

please reply to:

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SWR Station Change Proposals – Railfuture Wessex Response

Railfuture has made a national submission on the Ticket Office Consultation to both Transport Focus and London TravelWatch: <https://www.railfuture.org.uk/display3418>.

The Railfuture Wessex branch represents Hampshire, Dorset & the Isle of Wight and we are the lead branch for dealing with SWR. We have the following supplemental comments.

Railfuture Wessex supports the concept of multi-skilling staff to improve customer benefit across all stations. This should also assist passengers during planned and unplanned disruptions. Many category 1 and 2 stations have to deal with services for other operators as well so national knowledge beyond SWR is essential.

We have been concerned for some time about the fragmentation of the railway customer service offering. Car parks subcontracted to third parties, the use of agency staff on gatelines, revenue protection officers who are unable to supply tickets and different skills between ticket and platform staff. The SWR proposals appears to make progress in addressing some of these concerns. However, there is much detail missing about how this will be achieved.

- Will RPIs and gateline staff sell tickets and help with TVM ticket purchases?
- Category 1 stations will have additional interim retail facilities available - what does this mean and for how long?
- The Basingstoke example refers to three colleagues with specific skills to support various activities. Are these numbers there and elsewhere guaranteed and for how long?
- Will station facilities such as waiting rooms and toilets at category 1 and 2 stations remain open for the same time as the staffed hours stated.
- What mechanism is proposed to ensure all these objectives are achieved and delivered over a sustained period.
- Will passenger groups be involved in monitoring the success or not of these initiatives?

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Our other main concern relates to category 3 stations. These have traditionally had a single person presence frequently displaying the multiskilling SWR is seeking for category 1 and 2 stations. They are often a key part of the local community looking after customers, keeping the station tidy, waiting rooms and toilets open etc. Their service and advice are valuable, friendly, and much appreciated. However, unlike category 1 and 2 in the proposals there appears to be a significant reduction in the hours of this presence. Monday is now often unstaffed and other days of the week much reduced. For example, Romsey currently has a staff presence with an open waiting room and toilets 06.50 to 13.30 Monday to Saturday. The proposal is unstaffed on Monday, Tuesday to Friday reduced to 06.00 to 10.00 but for some reason Saturday is the only day which goes beyond 10.00 with a 09.30 to 13.00 schedule.

- We are concerned at the significantly reduced hours proposed. We believe that the existing hours of a staff presence should be maintained for category 3 stations at least for a transition period.
- How will SWR keep toilets and waiting rooms open when there is no staff presence?
- Video ticket assistance has been tried before with limited success and the help call point is often not working or answered especially during disruption.
- What improvements are being made to the communication infrastructure and call centre staffing to make these alternatives more viable?

Category 3 and 4 stations often rely on single or dual TVM machines. These frequently have technical issues, touch screen faults, or restricted to cash or card only. The faults can be temporary due to communication problems or of longer duration. The single TVM at my local station Shawford was recently out of service for several days. These stations are often in rural areas where mobile phone reception can be poor. The proposal refers to allowing passengers from category 3 and 4 to travel to a category 1 or 2 station without penalty to complete their travel advice or purchase. How?

- Little advice is given at these stations about how to travel when you are unable to purchase a ticket, just the harsh posters and announcements about Penalty Fares.
- We would propose the reinstatement of a very simple Permit to Travel facility for category 3 and 4 stations when appropriate tickets cannot be purchased.
- This would also enable the passenger to access the ticketing and route choices available via the guard on the train. There is little reference to on board staff's role in the multi-skilling proposals.

Other issues relating to these matters, fares simplification, TVMs and penalty fares is contained in the Railfuture main document.

Mike Southgate

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Chair Railfuture Wessex