

Dear Sirs,

We in Railfuture East Midlands Branch are aware that there are a great many responses to this consultation, setting out objections to ticket office closures on the grounds of:

- The equalities implications for disabled and other vulnerable people and others who are unable or unwilling to use online ticket purchasing or mobile phone apps,
- The reduced access to various tickets and other services that are currently only available at ticket offices, and
- Concern that the related reduction in staffed hours at stations is a precursor to full de-staffing.

We share these concerns. In addition, we are anxious that these factors may act as a deterrent to rail travel, with resulting loss of revenue and the implications for the viability of rail services at their present level.

In this context, we wholeheartedly endorse the detailed submission by Transport for the East Midlands as published on their website at <https://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/News/train-station-ticket-office-consultation->

In all of this, it is important to stress that we are not opposed to modernisation of working arrangements, customer service and retail provision at stations and elsewhere on the railway. However, any such modernisation must result in improvements in the customer experience; something that has yet to be demonstrated in the current proposals to close ticket offices.

Therefore, rather than repeat the familiar concerns in detail, we wish to ask the following questions, with reference chiefly to non-staffed hours at stations, specifically those managed by EMR:

1. For those stations identified as due to receive weekly staff visits, will these visits be at regular times, so that passengers know when staff will be available? (E.g. Hinckley, Mansfield, Melton Mowbray, Narborough, among others.) Or will such visits be at random times according to the availability of the mobile teams?
2. Likewise, for stations proposed to receive daily visits? (E.g. Alfreton, Beeston, Newark Castle.)
3. As a supplementary question to 1 and 2 above, what will be the process for deciding on the nature of weekly and daily visits, such as timing and number of staff? How will the level of staffing at stations be determined?
4. How will lifts at stations be managed, such as the footbridge lifts at Market Harborough and the access lifts at Long Eaton? Will these still be available from first to last train?
5. Will toilets – including disabled accessible toilets - still be available to at least the same extent as now, whether these be accessed via the booking hall (e.g. Beeston, Melton Mowbray) or via separate buildings or entrances (e.g. Market Harborough, Narborough)?
6. If disabled-accessible toilets are to remain available at stations when no staff are on duty, how will help-call alarm systems be monitored and responses provided?

7. How will car park barriers and ticket machines be monitored and managed? (E.g. at Market Harborough.)
8. How will passenger assistance be provided for disabled and other passengers who need it when boarding or alighting from the train?
9. Similarly, if any stations still retain barrow-crossings that are the only means of step-free access to specific platforms, and are currently managed by station staff, how will these be managed in future (pending replacement by bridges)?
10. How will ticket office services that are not available from Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) be provided at the station? Examples include travel information, detailed advice on ticket availability and validity, advice and assistance during times of service disruption, cycle-hub fob keys, refunds, and tickets that are not issued by TVMs such as seasons longer than seven days, and GroupSave tickets (among others).
11. On a related note, a sign at Beeston advises that *"No discounted tickets (including Railcard discounts) will be available from the conductor on the train unless the ticket machine is not working. In these circumstances the conductor will sell the full range of tickets."* There are presumably similar signs at other stations. Three questions arise from this:
 - a. Does this apply to conductors on CrossCountry (which serves Beeston) as well as EMR?
 - b. How will conductors know whether or not ticket vending machines at all stations on their route are working on any given day?
 - c. In such circumstances, will conductors then also sell tickets that are not available from TVMs, such as GroupSave?! (See quote above: *"...the full range of tickets..."*)
12. Will the Derbyshire Wayfarer (with the Nottingham and Beeston add-on) be made available online if, for example, the ticket office at Beeston is not available to issue these? Indeed, will the Derbyshire Wayfarer be made officially available via the full remaining range of outlets (online, TVM, on-train)?
13. As Question 12, but for the All-Line Rover. Will EMR be making these tickets available online, or will they direct their customers to purchase tickets of this kind online with, say, GWR (a facility they already offer)?
14. Some TOCs, such as Northern and Transport for Wales (albeit the latter is not part of the current consultation) are setting up ticket sales via local shops close to stations (<https://www.railadvent.co.uk/2023/08/train-tickets-in-north-wales-and-the-wirral-now-on-sale-in-local-shops.html>). Does EMR have any similar plans? If so, how will they ensure that such retailers have sufficient knowledge of the complexities of rail fares and ticketing?

We reiterate that we are not opposed to modernisation, and that we recognise the financial pressures faced by the rail industry. However, if the real aim is to reduce financial support to the railway, we feel that much more is to be achieved by growing the revenue. Marginal reductions in cost, of a kind that bring with them significant disbenefits to the passenger and thereby act as a deterrent to travel, are not the way forward.

Yours faithfully,

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Railfuture East Midlands - Submission to Ticket Office Closures Consultation - EMR

Submitted 31st August 2023 by email to ticketoffice.emr@transportfocus.org.uk

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Page 3 of 3