

Transport Focus,
PO Box 5594,
Southend on Sea,
SS1 9PZ

26 July 2023

Dear Transport Focus,

Cheshire and Warrington Response to the Consultation on Closure of Ticket Offices.

This response to the consultation has been developed by Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership in conjunction with Cheshire West and Chester Council, Cheshire East Council and Warrington Council.

Consultation Timescale

The original consultation period of approximately 3 weeks was too short for proposals of this significance and hence we welcome the extension to 1 September. However, despite the regular strategic stakeholder engagement that train service operators undertake, the rail industry chose not to directly discuss this with stakeholder forums, and hence stakeholders were not given the ability to input at an earlier stage of assessing/proposing alternative options to closure. It will be important going forward that train service operators commit to meaningful dialogue with stakeholders and transport authorities to ensure that the proposals don't result in unintended or unmitigated consequences.

Potential Implications of the Proposals

There are significant concerns in the Cheshire & Warrington sub-region about the potential impact of the proposal to close ticket offices and the reliance going forward on online ticket purchases and ticket machines. The effectiveness of this approach will be heavily dependent on people being able to use those options and for those options to be available e.g. a lack of ticket machines would compound problems even if people are sufficiently experienced in using them.

Ticket offices currently provide passengers with the reassurance that there is help available to buy the right ticket for their rail journey(s), no matter how complex the journey is. Passengers are also able to get advice on options which can save them money, or enable the passenger to travel at the time they wish to travel at. Ticket office staff can also help to ensure that passengers understand any restrictions particular tickets may have. This service is particularly important for people with additional needs (e.g. elderly or disabled people) and/or who may not have the

confidence, time or ability to locate a member of staff who could be at any location on the station (as opposed to knowing the location of a staffed ticket office). The proposals set out in this consultation could potentially create a new inequality barrier for such people and discourage rail travel, limiting opportunities and quality of life for those people as well as encouraging use of less sustainable modes of travel, contrary to national, sub-national and local policies.

For people that don't have access or the ability to buy tickets online, the proposals will force them to use ticket vending machines. Currently not all vending machines offer all ticket types, nor do they help people to assess the full range of ticket products available. This particularly relates to multi-journey ticket options when planning a complex rail journey. Furthermore, the proposals will be dependent upon there being sufficient ticket vending machines available at stations, that they are in working order, and that people can understand them in order to get the correct ticket for their journey. Many people, especially those with particular needs, will want reassurance that they will have convenient access to staff who can help them. This is particularly important for the larger rail stations. There will be an increased risk of:

- Confused passengers trying to seek expert help en route, or before departure;
- Disabled people who rely on assistance and in need of a supportive travel environment receiving a far poorer service;
- The elderly, the less digitally savvy and the digitally excluded finding rail travel more difficult and more off putting.

These risks need to be assessed and mitigated prior to any closures.

Sadly, a lot of public transport is not seen as a safe place for girls and women, particularly on days of certain events, in the evenings and late-night services. For rail to grow it will be important to ensure a safe environment is provided for all, but especially women and girls, which means ensuring station staff are present to provide reassurance and security. Locating staff outside of ticket offices could be helpful, providing they are available during events, in the evenings and for late-night services.

Given the issues set out above, it will be essential for a full equality impact assessment to be undertaken and measures developed to mitigate impacts before any closures take place.

Avoiding Regional Inequalities

For Cheshire & Warrington, the implications of these proposals would be stations with no ticket offices across the majority of the area, but with neighbours (Merseyside and Wales) still having ticket offices simply because of a different ownership/operating model. This would also be the case within Cheshire & Warrington, for example Chester (operated by Transport for Wales) and Ellesmere Port (operated by Merseyrail) would retain ticket offices whereas Crewe and Warrington Bank Quay would not, simply

because they are stations run by Avanti. This would create a two-tier system with most of Cheshire & Warrington being seen as a poor relation.

Alternative Approaches

A key element of our sub-regional and local strategies is to encourage more people to use public transport instead of using their cars. It will be important to avoid implementing options which discourage people from using the rail network, which closure of ticket offices could do. Alternative options should be considered, for example, in Switzerland the national railway company has collaborated with a food retailer to offer the full range of ticket services in station shops. Liverpool City Region has used devolved powers to pilot similar schemes on the Merseyrail network. Such options should be investigated, particularly at the larger stations.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Clare Hayward'.

Clare Hayward

Chair, Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership