



Policy Submission

March 2022

NZET Committee – ScotRail Ownership

Ticket offices

- As the Committee will be aware, in January 2022, ScotRail announced proposals to reduce ticket office opening hours at 117 of its 143 managed stations, including the complete closure of three ticket offices.
- Already c60% of ScotRail stations do not have a staffed ticket office, and the proposals amounted to a weekly reduction in ticket office opening hours of more than 3200 hours.
- RMT is fully opposed to the proposed cuts for a number of reasons including: the impact on services and the level and quality advice available at the station and passenger accessibility, safety and security. A more detailed briefing on the ticket office proposals, and a copy of RMT's submission are available here - <https://www.rmt.org.uk/campaigns/rail/stop-the-cuts-to-scotrail-ticket-offices/>
- RMT is also critical of the decision to hold the consultation in January 2022 when Scottish Government 'work from home' advice remained in place and passenger numbers were therefore significantly reduced. RMT also queried why the outgoing operator Abellio was consulting on major changes to a franchise that is soon entering public ownership, and the Scottish Government's level of involvement in this decision given that it has been managing the franchise via its Emergency Measures Agreement since March 2020.
- There was widespread and significant opposition to the proposals including from MSPs, councillors and councils, campaign groups, charities etc. For instance, the group Disability Equality Scotland polled its members about the proposals with 95% opposing the cuts.¹
- At the end of February 2022, the passenger watchdog Transport Focus published its response to ScotRail following the three-week public consultation.
- There was overwhelming opposition to the proposed cuts. Of the 1550 responses received by Transport Focus, just 1% were in favour of the cuts. The Transport Focus response summarised respondents' 'widespread concerns' relating to issues including buying a ticket, accessibility, access to NHS hospitals, anti-social behaviour, station facilities and ticket office closures.

¹ <https://yoursayondisability.scot/scotrail-ticket-offices/>

- Yet, as Transport Focus also acknowledged 'the narrow focus of the TSA consultation did not give an opportunity for passengers' wider concerns about staffing to be addressed'. This is because the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement (TSA) process, which is set by the Westminster Government, only permits Transport Focus to object to proposals on a very narrow criteria, essentially based solely on average ticket sales transactions. This process of course ignores the much wider role played by the ticket office and ticket office staff.
- Despite the widespread opposition, ScotRail's response to Transport Focus makes clear that it is still planning to make the vast majority of the cuts. In fact, it has only committed to reinstating 33 hours a week (c1% of the total cuts).
- At 51 stations ScotRail states that it will retain current staffing hours when the ticket offices are closed. The reality is that in many cases this will mean moving staff from the ticket office to the platform at night, putting both them and passengers much more at risk from anti-social behaviour and assaults by removing access to the ticket office which acts as a place of safety and security.
- At a further 54 stations ScotRail wants to reduce ticket office hours in line with its original proposals, with no guarantee that staff will remain present at the station when the ticket offices are closed. These cuts risk making many stations no-go zones at night and are completely at odds with the Scottish Government's stated agenda for ScotRail and public transport in Scotland.
- ScotRail has paused the closure of three ticket offices for two years, and again, RMT believes that the Scottish Government should scrap these proposals entirely.
- The Transport Focus response states that ScotRail first made it aware of its plans to review ticket office hours in July 2021, yet the trade unions were only informed of the proposals in January 2022, the day before the consultation opened. This lack of transparency is very disappointing and RMT would expect that the Scottish Government conducts its industrial relations in a far more collaborative manner.
- **It is clear that despite the spin from ScotRail, it is proposing that the vast majority of the proposed cuts to ticket office hours will go ahead. But the ultimate responsibility sits with the Scottish Government's and there is no reason why it cannot decide to listen to passengers who clearly opposed the cuts and scrap them and instead commit to investing in an affordable, sustainable and comprehensive rail network for Scotland. This is what RMT is demanding and has already put to the Transport Minister.**

Fares

- In January 2022, Scottish Rail fares increased by 3.8%. At the time RMT warned of the 'climate cost' of the fare hike and published analysis which showed that the price of using rail had risen more than four times quickly than the cost of petrol. Combined with the proposed service and ticket office cuts, RMT warned that rail passengers would be paying 'more for less'.²

² <https://www.rmt.org.uk/news/rmt-warns-of-climate-cost-of-latest-scottish-rail-fare-hike/>

Services

- In February 2022, ScotRail announced that its timetable from May 2022 would run c10% fewer services than pre-pandemic levels. RMT believes that service cuts are short-sighted and will deter passengers from the sustainable rail network and has called on the Scottish Government to commit to returning rail services to pre-pandemic levels.

No compulsory redundancy agreement

- The current ScotRail franchise has a no compulsory redundancy commitment for all ScotRail staff. Despite multiple requests from the Unions and MSPs for it to do so, the Scottish Government has, so far, not agreed to continue this commitment under the public sector operator. This means that perversely, rail workers who worked heroically throughout the pandemic to keep Scotland's railway running, now risk losing the protection of a no compulsory redundancy agreement as they transfer into the public sector.

National Conversation / Women's Safety on Public Transport

- The new Transport Minister recently announced a 'National Conversation' for the future of ScotRail and a consultation on women's safety on public transport in Scotland. Ultimately, RMT believes that ploughing ahead with the overwhelming majority of ScotRail's proposed cuts to ticket offices which will worsen passenger safety, security and accessibility, fits with this approach. As Transport Focus' response stated, *'this conversation should include ScotRail listening to the concerns expressed by passengers and stakeholders replying to this consultation'*.