

Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date	30 October 2023
Report title	Rail Ticket Office Closures
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Recommendation(s) for action or decision:

The Transport Delivery Overview & Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Note and comment on the update on rail ticket office closures.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide a report on the current status of the Rail Ticket Office closure proposals made by the rail industry.

2 Background

- 2.1 On 5 July 2023, 13 DfT contracted train companies each launched a consultation on proposed changes to the way that tickets are sold at railway stations (the 14th DfT contracted company – CrossCountry – did not consult as they do not operate any railway stations).
- 2.2 The proposals differed from company to company, but the emphasis was the same - to move staff out of traditional booking offices and into the public areas of stations.
- 2.3 The proposals made by West Midlands Trains (WMT), Chiltern Railways and Avanti West Coast were relevant to the WMCA area. The Avanti and Chiltern proposals were very similar, with staff proposed to be redeployed from behind the ticket office glass onto public areas of the station. By comparison, WMT's proposals were more expansive. They proposed closing all traditional booking offices and replacing them with 10 Customer Information Centres (five of which would be within the WMCA area). From these

Information Centres, WMT proposed that mobile teams of multi-skilled staff would be deployed to locations on their line of route in response to insight and demand.

- 2.4 The consultations were conducted in accordance with the process laid out in the rail industry's Ticketing and Settlement Agreement (TSA). TfWM (through the wider regional response submitted by the West Midlands Rail Executive) responded to the consultation. In short, this determined that whilst a need to modernise the way railway stations are managed and staffed was recognised, TfWM/WMRE could not support the proposed closures due to insufficient information around how passenger needs would be met.

3. Update

- 3.2 The consultation period for the station booking offices proposals closed on 1 September, having been extended by five weeks from the original deadline of 26 July. Approximately 718,000 responses were received by independent passenger watchdogs Passenger Focus and London TravelWatch, which is a record for a rail industry consultation (and potentially for any public policy consultation).
- 3.3 Following the debate at the last WMRE Board, WMRE/TfWM submitted its responses in July. A subsequent press release on the subject garnered considerable local and national attention.
- 3.4 Transport Focus and London TravelWatch have been given an extension to the time available to them to analyse the consultation responses. Their conclusions are now expected by 31 October. During this time they will also engage with the train operators. Transport Focus and London TravelWatch will publish the response to each train operator's proposals online, with an overview of the number of responses received, and the main issues raised in the consultation.
- 3.5 If either of the two watchdogs object, the affected train operator can amend its proposals to address the concerns raised, withdraw its proposals, or refer its proposals to the Secretary of State for a final decision. In the latter scenario, the Department for Transport has published the guidance that it will use to make any such determination. This can be found here [Secretary of State for Transport's Ticketing and Settlement Agreement ticket office guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/614422/Secretary_of_State_for_Transport's_Ticketing_and_Settlement_Agreement_ticket_office_guidance_-_GOV.UK_(www.gov.uk).pdf) and in summary says that the Secretary of State will consider:
- How any changes represent an improvement on current arrangements in terms of quality of service and/or cost effectiveness;
 - How members of the public will continue to enjoy widespread and easy access to the purchase of rail products; and
 - How any changes help deliver the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, including:
 - Modernising customer service at stations.
 - Staff providing a more personal service, which can be crucial for those who need additional support at stations and those who cannot or do not want to use contactless or mobile tickets.
- 3.6 It is unclear from the guidance how long the Secretary of State will need to make any determination.

4. Strategic Aims and Objectives

4.1 Not applicable.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 As WMCA, TfWM or WMRE do not operate any of the stations, or employ any of the staff affected by this change, there are no financial implications for WMCA as a consequence of this report, save from at Bromsgrove station, where there could be very minor implications. Although outside of the WMCA geographical area, WMCA own the station in a joint venture with Worcestershire County Council. Station staffing is provided by West Midlands Trains (WMT) under contract to WMCA. Consequently, any changes to the way that the station is staffed could impact on the management fee paid to WMT by WMCA.

6. Legal Implications

6.1 There are no immediate legal implications for WMCA flowing from the contents of this report. It is noted that nationally there are a number of ongoing legal challenges to the process under which the consultations have been held. WMCA are not a party to any of these cases.

7. Single Assurance Framework Implications

7.1 None.

8. Equalities Implications

8.1 As part of the consultation process, the 13 train companies were required to undertake station by station Equality Impact Assessments. These were publicly available during the eight week process. However, in its consultation response, TfWM/WMRE made representations that this information was of insufficient quantity and granularity to accurately determine how passengers with mobility issues and other impairments would be catered for under the proposed changes.

8.2 As part of their analysis of both the proposals and the consultation responses, independent bodies Transport Focus and London TravelWatch are taking action to establish the quantity and granularity of information required for them to reach a view as to whether the proposals can be endorsed. TfWM/WMRE (and local transport authorities in general) have no role in this stage of the consultation process.

9. Inclusive Growth Implications

9.1 Rail services are a key element of delivering the 'Connected Communities' fundamental of the Inclusive Growth Framework – both for those citizens in receipt of existing services, and for those who will have access via new 'enhancements', links and stations in the future.

9.2 The ongoing role of West Midlands Rail Executive in the oversight of the running of local rail services falls under the Power, Influence and Participation fundamental of the Inclusive Growth Framework, as it is notionally more democratic and locally accountable than other local rail operators. It will be important to use committees such as TDOSC to ensure that the vision for local leadership of rail services is adhered to, particularly given

the national pressures on the rail industry to change the way it delivers services to customers, including at stations.

10. Geographical Area of Report's Implications

- 10.1 This report covers the impacts of these proposals on the TfWM area, but it should be noted that these proposals are being put forward by 13 DfT contracted rail companies and so are national in scope.

11. Other Schedule of Papers

- 11.1 Not applicable.