

09 January 2012

Dear Ms Younghusband

## **PROPOSED CHANGES TO TICKET OFFICE OPENING HOURS AT SITTINGBOURNE AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS STATIONS**

This document is the Passenger Focus response to Southeastern's proposal to reduce the opening hours of ticket offices at the above stations on Sundays. The proposal is shown below:

	<b>Current Sunday Hours*</b>	<b>Proposed Sunday Hours</b>
Tunbridge Wells	06:40 - 21:55	07:45 – 21:55
Sittingbourne	07:00 - 19:00	07:10 – 18:40

*\*Source – National Rail Enquiries*

Operators are obliged to display notices prominently at affected stations to inform passengers of the proposed changes to ticket office hours and how to object by contacting us. We received nil responses from passengers at either station during the consultation period.

### **TUNBRIDGE WELLS**

The electronic National Rail Timetable (eNRT) #206 and Southeastern's 'Mainline 5' timetables report the first northbound train departing Tunbridge Wells on Sunday is at 08:15, and the first southbound train an hour later. The proposed opening hours give passengers a half hour period before the departure of the first train in which to obtain a ticket from a staffed office.

Analysis of the hourly ticket sales data provided over a 12 month period showed sales were nil in the 06:00 – 07:00 period except for one occasion when 11 tickets were sold. This instance falls below the hourly sales rate at which we would object. Ticket sales are higher in the 07:00 – 08:00 period, with only three occasions in 12 months where sales exceed the limit at which we would object ( $\geq 12$  tickets sold / hour).

Considering the above points and nil passenger responses received, Passenger Focus will not oppose the proposed change for Tunbridge Wells station.

### **SITTINGBOURNE**

eNRT tables 194, 212 and Southeastern's 'Mainline 3' timetables report the first London-bound train departing Sittingbourne on Sunday is at 06:45, with a further service at 07:07; the first coast-bound service departs well after the revised opening time. Several services stop at Sittingbourne later than the proposed closure time of 18:40 and current closure at 19:00.

Hourly ticket office sales data over a 12 month period shows 14 occasions that exceed the guideline 12 tickets sales per hour threshold for the period of 07:00 – 08:00. Furthermore, the data shows 7 occasions that the guideline is exceeded in the 18:00 – 19:00 period. In response to requests for more detail on ticket sales during the proposed alteration periods we were informed that no further data was available.

A change to the ticket office opening time to 07:10 will mean passengers will not be able to purchase tickets for the 07:07 train from a staffed ticket office. Our research shows passengers find purchasing tickets from ticket offices reassuring and easier than using self service machines, particularly amongst vulnerable groups. Since the sales data does not allow us to determine the ticket office demand for the 07:07 train, and considering Southeastern applies penalty fares to journeys from Sittingbourne, we disagree with the proposal to change to opening hours in the morning.

The above timetables show services continue from Sittingbourne after the current 19:00 closure time of the ticket office. Changing the closure time to 18:40 will disadvantage passengers wishing to buy tickets for the later services from a ticket office, and evidence shows that on several occasions sales have exceeded the guideline threshold during this period at the station. The data does not make clear the spread of demand in the 18:00 – 19:00 period, so we cannot agree to the evening closure proposal.

We would review our position on Sittingbourne if more data was to become available.

## **FINAL POINTS**

Our position is based on the as-is situation for both the affected stations and analysis of the data provided. Should the timetables on this route change in the future or passenger usage increase significantly, the ticket office opening hours should be reviewed to ensure passengers are not disadvantaged.

Passenger Focus is aware of the need to review staffing at stations from time to time, especially in the current economic climate. However, our research shows passengers place a high value on the availability of staffed ticket offices, as well as the information and facilities often contained within station buildings. It is important that any restructuring of staff presence is balanced against the need of ensuring that passengers receive the service and facilities which they reasonably expect.

I would be happy to discuss any of the points made or amendments to the proposals with you.

Yours sincerely,

**Daniel Davenport**  
**Passenger Team Executive**  
Passenger Focus