

Reentrant Prepositional Chains

That is, chains where prepositions or participials jump back to before the immediately preceding object. Some of these jumps can be confusing.

Examples are drawn from the SmartBus FPS.

Any terms used in this Function and Performance Specification (FPS) and its annexes that are not defined in this FPS have a corresponding meaning to that used in the Statement of Work for work activities, or in the SmartBus ICT System Contract between the Director of Public Transport and the Contractor.

“or in” jumps back to parallel the “in” in “used in”.

This timetable represents the Bus Company’s expectation of the services to be delivered at 1 day prior to their delivery.

“at 1 day” jumps back to “expectation”. This would require resolution of anaphora (“their”) and an understanding of “expectation” – refers to something in the future. It is possible to say

“the Bus Company’s expectation of the services to be delivered at a time of their choosing.”

So the time could refer to “delivered”. The following “their delivery” prevents this meaning –

“to be delivered at a time of their delivery” is tautologous, so can’t be meant. The term “prior to” says it can’t be referring to the “delivery” relation.

The DT is the equivalent of the information published to customers by Bus Companies 1 day prior to their delivery.

This is a repetition of the previous sentence, leaving out what is being delivered. The three sentences:

“Daily Timetable” or **“DT”** means... This timetable represents the Bus Company’s expectation of the services to be delivered at 1 day prior to their delivery. The DT is the equivalent of the information published to customers by Bus Companies 1 day prior to their delivery.

It looks like nonsense resulting from cut and paste operations – something we should definitely find. We were told they have the same meaning, and then get two definitions.

The Timetable is the equivalent of the information published to passengers in the timetable pamphlets and at stops provided by operators.

“at stops” jumps back to “published”. “provided” jumps back to “information”.

This seems unnecessarily confusing – the stops are not provided by operators (even if they are). The “operators” here refers to “Bus Companies” – an inappropriate use of “operators”, when information is being provided by Bus Companies four sentences back. The sentence looks to have grown by accretion – bits are tacked on as they are thought of. It would have been clearer to say

The Timetable is the equivalent of the information provided by operators that is published to passengers in the timetable pamphlets and at stops.

It is still not clear – the pamphlets are also published to intending passengers, so

The Timetable is the equivalent of the information provided by operators that is published in timetable pamphlets and at bus stops.

Should we attempt to unravel the original, or report that it is confusing?

We could set up what things we know Bus Operators provide – buses, depots, bus stops, pamphlets. We wouldn't see as ambiguities a possible reference to these things being provided – it would be a tautology and ignored.

These messages shall also be able to be activated at the display by authorised personnel, for example during servicing.

Some prepositionals have a higher purpose, such as “for example”, which can apply to all of the preceding chain or clause.