

Response from the Teddington Society to the consultation being undertaken by South Western Railway on changes to railway station ticket offices

Response to be submitted to London TravelWatch on behalf of The Teddington Society.

1. Introduction

The Teddington Society is a civic society, run by volunteers, and with a wide membership of over 900 local residents and businesses. Our aim is to preserve and enhance the quality of life for everyone living and working in Teddington.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the proposals put forward by South Western Railway ('SWR') to change the way in which they sell rail tickets at stations and to re-deploy ticket office staff to other duties.

However, we have major concerns with the proposals put forward for Teddington, which risk severely degrading an important community asset, much used by those who live, work and visit here.

2. Detailed response

SWR's consultation document states that most passengers no longer buy their tickets from railway station ticket offices but instead use smart media (including PAYG), the internet and ticket vending machines. As a result, SWR propose that the vast majority of their station ticket offices are closed and that ticket office staff are re-deployed to alternative multi-skilled station/platform roles, where they can provide more direct help and support to customers.

Whilst we have concerns about the closure of ticket offices, the re-deployment of staff to alternative customer service roles could potentially have worked if done properly. In particular, if staff had been appropriately re-trained, situated in fixed information points where they were easy to find, and able to provide assistance to customers using Ticket Vending Machines.

In this context, we would have expected to see the staff currently engaged in ticket retailing at Teddington re-deployed on a roughly like-for-like basis in terms of their availability with a clear description of how they would fulfil their new customer service roles (for instance what re-training was planned, where they would be located on the station, how they would be to assist passengers wishing to purchase tickets, and so on).

Instead, it is clear from the consultation document that Teddington will see draconian reductions to station staffing with little or no explanation as to how the minimal remaining staff presence will be used to help and support customers.

Teddington currently enjoys a staffed ticket office seven days a week, from early morning to mid-evening on weekdays and Saturdays, with slightly shorter hours on Sundays. The ticket office is currently staffed for a total of 91 hours 45 minutes a week. Under SWR's proposals, these staff will be replaced by general station/platform staff, who will be present at the station for just 20 hours a week, a near **78%** reduction in staffing. This is one of the largest reductions in staffing across the entire SWR network and will leave Teddington station unstaffed for the vast majority of the times that services operate. On Sundays and Mondays, it will become completely unstaffed.

It is clear from the proposals put forward for Teddington, that this has little to do with the assertion in SWR's consultation document that the changes are designed to 'offer customer service aligned

with what customers want and need', but is instead, a thinly disguised plan to reduce staff costs at the expense of customer service.

Teddington is a busy station with significant footfall throughout the week. This includes significant weekday commuter flows to and from central London and other business centres, large volumes of short and long-distance leisure demand throughout the week, but particularly at weekends, and weekday business travel to and from major local employers such as the National Physical Laboratory. As well as acting as an interchange station for the Shepperton branch, it is also a gateway station for visitors wishing to access Bushy Park, the Thames, and local attractions such as the Landmark Arts Centre.

Despite enjoying such a large and diverse customer base, the drastic reduction in staffing proposed will completely undermine existing levels of customer service, where the ticket office at least provides an information and help point for passengers, even if they do not need to purchase a ticket. It will leave passengers with virtually no staff to provide help and advice, to provide information when services are disrupted, to provide assistance when using ticket vending machines, to deter anti-social behaviour, and so on. Anti-social behaviour is, already sadly a problem at times, as is more serious criminal activity such as bicycle theft.

Importantly, the virtual absence of staff will also make the station less accessible. Whilst the planned construction of passenger lifts at Teddington will make the station much more accessible for the mobility-impaired (as well as families with buggies, passengers with heavy luggage), this will still stop some way short of making the station fully accessible. Staff are still required to help and support blind and sight-impaired passengers, passengers with neuro-divergent conditions such as autism, and so on. In this context, the proposed re-deployment of staff provided some potential improvements to accessibility such as the easier provision of wayfinding to the blind and sight impaired. However, as the proposals stand, even the current help provided by ticket office staff will be largely lost, rendering the station less, not more, accessible.

The reduction in staffing will make the station less accessible in other ways as well. The disabled toilet on platform 1, whilst Radar-key operated, is locked when the station is unstaffed according to the SWR website. Under the proposed new staffing arrangements, the disabled toilet would be unavailable for use for the vast majority of the time. Similarly, it is not clear to what extent the heated waiting area in the ticket hall on platform 1 and the heated waiting room on platform 2 would remain open during unstaffed periods. The waiting area on platform 1 is currently locked when the ticket office is closed.

It is worth emphasising that many of the points above also apply to other vulnerable customer groups, such as the elderly.

Finally, we need to raise a strong concern about the potential for further changes to staffing, as the proposed changes open the door to a potential complete de-staffing of the station in the future. Having taken expert advice, we understand that the current consultation is the result of legal requirement with the railway industry's Ticketing and Settlement Agreement ('TSA'), which forms part of the industry's regulatory framework. The TSA requires that train companies consult on proposed changes to ticket office opening hours, which are regulated on a location specific basis. However, once the ticket office at Teddington has been closed, we understand that there will be no such requirement to consult on changes to the station/platform staff that will replace current ticket office staff, meaning that at some future point SWR could simply choose to de-staff the station completely. SWR's consultation document provides no assurances in this regard and given that cost

savings appear to be the primary driver of the changes currently proposed, complete future de-staffing does not seem like an unreasonable possibility.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, the proposals, as they stand, threaten to severely degrade an important community asset, at the heart of Teddington life. They offer no benefits to those who live and work in Teddington, or those that visit, and **we strongly oppose them**.

As such, we urge London Travelwatch to seek major changes to SWR's proposals for Teddington. In particular, we would urge that current staffing levels are maintained, and that staff, if re-deployed, are focussed on improving customer service and accessibility.

Officers of The Teddington Society

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