

Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation

Registered Charity Number R264557

www.stortfordcf.org.uk



Transport Focus

By email only: TicketOffice.GA@transportfocus.org.uk

London Travelwatch

By email only: info@londontravelwatch.org.uk

19 July 2023

Dear Sir/Madam

Bishop's Stortford Station Ticket Office Consultation

I am writing on behalf of the Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation (BSCF) to set out its objections to the proposed closure of the ticket office at Bishop's Stortford station, covered by the Greater Anglia train company.

BSCF represents residents' associations and member households in Bishop's Stortford.

Access to rail products and advice

We believe closure of the Bishop's Stortford station ticket office would mean passengers would no longer have easy access to the purchase of all rail products and best value fares.

In addition, ticket office staff provide a vital service for Bishop's Stortford residents in advising on journeys and ticket types and are valued highly. There is a wide range of products and services available at the ticket office, which may not be available from Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs).

Moreover, TVMs do not automatically offer passengers the cheapest ticket for their journey or clearly explain restrictions on certain fares. Indeed, there is no requirement in the DfT's Schedule 17 guidance for TVMs to offer all fares. This risks local passengers losing easy access to a full range of products and fares.

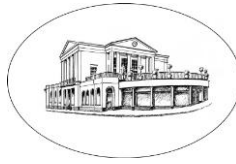
Additionally, many TVMs do not take cash, meaning people on lower incomes, older and disabled people are likely to be disadvantaged by ticket office closures and consequently may find it difficult to travel.

Ticket offices provide passengers with dedicated advice and expertise about their journey and onward travel. They can tailor their service to meet their customers' needs in a way that TVMs and online ticketing cannot.

Disadvantage to vulnerable travellers

Disabled people already face numerous barriers accessing the rail network and are three times less likely to travel by rail than non-disabled people. In 2021 24.8 million households across England and Wales had at least one person who identified as disabled, up 6.1% from 23.4 million in 2011 (ONS). Ticket office closures would cause a significant worsening of the facilities and support offered to disabled, blind, deaf and older people.

The elderly are less likely to have access to the internet or to be tech-savvy and many do not possess a mobile phone, making online ticketing inaccessible for a not insignificant tranche of society.



Security

Ticket offices provide a place of safety for both staff and passengers. Requiring staff to undertake transactions on the platform puts both passengers and staff in a more vulnerable position.

Passengers value the presence of staff and having staffed ticket offices supports passenger perceptions of security. Closing ticket offices could lead to passengers no longer feeling safe and consequently choosing not to travel.

Demand

There is evident demand for the ticket office at Bishop's Stortford, as evidenced by a letter from Angela Barton in today's copy of our local newspaper, the Bishop's Stortford Independent (attached). Nationwide, 12% of tickets are sold at ticket offices. In 2022/23, this equated to around 180 million journeys being facilitated by ticket offices - not an insubstantial amount.

Ticket office closures could well be counterproductive in terms of revenue, as sections of the public may be alienated from rail travel - potentially as many as the 12% who currently buy tickets at the ticket office. If revenue dropped by 12% in other circumstances, it would no doubt be a cause for concern.

Proposed alternative arrangements

We do not see how 'roving' staff would replicate the service provided by staff based in the ticket office. No doubt staff would be expected to have a dual-purpose role, for example managing train departures as well as offering travel and ticketing advice.. This will not only make them more difficult to locate, which is particularly problematic for many disabled and older people, but also diminish the time available to explain ticketing and routes etc. to customers, and give tailored advice.

Queues most would likely form at ticket barriers or around the 'roving' staff as travellers attempt to seek advice/buy tickets, which could cause an obstruction or hazard for other travellers.

No doubt staff would be expected to have a dual-purpose role, meaning less time to explain ticketing/routes etc to customers.

It seems this is a back-door attempt to reduce staffing at stations. Government and train operators have given no commitment that staffing numbers will not reduce as a result of ticket office closures. We do not support cuts to ticket office staff and believe any purported cost savings do not justify a policy that will worsen passenger service, accessibility, security and access to travel information and rail products.

We are also concerned that if ticket offices are closed, there would no longer be statutory regulation of staffing provision at stations and passenger watchdogs would have no formal role in monitoring this. This will doubtless lead to reduced staffing provision at stations.

Conclusion

Bishop's Stortford's station building, including the ticket office, was recently redeveloped and forms part of a large development of the area surrounding the station. To render it redundant so soon after construction risks creating an impression that the area is already degenerating before it is even completed and diminishing attempts to create a vibrant and welcoming new quarter in our town.



During the lengthy construction period around the station and the failure to provide adequate interchange facilities during that period and thereafter, station staff are no doubt also providing essential information on and directions to the now remote taxi, pick-up, bus, car and cycle parking facilities.

Interaction between travellers and service provider is essential to maintaining good customer relations and ticket office staff are the customer-facing representatives of Greater Anglia. Residents have had excellent service and rapport with ticket office staff at Bishop's Stortford who are friendly and knowledgeable, which enhances the customer experience. We believe it is essential that ticket offices and their staff are retained.

For the reasons set out above, we believe Transport Focus and London Travelwatch must reject proposals to close the ticket office at Bishop's Stortford station.

Yours faithfully

Jill Wade

Committee Member

Bishop's Stortford Civic Federation

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