
Secretariat memorandum

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LTW 363

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London Underground ticket office hours reduction

1 Purpose of report

- 1.1 To advise members of London Underground's proposals to change the opening hours of (and in some cases close altogether) a number of ticket offices on the Underground network, and to seek members' views as to an appropriate response.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That London TravelWatch should object to the reduction in booking office hours at stations where the number of transactions exceeds 12 per hour.
- 2.2 That London Underground should consult the relevant National Rail operators at interchange stations affected by these proposals
- 2.3 That London Underground should consider modifying its passenger operated ticket vending machines at stations also served by National Rail services to allow for railcard reductions.
- 2.4 That the proposals for Highbury & Islington and Stratford stations are withdrawn, because certain rail services were not operating at the time that the data on ticket office sales was obtained.
- 2.5 That the proposals for Blackfriars station are withdrawn until after the reopening of this station to traffic.
- 2.6 That an additional Oyster agent is appointed to operate at Heathrow Central (Terminals 123).
- 2.7 That members consider the options set out in paragraph 4.3.4.

3 Information

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 London Underground has given London TravelWatch information supporting its proposals to change the opening hours of stations on its network, including hours of operation, changes in the number of tickets issued over a period of time, availability of adjacent Oyster retailing facilities, and changes to the proposed staffing levels across the network.

- 3.1.2 It is proposed to substantially change the hours of operation at most London Underground stations in some form or another with effect from February 2011. The effect on individual stations is set out in Appendix A (which due to its volume is only available electronically on London TravelWatch's website). There are no changes proposed at Barkingside, Chigwell, Fairlop, Grange Hill, Gunnersbury, Roding Valley, Theydon Bois or at stations between Queens Park and Harrow & Wealdstone.
- 3.1.3 London Underground state that of the current daily sales figures, 99% of those ticket transactions that could be undertaken at booking offices could also be done at the passenger operated machines at the station. However of this figure 95% of transactions occur at a ticket vending machines with 5 % at a booking office. Of this 5% about 0.6% of passengers will not have access to a ticket office as they do now. 4.4% will continue to have access to a booking office.
- 3.1.4 There are no figures relating to sales from Blackfriars station as this has been closed since March 2009 for reconstruction as part of the Thameslink programme. It is therefore recommended that there are no changes to this station's booking office hours until after the station is reopened, and demand has properly re-established itself.
- 3.1.5 The figures for Highbury & Islington and Stratford stations include the period when the London Overground North London Line was closed for an engineering blockade. This could have substantially reduced demand at these stations. In addition, at Highbury & Islington the East London Line extension, and at Stratford the Docklands Light Railway extension from Canning Town to Stratford International, are due to open in January 2011. In these cases we recommend that the existing proposals should be deferred until the effects of the changes in demand that these new services will create are known.

3.2 Alternative ticket and Oyster purchasing facilities

- 3.2.1 No station would lose its ticket office facilities entirely under these proposals. However at Aldgate East (eastern entrance), Canary Wharf (east), Charing Cross (Trafalgar Square), Earls Court (Warwick Road entrance), South Woodford (east side) and Woodford (east side) where there are other ticket offices at the same station it is proposed to close permanently the offices at these locations. All stations are equipped with passenger operated ticket vending machines capable of updating pre-issued Oystercards. At Balham, Cannon Street, Charing Cross, Elephant & Castle, Euston, Finsbury Park, Kings Cross, St.Pancras International, Liverpool Street, London Bridge, Marylebone, Paddington, Shepherds Bush, Stratford, Vauxhall, Victoria, Walthamstow Central, Waterloo and West Hampstead there are alternative booking offices operated by National Rail operators nearby.
- 3.2.2 There are a number of locations which have no alternative Oyster agents. These are mainly rural stations in Buckinghamshire and Essex. However, one major omission is that of Heathrow Airport Central (Terminals 123). At this location the Underground station is the only outlet and because of the nature of the site anyone without access to a car or taxi can only leave the site by public transport. If the person does not have an Oystercard this can be significantly more expensive by any mode (bus, Underground, Heathrow Connect or Heathrow Express or any of the private bus and coach companies that operate there) if the person does not have an Oystercard (unless they are travelling the very short distances confined to the Heathrow Free

Fare Zone). It is recommended that an alternative agent within the Heathrow central area is sought.

3.2.3 In central London the lack of suitable agents because of high property values and rents also means that there are longer walking distances to alternative agents.

3.2.4 The presence of alternative agencies is however no guarantee that these agencies are actually open at the times when booking offices are likely to be closed.

3.3 Stations also used by National Rail services

3.3.1 Most stations also served by National Rail services where London Underground provides the only ticketing facilities would have some reduction in ticket office hours. This is important in that these stations will have a much higher proportion of sales of tickets to National Rail destinations which are either not available from London Underground Ticket Vending Machines or involve the use of a Railcard. Railcard discounts are not available from London Underground Ticket Vending Machines.

3.4 Staffing of stations

3.4.1 London Underground does not propose to leave any station unstaffed during operational hours under this proposal

3.5 Passenger representations

3.5.1 London Underground has directed passenger comments on the proposed changes to London TravelWatch a summary of responses received is attached in Appendix B.

4 Discussion

4.1 Issues for discussion

4.1.1 These proposals reflect a major change to the way in which passengers purchase tickets from stations on the Underground network.

4.1.2 They also represent a major cultural shift in the operation of the Underground, toward one in which staff are much more visible on the 'passenger' side of stations rather than being in an office location.

4.1.3 Members are invited (firstly) to discuss whether the approach proposed by London Underground is acceptable to passengers in principle, and (secondly) to identify any areas of concern within the proposals and what additional measures might be required to reduce their impact on passengers.

4.1.4 A number of studies of passengers' perceptions of personal security while travelling have confirmed that there is a widespread desire for the greater availability and visibility of staff at stations, whose presence is valued as a means of asserting control and responsibility and thus demonstrating that it is a managed environment. Members may agree that if advances in ticket-issuing technology mean that the demand for across-the-counter sales is diminishing, it is a sensible and welcome move to release staff to act in this new role. What is not clear, however, is why this is to be accomplished at the expense of the closure of ticket offices (either at all times or at certain periods). Members may wish to challenge this decision, and to assert

the view that multi-functional staff can continue to cater, on request, for those ticket transactions for which the passenger-operated machines cannot provide.

4.2 Station Standards Report

- 4.2.1 Our station standards report recommends that at joint stations operated by London Underground, and also served by National Rail that National Rail tickets should be offered, as noted in 2.5. above when ticket offices are closed, London Underground ticket vending machines are unable to offer railcard discounted tickets.

4.3 Comparisons with National Rail

- 4.3.1 On the National Rail network there is now an established standard for when it is considered acceptable to consider closure of a ticket office or a reduction in hours and the alternative ticket purchasing facilities that should be available. The accepted standard is that a ticket office is considered busy if there are more than 12 transactions per hour (or 1 every 5 minutes).
- 4.3.2 Of the stations proposed for a reduction in ticket office hours there are a substantial number (128) where the number of transactions at ticket offices exceeds this standard for at least one hour per day. Of these all of the stations where London Underground provides the ticketing facilities on behalf of National Rail operators (24 stations) where a National Rail operator serves the station as well, have substantial numbers of transactions above 12 per hour (the exception is Old Street). Of the other stations where the National Rail standard of transactions is exceeded it is notable that the common feature of these is that they are either in areas of tourist activity or where the station acts as a railhead for passengers driving from outside of London. In each of these cases, it can be reasonably assumed that a significant proportion of passengers are casual users who either are unfamiliar with the system and require more information or are less likely to have an Oystercard in their possession at the start of their journey.
- 4.3.3 London Underground argue that they are a 'metro' system with different characteristics to National Rail and that it is therefore acceptable to have a higher number of transactions per hour which would have to be accommodated on passenger operated ticket vending machines. At the moment the National Rail standard is that 12 or more transactions per hour is classed as busy and therefore closing the ticket office would not be considered acceptable. Many of the London Underground closures are for hours (or parts of hours) where there are 15 (1 every 4 minutes), 20 (1 every 3 minutes) or up to 30 (1 every 2 minutes) transactions per hour.
- 4.3.4 Members are therefore asked to discuss whether they accept that closing a ticket office with more than the National Rail standard of transactions per hour is acceptable. One option would be to agree that at London Underground stations also served by National Rail services (including London Overground) that only where there are less than 12 transactions per hour (and part hour proportionately) would ticket office closures would be acceptable, but that at stations only served by London Underground that a different standard of, say, 18 transactions per hour (1 every 3.5 minutes) should be applied. If members agree this, the procedure would be to put forward a formal objection to the proposal, but specifying that this would be withdrawn if London Underground withdrew the stations and hours where there are greater numbers of transactions.

5 Equalities and inclusion implications

- 5.1 The closure of ticket offices may adversely affect the ability of some people with disabilities to purchase tickets at the affected stations. But this should be mitigated by the continuing presence of staff.
- 5.2 There are also possible implications for people in low income groups, and for those whose first language is not English or who are unfamiliar with ticket issuing technology. London Underground has considered this aspect of the proposals through feedback from local managers. However, it is recommended that London Underground review the proposals in the light of known data, such as the census, in relation to the catchment areas of the stations proposed for change to supplement or confirm local managerial knowledge in this respect.

6 Legal powers

- 6.1 Section 248 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 places upon London TravelWatch (as the London Transport Users Committee) a duty to consider – and where it appears to it to be desirable, to make recommendations with respect to – any matter affecting the functions of the Greater London Authority or Transport for London which relate to transport (other than of freight).

7 Financial implications

- 7.1 The contents of this report have no specific financial implications for London TravelWatch.