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Dear Alan,

Proposal to adjust travel centre opening hours

We have received 164 responses to the Schedule 17 notice.

- **Individuals** – 145
- **Other correspondents** – MPs, local authorities and councils, trade unions, rail user groups

All the responses opposed the measures. Issues raised have been incorporated into the points below.

Sales Data

Thank you for providing average ticket sales data covering an eight week period from October – December 2019. We have received comments that data submitted during travel restrictions imposed as a consequence of the pandemic would be unrepresentative of sales. However, we note that the data provided is from representative weeks prior to any travel restrictions coming into force.

Specific questions were asked about sales over the summer period for holiday destinations and whether this has resulted in any localised peaks that exceed the published levels. We would seek assurances from LNER on this point.

Volume of ticket sales

We are mindful of guidance issued by the Department for Transport on major changes to ticket office opening times. This guidance states that applications would only usually be accepted where sales are below 12 tickets per hour.

Now that we have been able to take a detailed look at the sales data provided we believe that there are 11 out of 12 instances where travel centre closure has been recommended where sales are at or over the 12 ticket per hour threshold (equivalent to 3 per 15 minute interval). These are listed below:

Peterborough

Monday-Friday: keep open until 2045 rather than 2000. Transactions between 1945 and 2045 average 12 per hour.

Grantham

Monday-Friday: keep open until 1730 rather than 1600. Transactions between 1600 and 1730 average 12 per hour and/or 3 per 15 minute period. Sunday: keep open until 1615 rather than 1300. Transactions between 1300 and 1615 average 3 per 15 minute period.

Newark North Gate

Monday-Wednesday: keep open until 1545 rather than 1300. Transactions between 1300 and 1545 average above 12 per hour and/or 3 per 15 minute period. Thursday-Friday: keep open until 1645 rather than 1300. Transactions between 1300 and 1645 average above 12 per hour and/or 3 per 15 minute period. Saturday: open at 0745 rather than 0900. Transactions between 0745 and 0900 average 3 per 15 minute period. Sunday: keep open until 1600 rather than 1500. Transactions between 1500 and 1600 average 12 per hour.

Retford

Monday-Friday: open at 0615 rather than 0700. Transactions between 0615 and 0700 average 3 per 15 minute period. Saturday keep open until 1915 rather than 1900. Transactions average at 3 per 15 minute period.

Doncaster

Monday: open at 0515 rather than 0600. Transactions between 0515 and 0600 average 3 per 15 minute period. Tuesday-Friday: open at 0545 rather than 0600. Transactions between 0545 and 0600 average above 3 per 15 minute period. Sunday keep open until 1845 rather than 1800. Transactions between 1745 and 1845 average 12 per hour.

Wakefield Westgate

Monday-Thursday: keep open until 1945 rather than 1900. Transactions between 1845 and 1945 average 12 per hour. Friday: keep open until 2000 rather than 1900. Transactions between 1900 and 2000 average 12 per hour. Saturday: open at 0645 rather than 0700. Transactions average at 3 per 15 minute period and keep open until 1930 rather than 1900. Transactions average 12 per hour between 1830 and 1930. Sunday: keep open until 1715 rather than 1600. Transactions between 1600 and 1715 average 3 per 15 minute period.

York

Monday-Friday: open at 0545 rather than 0600. Transactions between 0545 and 0600 average 3 per 15 minute period. Saturday: keep open until 2100 rather than 2000. Transactions between 2000 and 2100 average 12 per hour. Sunday: open at 0730 rather than 0800. Transactions between 0730 and 0800 average 3 per 15 minute period and keep open until 2000 rather than 1900. Transactions between 1900 and 2000 average 12 per hour.

Darlington

Friday: keep open until 2000 rather than 1900. Transactions between 1900 and 2000 average above 12 per hour. Saturday: open at 0645 rather than 0700. Transactions average 3 per 15 minute period. Sunday: keep open until 1845 rather than 1800. Transactions average 3 per 15 minute period.

Durham

Friday: keep open until 1900 rather than 1800. Transactions between 1800 and 1900 average above 12 per hour. Saturday: open at 0645 rather than 0700. Transactions average 3 per 15 minute period and keep open until 1745 rather than 1700. Transactions average 3 per 15 minute period. Sunday: open at 0845 rather than 0900 and keep open until 1630 rather than 1600. Transactions average 3 per 15 minute period.

Newcastle

Monday-Friday: keep open until 1930 rather than 1900. Transactions between 1830 and 1930 are above 12 per hour.

Edinburgh

Friday: keep open until 2300 rather than 2200. Transactions between 2200 and 2300 are above 12 per hour. Saturday: keep open until 2330 rather than 2300. Transactions between 2300 and 2330 average 3 per 15 minute period.

Berwick-upon-Tweed

On checking the sales data provided we found that proposals meet the guidelines issued by the Department for Transport. We note from the proposals that this station has the lowest level of transactions on the LNER network. However, over one third of comments and feedback received related to the proposals affecting Berwick-upon-Tweed. Points raised, include:

- lack of staff presence at front of station
- use of toilet facilities as travel centre staff hold key
- provide a vital passenger friendly service giving travel advice not readily available online
- Berwick-upon-Tweed is a tourist destination with many unfamiliar passengers to the town seeking advice and assistance on travel options
- reducing the opening hours will make it more difficult for passengers accessing advice who live in the rural hinterlands
- loss of knowledgeable and experienced staff who communicate clearly and serve passengers conscientiously.
- ageing demographic of area will result in less people travelling by rail as unable to access much needed advice
- concerns regarding accessibility and security

Careful consideration should be given before implementing the proposals, taking into account the comments and feedback received and the potential impact the proposals might have.

Ensuring continued, easy and widespread access to rail products.

As well as Department for Transport guidance on ticket sales, the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement requires passengers to have continued easy access to rail products.

During the 21-day window for comment and feedback, we received many comments raising concerns on easy access to rail products and accessibility issues. We in turn sought clarification from LNER (14 September) on the following points raised by respondents:

1. Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) will be available at all LNER stations and accept cash and card payments, offering a wide range of tickets and railcard discounts. Can you confirm that the full range of ticketing products will be available via a TVM as currently available via a travel centre and if not, what ticketing products are unavailable?
2. Not everyone is confident using a TVM and in addition some people are unable to use a TVM due to dexterity or disability issues. Will a member of staff be available to help a passenger in such instances?
3. Are LNER TVMs fitted with a 'help' button allowing a video call to a call centre operator? If not has consideration been given to this additional functionality?
4. Can you confirm that all TVMs are in a fully accessible location and available for use from the opening to the closing of the station(s) (as opposed to the opening and closing time of the travel centre)?

Accessibility and Security

1. Can you confirm that the revision of travel centre opening hours will not create any issues with entrances/exits to stations and access to waiting and toilet facilities being unavailable?
2. A number of responses have raised issues regarding accessibility and assistance. We are mindful that rules on accessibility are set via licence provision rather than through travel centre provision. However, respondents acknowledge the additional work that travel centre staff undertake, over and above selling tickets. Providing reassurance and after sales support to passengers. Offering an additional line of support to the station team. A potential impact could affect mainly turn-up and go passengers who rely on assistance. We note the LNER document notes 'no impact' to provide assistance. Can you detail the role that travel centre staff play in delivering assistance and how this will be affected by LNER's proposals?

Clarification on the above points would assist in determining if the change would represent an improvement on current arrangements in terms of quality of service and/or cost effectiveness and whether members of the public would continue to enjoy widespread and easy access to the purchase of rail products, notwithstanding the change.

As we must respond to LNER within 28 days of notices being displayed at travel centres asking for comments and feedback on the proposals and have not yet received clarification on the points raised, we therefore **object** to proposals to cut ticket office opening hours.

We are, of course, happy to discuss our findings.

We have copied this submission to our colleagues at London TravelWatch.

Yours sincerely

Robert Samson

Robert Samson
Senior Stakeholder Manager