



## **Proposals by train operating companies for ticket office closures: response by Norwood Forum**

Norwood Forum objects to the proposals to close ticket offices throughout our patch – the south east corner of the London Borough of Lambeth. Ticket offices at the following train stations would be lost to our local community over the next three years:

Gipsy Hill

Tulse Hill

West Dulwich

West Norwood

Firstly we regard the three week period allowed for this consultation to be totally inadequate; we feel it shows the exercise to be a sham. We note that the government set out its stall on ticket office closures in December 2022, yet only now in July, as the busy holiday period arrives, is a three week consultation being held by the train operating companies.

Why are no trials being conducted to see if there is any chance of the promised refocused service working in practice, and what the public make of the plans through experiencing them in action? Why not ask the public for ideas? Why not trial involving other local small companies in running ticket offices?: “That’s one Latte and a return to Victoria please”. And why not now ask groups representing those likely to be most affected – e.g. physically disabled people, how the proposals would need to be adjusted so they can continue to travel? For all these reasons, we firmly believe that a successful trial is necessary before any roll-out.

We cannot see how physically disabled people will be able to reach the platforms of many of our local stations without being able to ask at the ticket office. Of our four local stations, only West Norwood has fully accessible platforms. The lack of lifts and other accessibility measures at Tulse Hill station, an important interchange for our local community, is particularly shameful.

We have seen mention of equality impact assessments being undertaken but cannot believe that the necessary support will be provided permanently to mitigate the disadvantages of ticket office closures.

We do not accept that seeking to modernise customer service requires cutting a much appreciated existing one. We believe in the community ethos and see the potential for our stations becoming more of a community hub. By all means seek to improve customer service, but adequate numbers of trained staff are needed to make it all work.

We all need help and advice at some time in navigating what must be the most complex ticketing system in Europe if not the world. This is especially true of the elderly, disabled

people and those often challenged by digitalisation. Just how will it be possible in practical terms for these people to purchase their tickets before travel?

We firmly believe that people will feel less safe approaching platforms and will be less inclined to use the service.

We feel that a much better alternative to the published proposals would be to instead bring the service up to date by investing in new technology. Empower staff on platforms to be able to give accurate and timely advice to passengers through mobile technology. Similar technology should be made available so ticket office staff can help their colleagues on the platform. And also explore the other ways already mentioned of developing the service to customers.

The number of existing ticket machines too will need to be increased and reformatted. We are aware of tickets that cannot be purchased via machines, e.g. from the boundary of zone 6. What plans do the companies have in this regard – none are mentioned?

The redeployment of ticket office staff would mean the loss over time of their specialised knowledge – knowledge of the complex ticketing system already described.

We are convinced that the real aim of this proposal is to save money by reducing the number of staff required to maintain a functioning station. If ticket office closures proceed despite what we would expect to an overwhelming force of opposition, we do not believe there will be any investment in the technology necessary to provide the new service it is claimed is the reason for proposing change.

We do appreciate the financial challenge that rail companies currently face, and believe that better public engagement can help to explore where the railways can enhance their financial viability - we all have a stake in their success.

We trust the train operating companies will ditch this proposal and seek government financial support to expand customer service and not ditch its main hub: the ticket office.

Kim Hart  
Chair, Norwood Forum  
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