

London TravelWatch
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Dear London TravelWatch,

Planned closure of ticket offices at 51 London Overground stations

Railfuture is the leading national independent voluntary organisation campaigning for a better railway across a bigger network for passenger and freight users in order to support economic growth, environmental improvement and better-connected communities.

We appreciate the opportunity to contribute through this consultation to a decision on the future of some of London Overground's ticket offices. We note that the online survey will usefully capture individuals' responses on their personal experience at a particular station.

Railfuture notes that for Transport for London 'every journey matters'; for Railfuture, every passenger matters. We advocate a railway where an industry-wide commitment to excellent customer service is front and centre of every part of the railway's culture. For London Overground in particular Railfuture has always welcomed the commitment to station staffing throughout all operational hours, a commitment which this consultation assures remains and without qualification.

Railfuture has also noted the similar transition to alternative models of retailing tickets and other 'permits to travel' such as Oyster, and associated customer service, on London Underground, together with London TravelWatch's review published in December 2016 to ensure that early deficiencies were addressed. London in general and TfL in particular therefore have experience of a previous similar transition. TfL and London Overground, albeit mostly through the previous concessionaire, also have extensive change-management experience in successfully modernising the working practices of other front-line, customer-facing staff through for example the evolution to a one-person-operated train fleet serving all of London Overground's routes.

In consideration of the above together with the evidence supplied by the operator ARL in '*Information in support of a Statutory Consultation regarding a Major Change Proposal*' Railfuture is therefore able to offer general support for the proposals. We note that several London Overground stations – nine of the twelve along the Barking-Gospel Oak line and three at the southern end of the West Anglia line – do not have ticket offices yet growth in the usage of those stations appears to continue unabated.

We do however question the advisability of simultaneously closing all ticket offices in the same locality, and advocate the retention of at least one for a period of some months during which an assessment can be made of any changes to its usage and long-term viability as a service to passengers.

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As an example, two London Overground stations, each in the top 100-busiest in Britain and in the same town centre, are both proposed for closure. Dalston Kingsland with 2016/17 ORR estimated usage of 6.2 million (82nd-busiest) and Dalston Junction with estimated usage of 5.3 million (92nd-busiest) in our view warrant a 'stay of execution' for Dalston Kingsland, pending a further review if Dalston Junction is closed. Similarly, Hackney Central with estimated usage of 4.8 million (102nd-busiest) and Hackney Downs with 3.9 million (132nd-busiest) would in our view justify a 'stay of execution' for Hackney Central (directly-connected with Hackney Downs since July 2015). From the submitted Appendices it appears that ticket office availability at Dalston Kingsland already needs remedial action, as do the TVMs at both central Hackney stations.

There is also the wider concern, especially for those stations left reliant on TVMs, with the accompanying need for well-trained station staff fully conversant with what the TVMs can and cannot retail, that the fullest possible range of national rail products, and discounts, is readily available.

Subject to those provisos, Railfuture would be content in principle for the proposals to proceed. It will probably be helpful if, as with the London Underground example, London TravelWatch carry out an implementation review after, say, six to twelve months. That review could include an assessment of whether or not any ticket offices given a 'stay of execution' have, as a result of the closure of their nearby neighbour, subsequently become officially 'busy' through increased ticket sales going above the 12 per hour threshold, and therefore justify retention.

Yours faithfully,

Roger Blake
Railfuture
Director, national Board
Vice-Chair, London and South East regional branch