

## **BROCKENHURST PARISH COUNCIL**

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Dear Transport Focus,

Brockenhurst Parish Council objects to the proposals to close ticket offices (TO) at train stations managed by SWR (South Western Railway).

### **Introduction**

Brockenhurst is a medium size station and transport interchange on the London to Bournemouth and Weymouth main line. It forms the main railhead for the New Forest with a branch line link to the coastal town of Lymington, nearby coastal villages and a cross Solent ferry that serves the western half of the Isle of Wight.

While the village population is only around 3500 the station serves a large hinterland and is well used by commuters, tourists and other leisure travellers. The tourist industry is particularly important to the economies of both The New Forest National Park and the island. Pre Covid the Office of the rail regulator consistently reported over 1,000,000 entries and exits and 300,000 interchanges at the station each year. We understand the figure is now about 750,000 and 200,000 respectively and, despite strikes, recovering particularly in the leisure sector.

Around 100 trains per day stop at Brockenhurst. The four platforms can only be accessed by a footbridge and lift to two island platforms each of around 850 feet in length.

### **Availability of staff, Accessibility of tickets and purchasing assistance.**

The ticket office is one of the most vital public facing features of this station. While its presence is less needed by local commuters it is important in imparting confidence to those making first time or infrequent longer main line journeys and the tourist clientele.

The council strongly objects to proposals which make the station and its services less accessible to many passengers especially the disadvantaged.

The ticket office, and ticket vending machines (TVM) are all "off platform" meaning users must use the bridge or lifts to access trains. The TVMs are currently located on the station upside by the ticket office (2) and by the downside entrance on to the station (1). They are not particularly intuitive and therefore not easy to use. They do not enable passengers to easily find the right type/lowest cost ticket, nor do they facilitate ticket refunds or changes. The provision of travel information for the staff is a service that passengers unfamiliar to the area find valuable. Typically, this may be the provision of information on local train connections or negotiating routes across or around London.

The proposals appear to assume the passenger will have knowledge of the rail network from the online offering. Without this information and faced with busy wall mounted help points or available staff in busy periods, the passenger will need to purchase his ticket at his destination or inconveniently at an intermediate station.

There are many disadvantaged and elderly who find themselves the wrong side of the “digital divide”, not having access to the internet or a smart phone. The proposals will do nothing to encourage these groups to use or to continue to use the station, bearing in mind they may be people who must rely on public transport or suffer isolation.

The extent of people unable to access the internet for reasons of disability, age, or affordability is significant and the removal of the Ticket Office will be discriminatory. (please refer to the Ofcom report ) [Digital exclusion: a review of Ofcom's research on digital exclusion among adults in the UK](#)

### **Upskilling staff and the clash of service priorities**

While understanding SWRs wish to use staff effectively, we believe there is need to give greater recognition to the needs of the disadvantaged.

We also believe the argument for upskilled or redeployed staff is not realistic. This proposal would make it difficult to achieve a clear definition between of “front of house” sales and “back office” operational needs. The operational need to dispatch trains on time will need to take priority over dealing with ticket sales or enquiries. Furthermore, the size of the station and the frequency of the trains mitigates against a single location on the platforms to deal with detailed passenger information and the sale of tickets. A central point is needed - a ticket office provides this. There are also concerns that a reduction in staff may also lead to a reduction in security.

### **Summary**

We would urge that the proposals are abandoned and SWR be asked to consider to what degree they are a “people business” with customers who will need assistance dealing with complex ticketing and travel products.

Kind regards

*Heather*

Heather Lawrence  
Parish Clerk