

Dear Rail User

I am writing to you to brief you on Railfuture's activities & opinions in this area, including content and topics you might wish to use in your submissions to [Transport Focus](#) (or [London TravelWatch](#) if the station is within their [remit](#)). These need to be sent on or before 26 July.

The use of the plural for submissions is correct – we recommend you write about almost every station in England (and Glasgow Central and Edinburgh Waverley) where you use the ticket office (or might reasonably need to do so) or would want support (as many Train Operators are proposing reduced staffing hours) – and copy your MP as well. Do note that stations operated by Merseyrail and Transport for London are not included in the current consultation. If relevant, do mention that you are a member of Railfuture, but please don't imply that it is a Railfuture owned submission.



We have created a dedicated landing page on the website here: [www.railfuture.org.uk/Ticket-Offices](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/Ticket-Offices) and in this briefing I wanted to detail some key points.

For those at the Railfuture National AGM last Saturday, I gave an [update on the topic](#) and the AGM also passed a special motion submitted by Stephen Waring '[Ticket sales – keeping the human touch](#)'. Our overarching message is in two parts: (1) that it needs to be about the people and the services, not the ticket office window glass – continued availability of those services is key to a railway that is appealing and encourages people to use it; and (2) that the widespread ability to buy a ticket from a member of rail staff remains essential.

There will be a national response from Railfuture which will address the issues below, but not comment on specific stations, other than as examples. So it will not contain a list of stations and suggest changes in hours. Many Branches will be writing to "their" TOCs with specific issues relevant to that TOC and Branch (eg the GTR letter will cover topics like Boundary Fares and Contactless); they may cover some stations. Rail User Groups and you, our members, are asked to write about specific stations.

## Our national response

The Railfuture national response will expand (considerably) on the above message, and be presented under 4 thematic headings:

1. A Customer Information Centre or the like is to be offered:
  - a. Does that include the ability to issue all ticket types and other products (eg Railcards) currently sold from the Ticket Office, and include cash payment as an option?
  - b. Are the hours appropriate?
  - c. Will the new arrangement cope with the volume (eg helping passengers use Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) is more time consuming)?
  - d. As with Ticket Offices, there needs to be a consultation mechanism before change in hours, services etc.
2. Otherwise (1): The plan is a move to supported self-service@
  - a. This isn't suitable for everybody – staff ticket selling is still needed – see below.
  - b. It doesn't sell everything – it needs to.
  - c. Can it cope with the volume?
  - d. Hours of operation (much more so at some TOCs)
  - e. As with Ticket Offices, there needs to be a consultation mechanism before change in hours, services etc.
3. Otherwise (2): Ticket Office is a focal point:
  - a. Need a replacement... ie a clear meeting point where passengers can find help
4. Otherwise (3): Linked reduction in staffed hours (much more so at some TOCs):
  - a. Not supported

"Recently, I purchased the following tickets at Hebden Bridge Ticket Office

- AP Grand Central 1st class Halifax to London KX
- AP Grand Central 1st class London KX to Halifax
- Day return Standard Class Balham to Basingstoke (not via Waterloo) on a specified future date."

**That's 52 steps on a TVM!**

The Department for Transport seems convinced that 100% of ticket purchases can be completed online, using contactless payment, at a TVM ‘on your own’ or at a TVM with support from a member of Rail Staff.

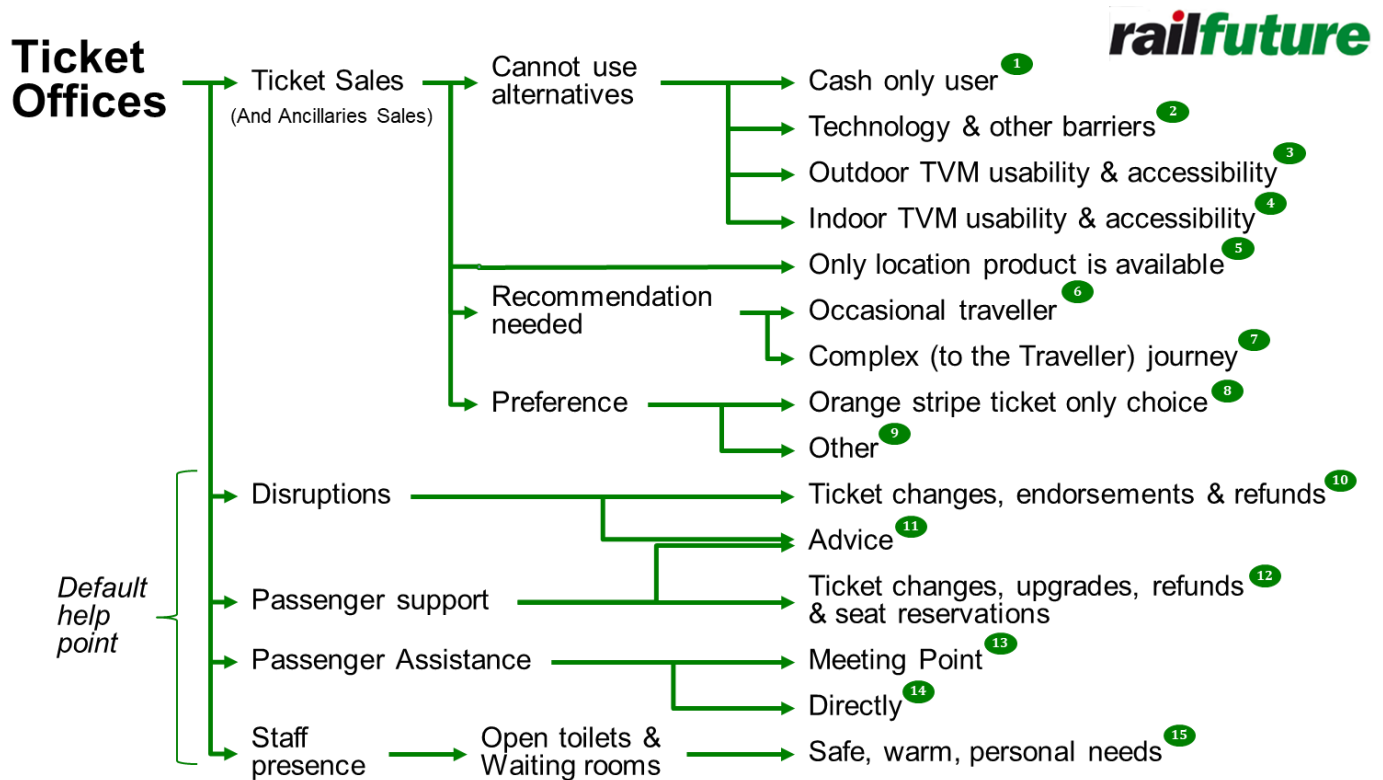
We think this is a very bad idea. Yes, encouraging a move to more online purchase and contactless use is a good idea – as is ‘training’ passengers to use TVMs, but we don’t see achieving 100% as either achievable or sensible, as it will result in passengers who either can’t use any of these options, or find it very difficult to do so. That is broadly for two sets of reasons:

1. Difficulties in using websites, the equipment etc – with causes ranging from loss of sight through not a debit / credit card user to not being a technology user.
2. The alternatives are not yet fit for purpose, in good part because of the complexity of rail ticketing and fares, resulting in ticket types and discounts not being available and real usability challenges with many outdoor TVMs.

And, yes, the Department for Transport has a point that some Ticket Office staff are unproductive (in some cases some of the time). But the solution to that is not to allocate them entirely to other tasks (eg assisting passengers to use in TVMs) or to make them redundant, but to organise it so they can do those extra tasks and still can sell tickets; sometimes where the station layout suits from the existing ticket office, but in other cases from a welcome desk or the like elsewhere on the station.

### What services to ticket offices provide?

We have done some work to look at the benefits of what ticket offices currently do and come up with 15 benefits of a ticket office:



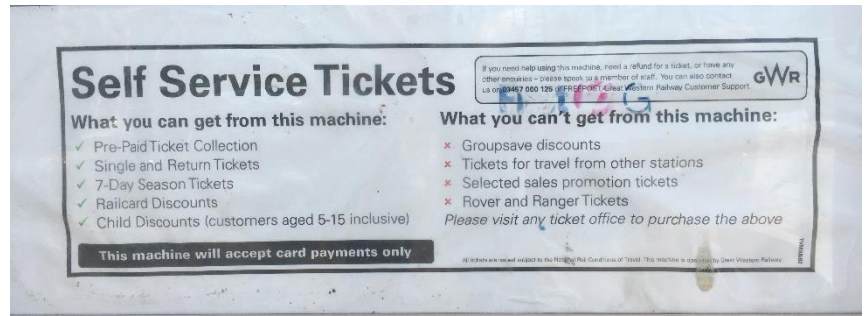
We have then compared this to [Transport Focus’s 6 tests](#) that they will use in their assessment – that document is available [here](#). Railfuture thinks that using this mapping, and in particular, putting any concerns you have under one or more of Transport Focus’s tests will help ensure the impact of your comments get their full weight.

### Topics for your response

As you write your response (or decide to top it up), we urge you to avoid justifications along the lines of “we have always had...” and instead focus on explaining what is needed now and why. We think that these topics are very relevant:

If you want to suggest this simple list of content to others, send them this link: [www.railfuture.org.uk/display3390](http://www.railfuture.org.uk/display3390).

1. Highlighting if you cannot purchase tickets online, particularly when away from home (eg not a Smartphone user).
2. The Challenges you face when using TVMs – from the ‘outside’ – eg touch screens that aren’t responsive, glare from sunlight, regularly out of order, don’t take cash – and also the ticket purchase interface. I’ve been told about a 52 step process to buy a pair of Grand Central Advance Singles at Hebden Bridge (a Northern station). If you have examples of these sort of challenges do include them (and if you can beat 52, do let me know!).
  - The Government seems to equate using a TVM with staff help is the same as buying from a member of rail staff. Any comment that can persuade them that this isn’t the case will definitely be useful; I think examples and details are essential to show it is more than a nuisance, an irritation and the like.
3. Anything you have to go to a Ticket Office to complete, because there is no alternative – in particular if you have ever wanted to get a Railcard quickly.
4. Some TOCs are offering a hub station concept where the full product set will still be available (including a refund of the cost to travel there). Is this at all practical for you? – if not, say so. I can travel from my local station to my nearest Hub station in around 6 minutes and there are 6 trains an hour, so very much unwanted, but not truly impossible – but if that station is 30 minutes away and the service is hourly, that really isn’t a credible option.
5. Concerns about the availability of toilets and waiting rooms. Whilst there are large numbers of public toilets in the UK that are unattended, and not visited by cleaning or other staff regularly, recent experience has suggested that the industry doesn’t like toilets open when unstaffed.
6. In some TOCs, there are significant or very significant reductions in staffing hours, with some stations now to only “benefit” from occasional visits from mobile staff at unspecified time. If this is relevant to you, please do comment.
  - Even in TOCs without much reduction in staffed hours, we think there will often be something to be said about increased Sunday staffing given the relative increase in weekend traffic.



And, of course, anything else that specifically occurs to you.

Our own campaigning will continue past 26 July – that’s just a data collection milestone; a lot of the key decision making will only happen after the Transport Focus / London TravelWatch responses are available. That’s scheduled for 30 August, but a delay seems quite possible – they were at 100,000 responses earlier this week, so the sheer logistics of handling that number could mean an extension has to be granted. When those reports are out, we urge you to write to your MP again.

*Neil*

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