



Policy Briefing

January 2022

ScotRail Ticket Office Consultation

ScotRail's proposals

In January 2022, train operator Abellio ScotRail announced proposals to reduce ticket office opening hours at 117 of its 143 managed stations. Under these proposals three ticket offices would close altogether (Cartsdyke, Clydebank & Woodhall). The full list of affected stations and the proposed hours are available here - <https://www.scotrail.co.uk/scotrail-ticket-office-consultation> and Appendix 1 lists the impact of these proposals at each affected station.

Already 216 (60%) of ScotRail's managed stations do not have a staffed ticket office, and the proposals amount to a weekly reduction in ticket office opening hours of more than 3200, around a third compared to the current opening hours at the stations.

Transport Focus consultation

ScotRail is required to consult on its proposals and the public consultation, which is being overseen by passenger watchdog Transport Focus, is open until **Wednesday 2nd February 2022**. Responses can be submitted via post or email to: Transport Focus Freepost (RTEH-XAGE-BYKZ), PO Box 5594, Southend on Sea, SS1 9PZ or schedule17.sr@transportfocus.org.uk

RMT is strongly encouraging members of the public to respond to the consultation and oppose the proposed cuts to ticket offices in their constituencies. If possible, it is important for responses to list the stations respondents are users of, or particularly concerned about.

Schedule 17 (the relevant legislation which regulates ticket office opening hours) states that a train operator can only change a station's regulated hours if:

"The change would represent an improvement on current arrangements in terms of quality of service and/or cost effectiveness and members of the public would continue to enjoy widespread and easy access to the Purchase of Rail Products, notwithstanding the change."

RMT believes that the proposals would fundamentally not lead to an improvement on current arrangements in terms of quality of service and the range of services and products available to passengers would be significantly reduced at the times the ticket offices would no longer be open.

RMT's position

RMT is opposed to the proposed cuts and believes that they will be detrimental for passengers and will lead to a worsening of the passenger experience because:

- The cuts will lead to a worsening in the quality of service provided to passengers. There are a range of services available at the ticket office which are not available at Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs). ScotRail's justification for the cuts centres around the average number of tickets sold per hour (based on 2019 data) yet this narrow focus ignores the wide range of advice and assistance provided by the ticket office. For instance, TVMs do not automatically show the cheapest ticket for a journey, but ticket office staff can navigate the complex ticketing system to provide customers with the cheapest option.
- The cuts will make the rail network less accessible, particularly for disabled and elderly passengers.
- Forcing passengers to use online ticketing or TVMs excludes parts of society who do not have access to the internet or the necessary digital skills. Again, this may include disabled and elderly passengers, or people on lower incomes or with lower literacy skills.
- RMT also questions the decision to consult on these proposals at the current time given that Scottish Government 'work from home' guidance remains in place. ScotRail has displayed posters at affected stations, but given that passenger numbers are lower than usual, it is likely that many passengers who would want to have their say, will not become aware of the proposals.

As of 1 April 2022, Abellio will no longer be operating the ScotRail franchise, which will be run in the public sector by the Scottish Government. RMT questions why the outgoing operator is consulting over significant changes to a rail franchise it will no longer be responsible for in just a matter of weeks.

RMT believes it is clear that the Scottish Government, which is already fully funding the franchise under its ongoing Emergency Measures Agreement, could intervene and withdraw these proposals and is calling for it to do so.

Importance of station staff

Research shows time and time again that the presence of staff is of critical importance to passengers' experiences of the rail network. As the passenger watchdog, Transport Focus, states, throughout its research *'there is a consistent message coming through about staff - put simply, passengers like and value having staff around'*.¹

The importance of staff is even more critical in the Covid-19 era. As Transport Focus points out, the pandemic has *'added a new dimension to their role'*.² Indeed, passenger research conducted by Transport Focus and published in October 2020 found that *'staff play a central role in helping passengers feel safe and secure'* and that *'a strong sense that the ideal response to the pandemic would be to see more staff on trains and at the station, rather than less'*.³ Cuts to ticket office hours are therefore in complete contrast to what research consistently shows passengers want.

¹ <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/blog/has-the-need-for-visible-public-transport-staff-risen-during-covid-19/>

² Ibid

³ <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/publication/transport-user-community-role-of-staff-in-passengers-feeling-safe/>

Under ScotRail's proposals, at the times the ticket offices are proposed to be closed, there is no guarantee that staff will remain present at their current stations. Furthermore, once ticket office opening hours are no longer regulated by Schedule 17 requirements, it makes it far easier for train companies to reduce station staffing and leave vacancies permanently unfilled.

Accessibility

RMT believes that ScotRail's proposals will worsen passenger accessibility. The ticket office provides a central location where passengers know they can easily go to for advice and assistance and closing the ticket office for more of the day removes access to this central hub. This will be particularly damaging for disabled and elderly passengers, who may particularly value the assistance of staff and may struggle to locate staff at the station if the ticket office is not open and will have no guarantee that staff will even be present at the station under these proposals.

Already, disabled people are less likely to use the railways overall and also more likely to use them less frequently. Studies also agree that disabled people would like to use the railways more than they do but feel that there are significant barriers to them doing so.⁴ ScotRail's proposed cuts to its ticket offices will only serve to make the rail network less accessible for disabled people.

Passenger safety and security

RMT also believes that the proposals will worsen passenger safety and security. A 2016 Transport Focus report into passenger concerns about safety when travelling by rail reported that one in ten passengers had cause to worry about their personal security during a rail journey during the past six months.⁵ The main causes of these concerns were the anti-social behaviour of passengers and the lack of staff. When passengers were asked what could allay concerns about safety they '*consistently identified staff presence as the key*'. In the report Transport Focus confirmed that '*cutting the number of staff, either at stations or on the trains, runs counter to what passengers actually want and could jeopardise their confidence in their ability to get to their destination safely*'.

RMT believes that the safety and security of certain groups of passengers may be particularly impacted by ScotRail's proposals and any subsequent reduction in staffing. For instance, figures published last year showed that hate crimes towards disabled people travelling on the railway rose 24% in the previous three years.⁶ British Transport Police (BTP) figures show that reports of sexual harassment on public transport between April and October 2021 increased by 63% compared to the year before the pandemic. Closing ticket offices for larger parts of the day will do nothing to help passengers' feelings around safety and security when at the rail station.

Limitations of TVMs and online ticketing

ScotRail's justification for its proposals centres around the number of rail product transactions completed during the proposed closure periods at the ticket offices. However, RMT believes that this is an intentionally narrow and restrictive way of approaching the

⁴ Elizabeth Clery, Zsolt Kiss, Eleanor Taylor and Valdeep Gill, *Disabled People's travel behaviour and attitudes to travel* (Department for Transport, 2017), pp. 14-20; *Research on experiences of disabled rail passengers* (Department for Transport, 2019); *Disabled Travellers Awareness of Rights* (Office of Rail Regulation, March 2014).

⁵ <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/publications/passenger-attitudes-towards-rail-staff/>

⁶ <https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/shocking-rise-in-hate-crimes-toward-disabled-people-on-the-rail/>

issue, and completely ignores the wide range of advice that is provided at the ticket office. Ticket offices and travel shops provide a wide range of services and advice in addition to ticket sales. Passengers are absolutely not able to access this level of advice from Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) or online ticketing platforms.

The fare and ticketing system is complex and many passengers find it hard to navigate, instead relying on the expertise and advice of staff in the ticket offices. ScotRail's proposals will make it harder for passengers to get the cheapest and most appropriate fare for their journey and restrict the type of services that are available to them at the station.

The proposed cuts will further exclude older and disabled passengers, and people on lower incomes who may not have access to digital ticketing and/or have difficulty using TVMs. For instance, the Office for National Statistics reports that around 18% of disabled people (as defined by the Equality Act) have never used the internet, compared to 4% of non-Equality Act disabled people. These figures rises sharply with age, with 52% of Equality Act disabled, and 40% of non-Equality Act disabled people over the age of 75 having never used the internet.

Twenty-two per cent of the UK population lack basic digital skills⁷ and the likelihood of having access to the internet at home rises with income with only 51% of households earning between £6000 – £10,000 having access to the internet at home.⁸

RMT therefore believes that the amount and quality of advice that ticket office staff can provide must also be taken into account. RMT believes that ScotRail should provide a comprehensive breakdown of the range of advice and services that would not be available for passengers if the ticket offices were going to close at the times proposed.

What can you do?

- **Respond to the consultation before the deadline of 2nd February 2022. RMT's model response can be accessed here - <https://bit.ly/3598dqu>**
- **Raise your concerns directly with the Scottish Government and email a copy of your consultation response to the Cabinet Secretary Michael Matheson MSP - Michael.Matheson.msp@parliament.scot**
- **Sign RMT's petition and share on social media - <https://www.megaphone.org.uk/petitions/stop-the-cuts-to-scotrail-ticket-offices>**
- **Ask your MSP to sign motion [S6M-02882](#) in the Scottish Parliament**

Contact:

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⁷ <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/digitaldivide>

⁸ Ibid

Appendix: Station level analysis

Current total weekly hours open	Proposed total weekly hours	Station	Proposed weekly decrease in hours	% decrease / increase
19:35	15:00	Aberdour	4:35	-23.40
127:30	89:00	Airdrie	38:30	-30.20
102:00	20:30	Alexandria	81:30	-79.90
110:30	72:00	Anderston	38:30	-34.84
89:34	76:55	Anniesland	12:39	-14.12
82:20	68:20	Arbroath	14:00	-17.00
79:25	44:30	Ardrossan South Beach	34:55	-43.97
108:00	101:30	Argyle Street	6:30	-6.02
84:19	61:40	Aviemore	22:39	-26.86
120:55	101:20	Ayr	19:35	-16.20
122:35	59:10	Balloch Central	63:25	-51.73
106:10	87:40	Barrhead	18:30	-17.43
46:00	88:00	Bathgate	+42:00	+91.30
42:24	40:00	Bearsden	2:24	-5.66
89:59	61:00	Bellshill	28:59	-32.21
83:34	75:30	Bishopbriggs	8:04	-9.65
92:37	82:20	Bishopton	10:17	-11.10
83:24	30:45	Blairhill	52:39	-63.13
85:48	49:15	Blantyre	36:33	-42.60
114:21	65:55	Bridgeton	48:26	-42.36
42:24	24:35	Burnside	17:49	-42.02
102:09	56:40	Cambuslang	45:29	-44.53
42:24	17:15	Cardonald	25:09	-59.32
41:00	13:00	Cardross	28:00	-68.29
43:34	35:45	Carluke	7:49	-17.94
42:24	24:00	Carstairs	18:24	-43.40
42:28	0:00	Cartsdyke	42:28	-100.00
42:24	24:30	Cathcart	17:54	-42.22
42:24	40:00	Clarkston	2:24	-5.66
42:24	0:00	Clydebank	42:24	-100.00
82:48	42:45	Coatbridge Sunnyside	40:03	-48.37
36:00	17:25	Cowdenbeath	18:35	-51.62
42:24	17:45	Croftfoot	24:39	-58.14
42:24	38:10	Crosshill	4:14	-9.98
91:04	81:40	Croy	9:24	-10.32
41:12	9:00	Cumbernauld	32:12	-78.16
81:05	55:00	Cupar	26:05	-32.17

108:04	11:15	Dalmarnock	96:49	-89.59
19:35	21:05	Dalmeny	+01:30	+7.66
125:20	88:20	Dalmuir	37:00	-29.52
83:24	15:45	Dalreoch	67:39	-81.12
42:14	12:45	Dingwall	29:29	-69.81
90:04	50:30	Drumchapel	39:34	-43.93
85:48	18:15	Drumry	67:33	-78.73
123:00	84:10	Dumbarton Central	38:50	-31.57
102:25	82:55	Dunbar	19:30	-19.04
41:12	38:00	Dunblane	3:12	-7.77
78:30	73:00	Dunfermline Town	5:30	-7.01
111:10	88:00	East Kilbride	23:10	-20.84
82:48	32:15	Easterhouse	50:33	-61.05
122:13	106:30	Edinburgh Gateway	15:43	-12.86
86:10	68:00	Elgin	18:10	-21.08
106:20	73:50	Falkirk Grahamston	32:30	-30.56
90:52	83:15	Falkirk High	7:37	-8.38
42:24	30:30	Forres	11:54	-28.07
82:48	37:00	Garrowhill	45:48	-55.31
84:30	26:40	Garscadden	57:50	-68.44
42:24	40:00	Giffnock	2:24	-5.66
50:04	31:00	Girvan	19:04	-38.08
42:24	24:00	Glengarnock	18:24	-43.40
123:19	70:00	Gourock	53:19	-43.24
87:34	32:30	Greenock Central	55:04	-62.89
123:58	77:15	Greenock West	46:43	-37.68
109:20	71:55	Hamilton Central	37:25	-34.22
82:24	54:20	Hamilton West	28:04	-34.06
124:19	86:25	Helensburgh Central	37:54	-30.49
42:24	20:15	Hillington East	22:09	-52.24
42:24	13:45	Hillington West	28:39	-67.57
42:24	22:40	Huntly	19:44	-46.54
119:25	86:40	Hyndland	32:45	-27.42
108:20	77:45	Irvine	30:35	-28.23
91:20	85:40	Johnstone	5:40	-6.20

42:24	16:00	Keith	26:24	-62.26
115:45	75:10	Kilmarnock	40:35	-35.06
119:10	90:10	Kilwinning	29:00	-24.34
41:24	20:30	Kings Park	20:54	-50.48
42:24	15:00	Kingussie	27:24	-64.62
42:24	39:00	Kyle Of Lochalsh	3:24	-8.02
84:30	19:35	Lanark	64:55	-76.82
83:24	71:45	Larbert	11:39	-13.97
116:55	54:15	Largs	62:40	-53.60
91:30	75:45	Lenzie	15:45	-17.21
104:35	75:00	Leuchars	29:35	-28.29
116:45	87:45	Linlithgow	29:00	-24.84
86:30	87:40	Lockerbie	+01:10	+1.35
116:45	82:00	Milngavie	34:45	-29.76
86:20	57:15	Montrose	29:05	-33.69
121:44	97:20	Motherwell	24:24	-20.04
94:25	66:55	Mount Florida	27:30	-29.13
42:24	40:00	Muirend	2:24	-5.66
42:24	31:30	Nairn	10:54	-25.71
99:22	51:10	Neilston	48:12	-48.51
109:40	53:10	Newton Lanark	56:30	-51.52
119:10	110:00	Paisley Gilmour Street	9:10	-7.69
121:20	108:50	Partick	12:30	-10.30
70:10	59:50	Pitlochry	10:20	-14.73
42:24	40:00	Pollokshields East	2:24	-5.66
83:24	60:00	Polmont	23:24	-28.06
122:38	72:00	Port Glasgow	50:38	-41.29
75:10	52:45	Prestwick Town	22:25	-29.82
86:40	51:00	Queens Park Glasgow	35:40	-41.15
115:50	80:05	Rutherglen	35:45	-30.86
81:10	38:15	Saltcoats	42:55	-52.87
85:00	62:40	Scotstounhill	22:20	-26.27
82:48	72:00	Shettleston	10:48	-13.04
41:00	16:45	Shotts	24:15	-59.15
82:24	23:45	Singer	58:39	-71.18
41:12	15:30	Springburn	25:42	-62.38
101:10	92:40	Stirling	8:30	-8.40
65:49	61:10	Stonehaven	4:39	-7.07
66:30	14:30	Stranraer	52:00	-78.20

75:10	47:30	Troon	27:40	-36.81
89:44	72:10	Uddingston	17:34	-19.58
115:35	44:45	Wemyss Bay	70:50	-61.28
93:58	83:50	Westerton	10:08	-10.78
42:24	40:00	Whitecraigs	2:24	-5.66
42:24	28:20	Wick	14:04	-33.18
42:24	40:00	Williamwood	2:24	-5.66
82:24	48:50	Wishaw	33:34	-40.74
42:24	0:00	Woodhall	42:24	-100.00