh City Bus Pass and the more recent Scottish National Entitlement Card have nothing in common, other than the popular name “bus pass”. Furthermore, the SNEC card, the so-called “bus pass”, and the once proposed UK Identity Card have identical properties, other than their popular names.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that, despite the use of an alternative descriptive name, the SNEC card is already functioning as an operational multi-purpose national identity card, for use with local and devolved services. Already in Scotland, therefore, around a third of the population are in possession of and are using a type of national identity card. This is especially ironic since the Scottish Parliament has always been careful to insist that ID cards would not be needed to access devolved services.

Furthermore, although the UK-wide National Identity Card Scheme was abolished in 2010 there can be little doubt that Scottish Citizens’ Accounts and similar “entitlement” schemes are, by stealth and coercion, being used to provide a slow-burn route to precisely the same national ID card objectives. To date national security arguments have already been used to gain blanket access to live feeds of travel data such as London’s OysterCard system. The irrevocable linking of the SNEC card system to General Register House’s birth number index is worrying evidence that this scheme has always been considered to be an integral element of the database state and transformational government objectives propounded by the Home Office.

In a world of ever-expanding indices and registers, any multipurpose, database-backed, smartcard system that combines aggregation and exchange of personal information with monitoring of individual actions and behaviour should ring warning bells for anyone concerned about “ID cards”.

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N.B. A copy of this paper can be downloaded (156Kb) from:
<http://www.jwelford.demon.co.uk/snec/3cards.pdf>