
Meeting: Rail North Committee Consultation Call
Subject: Ticket Offices Next Steps
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Meeting Date: Tuesday, 14 November 2023

1. Purpose of the Report:

- 1.1 This report provides an update to Committee outlining outcome of the public consultation on Ticket Office closures and the next steps that Transport for the North intends to undertake, subject to a response from the Secretary of State to Transport for the North's consultation submission.

2. Recommendations:

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the update and agree the next steps as set out in paragraph 3.7.

3. Background:

- 3.1 Public consultation on the potential future closures of rail station ticket offices in England closed on 1 September 2023. Transport for the North's response, outlining the evidence behind objecting to the proposal, was endorsed by Rail North Committee at the meeting on 13 September 2023 and at Transport for the North Board on 27 September 2023.
- 3.2 The Transport for the North response recommended that future retailing arrangements should be considered as part of a wider ticketing and stations reform programme, in the context of integrating stations more fully with their local communities and making rail travel more attractive and accessible.
- 3.3 The Transport for the North response has been issued to the Secretary of State and this included the proposal for Transport for the North to work with Northern to develop an alternative approach; a response is awaited.

Transport Focus published response to the Consultation

- 3.3 Transport Focus issued its responses to train operator proposals on 31 October 2023. They formally objected to all proposals.
- 3.4 The main points of the Transport Focus response to the TransPennine Express proposals are:
- a) Transport Focus received 35,380 objections to TransPennine Express's proposals and 11 representations in support
 - b) They recognised that changes were made to proposals by TPE – Staff hours were revised to make sure there were no reductions in staffed hours at any station and the same level of staffing on each shift
 - c) There are still a number of areas of concern – these are industry-wide issues to be resolved
 - d) Therefore, they object to all 14 proposals to close ticket offices
 - e) They also objected to the proposals to significantly reduce the ticket office opening hours at Huddersfield and Manchester Airport.
- 3.5 The main points of the Transport Focus response, to the Northern proposals are:

- a) Transport Focus received 60,339 responses objecting to Northern's proposals and only 90 responses supporting them
- b) Transport Focus themselves object to the proposals for 127 out of the 131 Northern stations affected
- c) Northern have revised their proposal since the public consultation, and proposed that a further 53 stations would lose any fixed staffing hours
- d) The principal concern was that at over a third of stations, where Northern's ticket office was proposed to close, there would no longer be any fixed staff presence at any time of the week, whilst at over a quarter there will be no fixed staff presence on Sundays
- e) The ease of purchase of tickets and passes, and the range of products offered, would be lowered at stations losing their ticket office
- f) Transport Focus was only happy with the proposals for Blackburn, Hartlepool, Harrogate, and Salford Crescent. At the other 14 stations which are due to keep their ticket offices, Transport Focus objected to the reduction in staffing hours
- g) The consultation process itself was criticised, especially for unsatisfactory Equality Impact Assessments, which meant that persons of reduced mobility did not have enough information available to judge the impact of the proposals
- h) The proposals were seen as undermining the ability of passengers to purchase the correct ticket, use cash to purchase tickets, receive timely and reliable advice (especially during periods of disruption), use station facilities, and generally feel safe at the station
- i) Transport Focus note that they did not receive sufficient information to judge whether the proposals are cost effective.

Transport Secretary Response

- 3.6 In a statement on 31 October 2023 the Transport Secretary, Mark Harper, stated that "The proposals that have resulted from this process do not meet the high thresholds set by ministers, and so the Government has asked train operators to withdraw their proposals. We will continue our work to reform our railways with the expansion of contactless Pay As You Go ticketing, making stations more accessible through our Access for All programme and £350 million funding through our Network North plan to improve accessibility at up to 100 stations."

Transport for the North Response

- 3.7 Transport for the North welcomed the withdrawal of the proposal. Transport for the North now proposes to work with Northern and TransPennine Express on a ticketing and stations reform programme, including developing Northern's Stations as a Place proposition. A key focus for such a programme would be seeking to integrate stations more fully with their local communities and making rail travel more attractive and accessible whilst retaining staff coverage to assist passengers

4. Corporate Considerations:

Financial Implications

- 4.1 There are no direct finance implications to Transport for the North as a result of this report.

Resource Implications

- 4.2 There are no direct resourcing implications to Transport for the North as a result of this report.

Legal Implications

- 4.3 There are no apparent legal implications arising other than raised within the report.

Risk Management and Key Issues

- 4.4 Risk 309 is being managed at corporate level which relates to the pandemic having changed travel patterns and behaviours and therefore service and investment decisions will need to reflect new markets and emerging evidence of demand.

Environmental Implications

- 4.5 This report does not constitute or influence a plan or programme which sets the framework for future development consents of projects listed in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive and therefore does stimulate the need for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) or EIA.
- 4.6 Passenger rail and rail freight plays an essential part in achieving our decarbonisation objectives within Transport for the North's Decarbonisation Strategy, particularly around managing road vehicle mileage.

Equality and Diversity

- 4.7 Closure of rail station ticket offices will have a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups who are more reliant on face-to-face contact to purchase tickets, particularly customers with disabilities and those most impacted by transport related social exclusion.

Consultations

- 4.8 Transport for the North Members are being consulted through this report.

5. Background Papers:

- 5.1 There are no background papers to this report.

6. Appendices:

- 6.1 There are no appendices to this report.

Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used

a) RNP	Rail North Partnership
b) TPT	TransPennine Trains
c) EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
d) SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment