

NEWS RELEASE



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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END OF THE LINE FOR TICKET OFFICES? SHARE YOUR VIEWS

Rail users are being urged to give their views on plans to shut station ticket offices in Wokingham Borough and beyond.

The Rail Delivery Group, which represents Britain's train operating companies, is consulting on the proposals until the extended deadline of Friday, 1 September. To respond, visit <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/train-station-ticket-office-consultation>.

The group says fewer people are using ticket desks because of smartphone apps or contactless cards, so they could be phased out in favour of retraining "multi-skilled" staff to help customers in other ways.

It says this is a more effective way of working and would help more passengers while reducing costs, but this has prompted objections from some quarters - including other local authorities and leading groups representing people with disabilities.

Wokingham Borough Council, which has long been working to promote public transport as an environmentally friendly alternative to driving, is reviewing the proposal and will send its response by the end of the month.

How could your journey be affected?

Under the proposals, South Western Railway says there would be at least one staff member at Wokingham station from 6am to 11.30pm to help with purchases, boarding trains and other issues - with at least four on hand in the 6am to 11am and 4pm to 8pm peaks.

At Winnersh, Winnersh Triangle and Earley stations, which are less busy, there would be one person at set times only, although it could be made possible to make video calls for help through ticket machines.

Meanwhile, GWR could close the ticket offices at Twyford as well as Crowthorne and Reading, both just outside the borough, by the end of 2024.

The council has highlighted some possible drawbacks including the lack of certain services at ticket machines, like specific discounts or processing refunds, as well as an impact on those on lower incomes who might mostly use cash.

There is also the risk of excluding some passengers, whether due to age, limited mobility or learning disabilities, plus an increased risk of anti-social behaviour, crime or other emergency incidents, and concern over possible job losses.

Looking into it and ready to respond

Cllr Paul Fishwick, executive member for active travel, transport and highways, said: "We're still reviewing these proposals, but it hasn't escaped our attention that some very serious concerns have already been expressed about them elsewhere.

"Rest assured, we will not support any measures that are likely to impede people's access to public transport, especially those groups who already face additional barriers to travelling.

"As well as being unfair, this would go against our own efforts to improve our borough's air quality and address the climate emergency by promoting sustainable alternatives to driving. These priorities will be first and foremost in mind as we put together our response.

"In the meantime, we encourage anyone who could be affected to share their views - whatever they may think. These changes will undoubtedly have a significant impact on people's experience of the rail network, for better or worse, so it's in everybody's interest to find out more."

Find out more and have your say

The consultation is being independently run by industry watchdogs Transport Focus and London TravelWatch. For more on the proposals, see <https://www.gwr.com/haveyoursay> and <https://www.southwesternrailway.com/station-change-proposal>

To respond, visit <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/train-station-ticket-office-consultation> or write to Freepost RTEH-XAGE-BYKZ, London TravelWatch, PO Box 5594, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 9PZ.

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Further information:

1. More from Cllr Paul Fishwick, executive member for active travel, transport and highways, at paul.fishwick@wokingham.gov.uk