

Update from Great Western Regarding Proposed Railway Ticket Office Closures

I have received the update below from Great Western regarding the proposed changes to ticket offices. They have said that they have made a number of key changes to their proposals based on some of the responses they have seen from the consultation although the final results are not yet in.

Dear John

Just a quick note to remind you that Transport Focus and London TravelWatch will be reporting back on their consultation on how tickets are sold at stations next Tuesday (31 October).

We will send a further update then, but we thought it would be helpful to send a reminder and a quick update on the work we have been doing in the meantime.

We have been listening to stakeholders and colleagues and to Transport Focus and London TravelWatch who have been sharing key themes from the consultation, and as a result we have made a number of key changes to our proposals:

- **Digital First, Not Only:** We have changed our proposals so that retail trained staff will have handheld sales devices to support self-service ticket machines. This means customers will still find every type of ticket they can get today at a station in the future and staff will be available to help with ticket advice if needed. In addition, we will upgrade our ticket machines to sell a wider variety of tickets and more tickets will become digitally available. Staff will also be able to help switch to buying digitally via our app or other options like pay-as-you-go/CPAY
- **Staffing Hours:** We are extending our staffing commitment so that retail trained colleagues will be on hand for the same hours as today at all stations with a ticket office, ready to help customers when they need it
- **'Help at Hand' Points:** We have proposed the introduction of accessible, clearly marked Welcome Points with 'Help at Hand' buttons providing a direct link to a retail-trained staff member should they not be immediately available
- **Cash availability:** We are proposing to add cash payment options to our self-service Ticket Vending Machines

We have also looked at the timing of the changes. Before any change is made, we will first need to agree our revised plans with the Department for Transport, we will then discuss the changes with our colleagues and their Trade Unions, complete updated Equality Impact Assessments for each station and a Crime and Vulnerability Risk Assessment.

Once this is complete, we propose to reduce the number of windows available at stations with multiple windows, bringing those staff closer to customers on the station floor. They will help customers use self-service machines, or digital purchase, while also helping with any queues for tickets with their handheld ticket devices. We will review progress before making further changes, including bringing staff from single window stations out from behind the glass, with handheld devices, and the pace of change will be driven by changes that customers make in how they buy their tickets.

Best Wishes

Great Western Railway

Agenda for roads

Now that government wants to help drivers get about there are ideas they can adopt to make the vision a reality.

Talking to Ministers, they say they do want highways authorities to review traffic light phasing and controls.

It would be good if all sets could be equipped with sensors so lights responded to different traffic conditions. At low use times lights should shift to green when any vehicle approaches a red light when there is no traffic using the green. At normal times green time should be proportionate to traffic flows.

If these systems cannot be used the phasings should be adjusted to reflect normal use patterns. For example, the lights at the junction of the Embankment with Vauxhall Bridge Road, a busy London junction, offer twice as long on green for traffic approaching from over Vauxhall Bridge. This produces unused green time in that direction and permanent queues on the other three. Why?

The government should allow traffic turning left at a light controlled junction to treat the red light as a Stop sign. Drivers should stop as now on red but if the turn was free of vehicles and pedestrians then they should be able to proceed.

Ministers approving schemes to alter road layouts and junctions should not approve or fund Council schemes which are designed to get vehicles off the road. Of course we need better routes for cycles and safe paths for pedestrians. Taking roadspace off vehicles on busy main roads is not the way to achieve this aim.

Roundabouts are usually better than light controlled junctions. They should usually be preferred.

Where right turning traffic can easily get stuck Councils should be encouraged to widen the carriageway to create a right turning lane to free traffic going straight on or turning left.

Councils should exercise greater discipline over timings and duration of works that entail digging holes in roads. This should include their own Highways department.

Councils should move to getting utilities under verges and pavements in conduits with locked access to avoid the continuing need to dig up roads to repair pipes and wires.

Stopping the small boats

I am pleased to report one of the hotels being used for migrants in my constituency will be vacated by the Home Office soon. The Minister reported progress with stemming the flow. He argued that it was not fair that groups of young men sought to circumvent the legal ways of entry and to take more of the places available for asylum seekers by refusing to use the legal channels.

He was able to tell us that numbers crossing from the continent are down by a fifth this year compared to last. The French authorities have co-operated more in stopping boats from departing French shores. The new arrangements with Albania have stopped most of the flow from there and have enabled the return of many to that safe country. The government awaits the result of the appeal to the Supreme Court over sending people to Rwanda who seek illegal entry to the UK. The processing of claims has been improved.

They have intensified work to find, charge and prosecute the illegal gangs operating the boats. It is good there has been some progress but clearly more is needed by pursuing all these options, and processing claims more rapidly.

Dear Colleague on extending the fare cap

23 October 2023

Dear Colleague,

£2 Fare Cap extension & support for Community Transport Operators

Extending the £2 Bus Fare Cap

I write regarding the Government's announcement today, confirming additional support for bus users as we extend the £2 bus fare cap until the end of 2024 and increase the funding available for Community Transport Operators. Buses are the most popular form of public transport in our country, playing a vital part in levelling up.

On 1 January, the Government introduced the £2 bus fare cap as part of our Help for Households to help passengers save on their travel costs at a time of increased cost of living. First launched for three months, the scheme has proven hugely popular and was extended until 31 October, and was planned to be followed by a £2.50 cap until November 2024, with £335 million committed to deliver these caps, save passengers money, and grow the economy. In England outside London, the local bus fares index decreased by 7.4% between June 2022 and June 2023, whereas in Scotland, Wales and London, where the buses are devolved, fares increased by 10.3%, 6.3% and 6.0%, respectively.

I am pleased to confirm that using the savings from HS2, we will extend the £2 fare, right across England until the end of December 2024. This means the government has invested nearly £600 million in capping bus fares. With over 140 bus operators running more than 5,000 routes in the scheme, maintaining the cap at £2 will ensure passengers all over the country can continue to save significant sums of their regular travel costs until 2025 and help encourage greater bus usage. My officials are working with bus operators to confirm their continued participation in the scheme from 1 November, and further updates will be provided on GOV.UK in due course.

Supporting Community Transport Operators

Our support for buses includes community transport too. Community transport offers transport for people who have difficulty using, or no access to, regular bus services or other public transport. Funding until June 2023 supported community transport operators during the COVID-19 pandemic by paying operators the same level of the Bus Service Operators Grant as they received pre-COVID, regardless of services run. This has allowed operators to run services that might otherwise have been cancelled.

I am also announcing today that the Government will continue to provide increased financial support to these community transport operators to help protect these key services by uplifting their bus service operator grant claims by 60%. This significant support will be available to operators (including in London) for claims from 1 July 2023 to the end of March 2025. This enhanced funding is part of Government's annual Bus Service Operators Grant payments to support bus services in England outside of London, which includes up to £213 million for commercial bus operators and £42 million for Local Authorities.

I hope you will agree that the measures we have confirmed today will make a real difference to some of the most vulnerable in our society, helping people get around more easily and for less. This Government remains determined that people should have access to affordable and reliable bus services, and this funding will help us progress these aims as we continue to deliver on our

commitments in the National Bus Strategy.

I look forward to keeping you updated as we continue to deliver on the vision for better bus services for passengers across England.

Yours sincerely,

The Rt Hon Mark Harper MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT

What should the Prime Minister put in the King's speech?

If all goes as planned Parliament will end the current session this week and prepare for a King's speech and a State Opening.

Given the state of the polls and recent by elections I assume this Parliament has at least a year to run before the next election to give the PM more time to demonstrate the competence he talks about and to deliver his five pledges.

The main opportunities he has to show the change he says the public wants rest on the year's legislative agenda to be set out in the King's speech, and changes made in the November and April budgets to come. I will be presenting detailed proposals for the budget shortly. Today I am interested in your ideas for legislation.

My own priorities are unlikely to appear. I would like to see

1 A small boats Bill to make clear to UK courts that Parliament does not want Human Rights Law to impede decisions and removals of illegal migrants from the UK

2. The completion of the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill to remove the problems with the Windsor Framework, restoring UK government of NI.

3. Restoration of the full EU Retained Law Bill with more EU law repeals and amendments.

4 Tax Reduction and Simplification Bill

5. A Wider Ownership Bill setting out more ways to promote ownership of homes, shares and businesses

6. A public sector productivity Bill creating opportunities for state employees to buy out their managerial and administrative tasks in government through an employee buy out.

7 A privatisation Bill to facilitate the sale of all remaining shares in Nat West and to sell Channel 4. Bill to be fast tracked to complete sales next year.

8. A People's BBC Bill as discussed here before