

## **Changes to railway ticket office opening hours**

Businesses often vary how they serve their customers in order to provide them with a better service or to deliver better value for money. So a supermarket might open more checkouts at busy times and fewer when it's quieter. Or a retailer might find that it is dealing with more customers over the internet than at a shop or showroom.

But because the rail network provides an important service to a great many people, the flexibility that train operators have to vary ticket office hours or the range of tickets and other products (such as seat reservations) that those offices sell are governed by a set of rules.

Those rules are designed to balance the need to protect the interests of rail passengers with the need to run the railway efficiently.

Train operators may propose various changes to ticket office hours. They may want to increase the number of hours that a ticket office is open each day. They may want to vary the times when the office opens to reflect passenger demand or better match the train service, but still provide the same number of hours in total. They may want to reduce the hours that the ticket office is open, and in some circumstances they may want to close a ticket office.

Proposals to change ticket office hours or what tickets they sell are considered under one of two related procedures – major or minor.

The minor change procedures apply if either the total time during which the ticket office is open each day does not materially reduce, or the change does not have a materially adverse effect on sales through that office.

All other proposals are considered under the major change procedures. Proposals to close a ticket office outright for example would be considered under the major change procedures.

[You can find a list of proposals to change the opening hours of ticket offices here](#) .

[You can find the rules governing major and minor change procedures here](#).

### Frequently asked questions

Q: What is a minor change to ticket office hours?

A: A minor change is one where either the total hours when the ticket office is open each day are not materially reduced, or the change does not have a materially adverse effect on either passengers or on tickets sold through that office on behalf of other train operators.

Q: So what is a major change?

A: A major change is one that would represent an improvement on current arrangements in terms of service quality and/or cost effectiveness, and members of the public would continue to enjoy widespread and easy access to the purchase of rail tickets. The major change process will apply where a train operator seeks to significantly change the opening hours at a station; it might be that continued access to buying tickets is through ticket machines at the station, or a ticket office at a different station, or through the internet.

Q: How will passengers know when minor changes are about to happen?

A: When the agreed change is published at the ticket office.

Q: Would a train operator have to consult passengers before making any major or minor changes to ticket office hours?

A: The operator must display details of proposed major changes at affected stations, inviting passengers to make their views known to the passenger representative body Passenger Focus (and London TravelWatch in the London area) within 21 days.

If no valid objections are received from Passenger Focus or London TravelWatch, then the change will usually go ahead. However, if following the consultation the operator is unable to agree the proposal with Passenger Focus or London TravelWatch, then the operator must refer the matter for arbitration to the Secretary of State for Transport if it wants to proceed with the change.

Operators may make minor changes without consulting passengers or Passenger Focus or London TravelWatch. But other operators or the Secretary of State may object to such changes if they think the proposal does not meet the criteria for minor changes.

Q: When do major and minor changes to ticket office hours take effect?

A: Once agreement has been reached, it is down to the train operator that proposed the change to decide when to implement it. For more information, contact the train operator. You can find details of train operators at the website of the Association of Train Operating Companies: <http://www.atoc.org/train-companies>

Q: How can passengers appeal against a decision to make changes to ticket office opening hours?

A: If no valid objection has been made to a proposed change under the major changes procedures by Passenger Focus/London TravelWatch or another train operator, then the change can go ahead.

There is no right of appeal for the public to such a change, but passengers would have been able to make representations to Passenger Focus/London TravelWatch for 21 days after the train operator first advertised their proposals at stations.

Q: Why can't the Department for Transport step in to keep ticket office hours the same as now?

A: Train operators are best placed to understand the requirements of their passengers and will do so in making proposals for changes. The Secretary of State for Transport can object to proposals made under the minor change procedure, but only on the grounds that they do not meet the criteria for a minor change.

In those circumstances, the change would have to be treated under the major change procedures, where the Secretary of State's role, if arbitration is required, is to consider whether the change improves current arrangements in terms of quality of service and/or cost effectiveness, and whether members of the public would still enjoy widespread and easy access to the purchase of rail products.

Q: Why do ticket office hours need to change anyway?

A: There may be a number of reasons. Sometimes they change to reflect the train timetable. Sometimes they change because a ticket office just isn't busy enough to justify a member of staff sitting at a sales counter when they could be doing other things, or perhaps could be deployed to a busier station.

Q: If ticket office hours change, will it affect other facilities at a station?

A: There may be some circumstances when access to other station facilities may need to be reconsidered when ticket office hours change.

Q: Is the Government planning to alter the rules covering when train operators can make changes to ticket office opening hours following the McNulty review?

A: We are conducting a full review of fares and ticketing, as suggested by the McNulty review. This will report in 2013.

We have made it clear that as ticket buying habits change, we expect train operators to consider how best to deploy their station staff to provide the most benefit to passengers while reducing costs and providing a safe environment. The Department's rail fares and ticketing review will consider whether the current regulation provides the right incentives to train operators to act in the best way for passengers while reducing costs and providing a safe environment, including the process for changes to ticket office opening hours and how the number and range of alternative outlets where tickets can be purchased could be radically expanded.

With growing demand for rail travel, many ticket offices will continue to be very busy. However, experience with Oyster smart ticketing in London demonstrates that alternatives to ticket office queues can become very popular if they are available. Similarly, we are pressing train operators to make ticket machines easier to use.

We recognise that passengers can feel very strongly about ticket office opening hours, and before we could agree to any changes we would need to be confident that passengers would continue to enjoy ready access to ticket-buying opportunities.

The needs of the elderly and disabled would have to be carefully considered, including options for access to 'assisted purchase' channels for those who may find it particularly difficult to use a ticket machine or to buy their ticket online.