



Policy Briefing

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Ticket Office Closures – Changes to the Schedule 17 Major Change Process

The Government and DfT managed Train Operating Companies are progressing plans which would lead to the closure of all ticket offices in England at stations managed by the 14 DfT TOCs. The Government has recently published, for the first time, updated guidance on how it deals with applications from train companies for ticket office closures. This briefing note sets out how the Government's guidance has changed and how this will impact the 'major change' process that train companies have to follow when they want to close ticket offices.

If you become aware of any proposals from train companies to close ticket offices, please inform the National Policy Department as soon as possible, you can email Sophie Ward (s.ward@rmt.org.uk).

Schedule 17 – Ticketing and Settlement Agreement

The Ticketing and Settlement Agreement (TSA) is statutory document which sets out the arrangements for the retailing of tickets. This includes ticket office opening hours and the process that must be followed when train companies want to close ticket offices or reduce hours.

Schedule 17 of the TSA sets out the list of regulated stations i.e. those with a staffed ticket office, and the ticket office's regulated opening hours. Currently, this is the only statutory arrangements for regulating staffing at stations.

Major Change Process

The 'major change' process set out in the TSA must be followed when train companies want to close ticket offices.

The train company must submit their proposals to the passenger watchdogs Transport Focus or in the case of any stations in London, London Travelwatch, who then oversee a 21 day consultation over the proposed closures.

The TSA only requires the train companies to put details of the planned changes on display in the affected station/s. Although, in practice, they often put the information online, as do the passenger watchdogs.

There is no requirement for the train companies to put the consultations into accessible formats.

Transport Focus and London Travelwatch

After the 21 day public consultation, the passenger watchdogs review the consultation responses and either object or accept the proposal for each station. Note that where a train company has stations both in and outside London, Transport Focus (TF) deals with the consultation for the stations outside London and London Travelwatch (LTW) deals with the consultation for the stations in London, so there will be two separate consultations for these TOCs.

The TSA states that TF and LTW can only object to the train companies' proposals if it fails to meet one or both of these criteria:

- 1. 'The change would represent an improvement on current arrangements in terms of quality of service and/or cost effectiveness'**
- 2. 'Members of the public would continue to enjoy the widespread and easy access to the purchase of rail products, notwithstanding the change'.**

If TF/LTW object to proposals for ticket office closures, this does not have to be accepted by the train company, and the train company can refer the decision to the Secretary of State to adjudicate.

The Secretary of State has a guidance document which sets out the approach it will take when adjudicating on decisions relating to applications for ticket office closures.

Previously, this guidance contained a threshold, whereby ticket offices deemed 'busy' where transactions averaged over 12 an hour, would not generally be permitted to close by the Secretary of State.

In reality this 'busy' threshold was the only quantifiable measure for objecting to ticket office closures.

Changes to the Secretary of State's guidance

RMT has long argued that wider issues such as safety, advice, accessibility should be properly taken into account when train companies seek to close ticket offices, in addition to ticket sales.

However, the Government has changed its guidance, to remove the 'busy' 12 transactions an hour threshold from its decision making. We believe this has been done to make it easier for train companies to close ticket offices.

The guidance now contains a new criteria which the Secretary of State will want to 'understand and consider' when reviewing ticket office closure applications. However, the guidance does not explain how this new criteria will influence decision making and if it would lead to the Secretary of State rejecting any proposals for ticket office closures.

The criteria that will now be considered are:

- **Quality of Service**
- **Cost effectiveness**
- **Widespread and easy access to the purchase of rail products**
- **Facilities and support for passengers with disabilities/accessibility or other equalities related needs**
- **Safety at station for passengers and staff**
- **Future monitoring of change**

Transport Focus/London Travelwatch can take the new criteria into account in their decision making, therefore it is vital that when train companies submit their proposals for public consultation, that the consultation responses are framed around these issues.

RMT will be producing a model response for members and the wider public to submit to the public consultations as and when they are opened.

However, we are asking activists and ticket office members to start considering why ticket office closures, and any resulting reduction in staffing, would lead to a worsening in terms of these criteria.

Devolved Transport Authorities

Stations managed by the devolved authorities, Welsh Government (TfW), Scottish Government (ScotRail), TfL (London Overground & TfL Rail) and Merseytravel (Merseyrail) are included within the remit of the updated guidance (as the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement predates rail devolution). Whilst these train companies have not currently indicated plans for ticket office closures, it is important to remain vigilant against any future plans to close ticket offices or reduce hours. We are also seeking clarification over who would act as an adjudicator should any of these train companies submit proposals for closures.

**If you have any questions or have information to share, please contact:
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