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Dear Andrew

Proposed revision of ticket retailing and station staffing at selected Greater Anglia stations: Transport Focus's response to the consultation, March 2017

Introduction

Transport Focus refers to the proposals to withdraw current ticket-office arrangements at several Greater Anglia stations (Alresford, Dovercourt, Great Bentley, Great Chesterford, Walton on the Naze), to remove staff from those stations and convert reliance on all ticket purchases to vending machines. We note also the revised staffing arrangements proposed for Harwich International and Thorpe le Soken.

As part of the consultation process, passengers are invited to submit their views on the proposals. The public consultation on this elicited some 209 individual contacts as well as six petitions, each with numerous signatories. All but one of these approaches objected to the proposal, clearly demonstrating the importance of this issue to passengers at the affected stations. Transport Focus recognises and shares many of those concerns.

Transport Focus appreciates that from time to time it is appropriate to review station arrangements, but we are keenly aware that any withdrawal of ticket-office staffing effectively removes all official staff presence on the station – and the benefits which that brings – a matter causing anguish for many passengers and concern to ourselves. The Department for Transport established a threshold of 12 tickets sold per hour as a guideline to level of usage of the ticket office. The data supplied by Greater Anglia shows that at a number of these stations 12 or more tickets an hour are regularly sold on many days. The data also show high levels of 10 and 11 issues per hour for other parts of the day.

Transport Focus objects to the proposals for the following reasons.

(i) The adequacy of the data supplied

- It is unclear from the data supplied how the number of tickets issued may vary at other times of year. Summer patronage may show a very different range of sales activity.
- It is clear from the data supplied that the ticket offices were not all open every day when they were advertised as being so.

(ii) The adequacy of alternative means of ticket purchase – i.e. ticket-vending machines (TVMs)

- The number of TVMs proposed for installation is not stated. Also it is wholly unclear of what the proposed “enhanced ticket machines” will be capable of selling. Obtaining anything other than a straight-forward ticket will be more complex, if not impossible, as not all ticket machines sell all valid ticket types.
- TVMs do not currently sell the full range of tickets (such as GroupSave, extensions to season tickets etc.) which passengers can obtain from a ticket office. This could result in passengers paying more than they would otherwise have done or risk a penalty fare.
- If the TVMs accept cards only, this will have an adverse impact on several sections of society, especially younger people, without banking or credit-card facilities, and those paying low-value fares who tend to prefer to use cash.
- No TVMs accept Rail Travel Vouchers.
- Many passengers find TVMs difficult to use. Research undertaken by us shows that many passengers who pay at the ticket office could have obtained their ticket from a TVM but the decision not to do so was driven by:
 - The purchaser’s lack of confidence in using the machine;
 - the purchaser’s lack of confidence in being able to identify the appropriate ticket at the correct price for the intended journey;
 - age of the passenger: older passengers are less inclined to use TVMs;
 - a preference for face-to-face transactions for reassurance.
- Further research confirmed that even those passengers who were accustomed to buying their tickets from a TVM for familiar journeys experienced difficulties when trying to find the most suitable ticket for an unfamiliar journey.
 - The main cause of confusion was linked to questions over the validity of the ticket, the restrictions that apply and the route that can be taken. Unlike ticket-office staff, TVMs were usually unable to provide the precise information and reassurance that passengers needed. The ticket clerk will ask basic questions and thus steer the passenger through the complexities of the fare structure and validity and thus assist the decision-making process.
 - The Department for Transport’s Action Plan for Information on Rail Fares and Ticketing recognises many of these difficulties which passengers face when staff are not available to assist.
- Within the figures supplied we note a number of surges in sales above the basic ‘12-per-hour’ threshold. Given our concerns we question whether TVMs will be able to cope with such surges and thus emphasise the need to retain staff at Harwich International and Thorpe le Soken, which we note will have staff exceptionally at ‘busy times’. Unpredictable surges in sales levels occur on many occasions, such as at
 - *Dovercourt*: sometimes in the first two hours after opening but also during the last few hours of opening;
 - *Great Chesterford*: similar surge times to Dovercourt’s;
 - *Walton on the Naze*: occasionally in the 06.00 to 6.59 period but also often until at least until 14.00 and sometimes later;
 - *Harwich International*: usually earlier in the morning but often until 17.00 at least

- *Thorpe le Soken*: occasionally as early as 05.15 but also extending at time to 20.30.
- *Alresford*: as late as 12.00 to 12.59 on some occasions issues exceed 12 per hour.
- Ticket machines cannot give advice and thus the absence of staff denies passengers the ability to obtain advice on more complicated or unfamiliar journeys. The revised staffing arrangements at Thorpe le Soken and Harwich international are wholly unclear.

(iii) Personal security

- The National Rail Passenger Survey constantly reflects passengers' concerns having witnessed anti-social behaviour at stations and the lack of a staff presence. This fact also recurs frequently in the responses to the current consultation.
- Rail passengers identify a staff presence as important for providing reassurance to them. Some stations under the proposals will lose their staff entirely and this coupled with the absence of staff from trains will lead to an almost unstaffed railway on the Walton and Harwich lines.

(iv) Information for passengers

- Staff presence is considered an extremely important medium for the delivery of information – especially at times of service disruption and missed connections. Reliance on help points will not provide as effective a level of reassurance.
- Staff also provide details of ticket validity and valid routes.

(v) Accessibility

- National Rail Enquiries and the Greater Anglia Disabled People's Protection Policy both indicate that assistance is available only part of the time at most of these stations (with the exception of Thorpe le Soken and Harwich which are shown as currently providing assistance 'full time' in the DPPP). At the other stations at times when the ticket office is closed, assistance can be provided only when booked 24 hours in advance. Clearly, if staffing were to be reduced at Harwich and Thorpe the same caveat would also apply there.
- During the public consultation a number of passengers raised the issue of assistance and the relative inflexibility of the current system, given that many stations are only staffed for part of the day. The proposal for further detaffing would only make this worse.
- The only 'fully staffed' station between Colchester and Walton is Wivenhoe which is only partially accessible (the Walton-/Clacton-bound platform requiring use of a footbridge). Although Thorpe le Soken will have residual staffing, neither platform is accessible to many mobility-impaired passengers. Accessibility is also a matter of concern for users of pushchairs etc., as the apparent absence of assistance by on-train staff will prevent the deployment of ramps. (Transport Focus is confused as to the role of on-train staff on this route. It seems that staff are available between Colchester and Clacton/Walton, but that they do not regularly pass through the train, according to the responses received. We note that no boarding/alighting assistance is provided at any of the stations under review when the ticket

office is closed, so we must assume that station staff alone perform this duty, unless assistance is booked.)

(vi) Loss of other existing passenger facilities as a result of destaffing

- Closure of ticket offices at most of these stations will remove all staff. As a result, a number of existing passenger facilities are also likely to be withdrawn: access to weather-proof waiting accommodation, which is usually found only within the station building itself, and access to toilets. Far and above simple ticket issues, staff presence at these stations, even for only part of the day, makes a great difference to the usability and attractiveness of the railway for passengers from all walks of life, as evidenced by the representations made to us.
- Absence of staff will also make tasks such as platform de-icing, litter removal etc. more complex to achieve.
- Safety and personal security concerns have been expressed as destaffed stations are a magnet for vandalism and anti-social behaviour – viz. the already destaffed stations on the lines.
- Closure of ticket offices will deny passengers access to racked literature, information leaflets, timetables etc. which are not available aboard trains either.
- Currently most of these stations have a staff presence for only part of the day and not necessarily daily. Withdrawal of staff completely from Dovercourt, Great Chesterford, Great Bentley, Alresford and Walton on the Naze would have a serious impact on many aspects of passenger use of the station and will create an almost wholly unstaffed railway from Colchester to Walton, with staff remaining otherwise only at
 - Wivenhoe (06.10 – 20.30 weekdays and 07.50 – 16.15 Sundays)
 - Frinton (06.50 Mon–Fri/5.40 Sat –13.00 and 08.10 – 15.50 Sundays)
 - Clacton (05.15 – 18.00 weekdays and 07.15 to 16.30 Sundays)

and a wholly unstaffed railway (apart from the proposed part-time post at Harwich International) from Manningtree to Harwich Town.

Specific comments relating to each station

Alresford

(2015/16 footfall 68,436) Current opening hours: 6.30 – 13.30 Mon – Sat.

Passengers' representations:

- Large housing developments following planning permission for some 300 new houses and applications for a further 60 in hand.
- Station adopters are particularly concerned that the rubbish and drug problem already prevalent will be exacerbated.
- The portacabin which serves as a ticket office is apparently in a poor state. What are the proposals for this structure?
- Difficulty obtaining correctly-priced tickets from the ticket machine. Automatic sales outlets do not recognise the easement applying to the 08.30 service to London.

Transport Focus's view:

- For several days, no data are shown. We assume that this implies that the office was closed on that day.
- Sales vary considerably, but the 08.00 to 11.00 period appears to be the most brisk with many days achieving 12 issues per hour or at least 10 or 11.

Great Bentley

(2015/16 footfall 74,710) Current opening hours: 7.00 – 11.00 M-F; 9.00 – 13.00 Sat.

Passengers' representations

- There will presumably be no access to the station toilets if a staffed presence is withdrawn
- The only weather-proof waiting accommodation is inside the ticket office on one platform and in the waiting room on the other. Presumably access to both of these are also under threat if staff are withdrawn.

Transport Focus's views

- For several days, no data is shown. We assume that this implies that the office was closed on that day.
- Considerably varied sales, but nevertheless the 07.00 to 10.00 period shows the briskest sales, often selling 12 or more tickets per hour.

Walton-on-the-Naze

(2015/16 footfall 121,466) Current opening hours: 6.00 – 13.30 Mon-Sat; 8.40 – 16.40 Sun.

Passengers' representations

- Closure of the ticket office threatens the weather-proof waiting room and the toilet facilities.
- The presence of staff is crucial to many people who need to buy tickets
- Similarly, staff help is vital to those who require assistance. (The population of over-65s locally exceeds the national average.)

Transport Focus's views

- A few days' data is also missing from this, which we attribute to non-opening of the ticket office.
- Solid bands of 12 or more tickets issued per hour appear on a Monday-Friday basis, interspersed with 10 or 11 sales per hour. Certainly this gives an overall average of 12+ sales until 13.00 on many days.
- The current station facilities would be drastically reduced if staff were withdrawn.

Thorpe le Soken

(2015/16 footfall 137,476) Current opening hours: 5.15 -22.45 M-F; 5.40 – 22.50 Sat; 7.15 – 23.00 Sun.

Passengers' representations

- Relative remoteness of the station
- Poor lighting, especially at the entrance and in the car park
- Mobile telephone signal access here is said to be more or less non-existent and the station has no landline public telephone (according to consultation responses, yet National Rail claims that a public phone is in situ – though none is depicted on the station diagram).
- The help point is of an old, very basic type.
- Staff assistance will remain critical when connections are missed
- No weatherproof waiting accommodation is available except in the ticket office building
- The ticket office currently holds the keys for the toilets which, it seems, will no longer be available
- Staff assist in identifying destinations of trains – this is a busy interchange station with adjacent interchange platforms in bidirectional usage
- Passengers tend to use this ticket office when those at Walton or Frinton are not available.
- The existing ticket machine's screen is often illegible due to glare.
- Disbelief has been expressed that sufficiently fast broadband connection is available locally to power ticket machines at this location.

Transport Focus's views

- Currently selling 12 or more tickets well into the afternoon, from 06.00.
- Frequent achievement of 10 or 11 issues per hour at other times.
- The increased afternoon sales may well represent custom from passengers resident elsewhere on the line whose own ticket offices have closed by then.
- The exact nature of the proposed change to staffing arrangements here is unclear and requires elucidation.
- The arrangements at this station in the absence of staff would be starkly poorer than at present. Despite the proposal that the station will retain staff at 'busy times' this will be of no benefit to those who cannot negotiate the 59 stairs to enter or leave the station. The definition of 'busy times' is not given. If higher levels of ticket sales here require the attendance of staff, they cannot then be despatched to other stations on the line without removing the acknowledged need for staff presence from Thorpe.
- In the absence of a better mobile telephone signal it is hard to see how enhanced digital products could benefit passengers here.

Great Chesterford

(2015/16 footfall 109,846) Current opening hours: 6.15 – 11.00 Mon-Fri.

Passengers' representations

- If the ticket office here closes some passengers will no longer walk to the station at Great Chesterford but drive instead to Audley End for staff assistance.
- Loss of staff here would deter use of rail.

- The area has a large proportion of older passengers who struggle with TVM technology (for instance when trying to buy a Super Off-peak Travelcard with a Senior Railcard discount).
- It seems that the TVM at Great Chesterford is frequently out of order.

Transport Focus's view

- Solid rows of at least 10 sales an hour and well into 12 per hour for most days from 07.00 until 09.00 and often much later.
- The station has a very high footfall and thus likely a large demand for information and other assistance.

Dovercourt

(2015/16 footfall 173,004) Current opening hours: 5.40 – 12.50 Mon – Sat.

Passengers' aspirations

- Closure of the ticket office here and at Harwich International will render the entire line unstaffed beyond Manningtree.
- The only weatherproof waiting accommodation is within the ticket office.

Transport Focus's views

- Varied sales figures, often peaking at 12 or more tickets issued per hour but interspersed with 10 and 11 issues per hour.
- The station has a high footfall – some of those passengers will also require assistance and information.
- Withdrawal of staff would remove a much appreciated passenger benefit – the waiting room.

Harwich International

(2015/16 footfall 91,024) Current opening hours: 6.30 – 19.30 Mon-Sat; 9.15 – 19.30 Sun

Passengers' representations

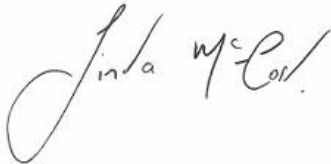
- Large station with international traffic
- The lifts must still be available throughout the times of train service if the far platforms are to be used.
- Many passengers from abroad need assistance/information as well as tickets.
- Withdrawal of the ticket office here and at Dovercourt will render the line from Manningtree to Harwich Town entirely unstaffed - apart from the part-time person at Harwich International.

Transport Focus's views

- Repeatedly high volumes of sales from opening for all the morning, and often until late afternoon. The volume of sales adds up to a good average of 12+ ticket issues per hour and a number of 10-11 issues per hour also. Overall, this seems a satisfactorily high overall average to retain at least current staffing.

- Presumably much of the custom comes from shipping docking at Harwich. For that purpose, staffing remains a priority, especially given the large number of overseas passengers likely to seek tickets.
- Fuller details are needed of the proposed staffing level and hours here and whether any staff member at Harwich is also intended to assist at Dovercourt should that station lose its staffing.
- It is unclear whether the railway or the port authority controls the weather-proof waiting area near the ticket window.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda McCord". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

Linda McCord
Senior Stakeholder Manager

07760 772504

Appendix:

'Voxpop' extracts from passenger representations

With no booking office we will lose our waiting rooms on both platforms, making it a very cold wait in the winter time....Greater Anglia are putting profit before the community and commuters they serve. [re. Great Bentley]

Affluent Frinton keeps its [ticket office] whereas economically challenged Walton doesn't. [re. Walton-on-the-Naze]

Who else is going to grit the platforms in winter? Who else is going to help keep the place tidy? What about the security? [re. Walton-on-the-Naze]

I think the service to the public by having a manned station is highly underestimated... [re. Thorpe le Soken]

The ticket office and the gentleman working in the office have made my journey so much easier. Tickets have been explained to me, which routes I need to take and the best way to get around. I would not get this help and advice from a faceless machine. [re. Great Chesterford]

It's better to be a bike at Thorpe station than a human, at least they have a brand-new covered shelter. [re. Thorpe le Soken]

Considering most of your money comes from the commuter, you're not looking after us very well. [re. Thorpe le Soken]

Greater Anglia are putting profit before the community and commuters which they serve.

My daughter takes the train every day to school in Cambridge...she is 11 years old so it is reassuring for the younger passengers to be able to buy their tickets face to face with an experienced ticket office member of staff ... [re. Great Chesterford]

...an increasingly elderly and disabled population who are reliant on station staff... [The staff] do so much more than just sell tickets – they help out with disabled and elderly passengers and keep us informed when there is a problem. [re. Walton-on-the-Naze]

Guards on train to take on more responsibility to the customer especially when stopped at an unmanned station.

[Ticket offices] are vital to train users. Machines will not give you advice, friendly service and, most importantly, the cheapest routes to take. [re. *Harwich International and Dovercourt*]

Staff working in [the ticket offices] do provide a valuable service giving information and reassurance. [re. *Dovercourt*]

You only need to see some of the small stations that are unmanned now to see how grotty and unwelcoming they are.

Customer service is highly valued in an age where everything is becoming increasingly mechanised, and reflects the attitude of caring business, so I personally urge you to reconsider. [re. *Great Chesterford*]

With double the number of passengers travelling by train compared to the situation 20 years ago, and not all of them experienced rail users, it is vital that intending customers have the option of speaking face to face to real person

Reducing costs is understood but it should be balanced against the service offering. [re. *Great Chesterford*]
