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Title of meeting:	Cabinet Member for Transport Decision Meeting
Subject:	Council responses to South Western Railway Ticket Office Proposals and Southern Railway Coastway West Timetable Proposals
Date of meeting:	18 th August 2023
Report by:	Kerri Farnsworth, Interim Director of Regeneration
Report Author:	Simon Bell, Principal Public Transport Officer
Wards affected:	All

1. Requested by

1.1 Report requested by the Cabinet Member for Transport.

2. Purpose

2.1 The purpose of this supplementary report is to provide Cabinet with details of Council's response to the recent consultations by South Western Railway on changes to ticket office closures and Southern Railway Coastway West timetable change

3. Information Requested

3.1 The consultations can be found here: [South Western Railway Station Change Proposal](#) [Southern Railway West Coastway Consultation](#)

For simplicity, both consultations and the Council's responses will be dealt with separately in this report, taking the South Western Railway first as their proposals arguably may have a greater impact on Portsmouth residents and similar proposals are being made by to all Train Operating Companies in England.

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4. Background- South Western Railway Station Change Proposal

- 4.1 Train operator South Western Railway, which manages all rail stations in Portsmouth, has launched a public consultation on proposed changes to station staffing arrangements. Under the "Station Change Proposal", ticket purchasing arrangements would be changed at all of SWR's currently staffed stations including Portsmouth Harbour, Portsmouth & Southsea, Fratton and Cosham. Similar consultations are being undertaken by all the Train Operating Companies in England.
- 4.2 Rail passenger revenue nationwide is around 30% below pre-pandemic levels and so the challenge is to address costs in order to reduce Government revenue support requirements. The consultation responses are to be made to Transport Focus [Home - Transport Focus], the independent watchdog for transport users, which will submit them to the Department for Transport. The consultation originally closed on 26 July but has been extended to 1 September 2023. By the original closure date 170,000 responses had been received by Transport Focus. A ministerial decision on whether to proceed with the proposals is expected in 2024.
- 4.3 This paper describes the issues concerning the proposals and their implications for rail passengers travelling from Portsmouth stations.

5. Current ticket purchase arrangements at Portsmouth rail stations

- 5.1 Staffed ticket offices offering a full range of rail tickets, railcards and smartcards are currently provided at the following stations in Portsmouth:

Station	Ticket office opening hours			Passengers 2019-20
	Mon-Fri	Sat	Sun	
Portsmouth Harbour	05:40-20:30	05:40-20:30	06:40-20:40	2,156,925
Portsmouth & Southsea	05:50-19:00	06:30-19:00	08:00-19:00	2,016,016
Fratton	05:55-19:40	05:55-19:40	09:10-18:40	1,884,369
Cosham	06:10-19:45	07:00-17:00	09:10-16:00	938,210

- 5.2 Only Hilsea station is unstaffed with ticket vending machines (TVMs) provided and had 345,097 passengers in 2019-20.
- 5.3 The passenger numbers in 2019-20 are provided by the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) [[Home page | Office of Rail and Road \(orr.gov.uk\)](http://www.orr.gov.uk)] and include passengers departing, arriving and changing trains. The ORR forecasts that SWR passenger

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numbers in 2023-24 will reach 83% of 2019-20 levels, although they will not be the same for all stations.

- 5.4 Tickets for travel from the staffed stations can be purchased through multiple 'channels' including the ticket office, TVMs and online from websites and apps. The use of these varies between stations with local demographics, age and income profiles and travel patterns: regular users will have a different understanding of tickets and fares than occasional travellers. Nationally only 12% of ticket sales are through ticket offices but this average masks variations between stations.
- 5.5 Unfortunately, SWR is unable to provide information on the 'channels' through which tickets are bought for travel from the Portsmouth stations. Without this data we are unable to estimate the numbers of Portsmouth's passengers who will be affected. [Fellow First Group company Great Western Railway has provided this information so that we know that at Barnstaple, for example, 46% of tickets are sold through the ticket office.]

6. The proposed arrangements for Portsmouth's stations

- 6.1 SWR, which has more ticket offices than any other UK TOC, proposes to close them all. The SWR stations including those in Portsmouth, are to be classified into the following categories with corresponding staffing levels and ticket purchasing facilities:

Station category	Staffing level	Portsmouth stations
1	Full retailing capability with expertise available to support retail choices and customer needs until full transition to digital retail. Ticket vending machines.	Portsmouth & Southsea
2	Multiple staff available to support retail choices and customer needs. Ticket vending machines.	Portsmouth Harbour Fratton Cosham
3	One staff member available to support retail choices and customer needs. Ticket vending machines.	-
4	Unstaffed as today. Ticket vending machines.	Hilsea

- 6.2 The proposed staffing hours of the stations in Portsmouth are listed below.

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Station	Category	Proposed station staffing hours		
		Mon-Fri	Sat	Sun
Portsmouth Harbour	2	00:00-23:59	00:00-23:59	00:00-23:59
Portsmouth & Southsea	1	00:00-23:59	00:00-23:59	00:00-23:59
Fratton	2	05:00-23:00	05:00-23:00	06:00-23:00
Cosham	2	06:30-11:30 15:30-19:30	09:00-16:30	Unstaffed

- 6.3 All stations which are currently staffed will remain so, but the total numbers of staff will be reduced, with efficiency savings achieved through more multi-role staff. The hours that stations are staffed will also be reduced in some cases and Cosham would become unstaffed on Sundays under the proposals.
- 7. Implications for Portsmouth's rail passengers and possible consequences**
- 7.1 The following concerns are identified which might affect passengers travelling from Portsmouth stations, particularly occasional users and those unfamiliar with online purchasing.
- (i) Difficulties in navigating the large number of available tickets and how they can be purchased. Railway tickets have become very complex in recent years with different fares for travel at different times, different routes or for one operator only and some services requiring a seat reservation. Not all tickets can be bought online or through the ticket vending machines (TVM). Although Great British Railways are developing proposals to simplify the range of fares and tickets, these will not be implemented before the proposed closure of ticket offices.
 - (ii) Railcard (non-digital) purchase and renewal is currently available at all staffed Portsmouth stations, including on the day of travel. Families, and older persons can currently purchase these on the day, which cannot be done through a TVM. It is not known whether a mobile member of staff at Portsmouth & Southsea station will be able to these. Otherwise, those travelling on the day will have to buy more expensive tickets or not use rail.
 - (iii) Smartcards, which are currently issued at all staffed Portsmouth stations and include much promoted products such as SWR's Tap2Go pay as you go facility will only be able to order online. Digital exclusion: not everyone has a credit card or a smartphone and many TVMs do not take cash. The TOC's own figures show that 99% of those using ticket offices had a digital alternative but did not, or could not, use it.

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- (iv) Difficulties in using the TVMs. TVMs have touch screens, not physical buttons, and do not have audio responses so are therefore difficult to use for those with visual impairments. The position of the virtual buttons varies between stations. There is a programme to update TVMs but the details are unclear and it will not be carried out before the ticket offices are proposed to close. Expecting someone with visual difficulties to find and identify a mobile member of staff adds another obstacle to independent travel.
 - (v) Uncertainty over the fares. If the ticket they require is no longer available at the station they start from, as TVMs do not offer all fares, or they wish to pay by cash where the TVM does not take cash, passengers will be expected to embark on their journeys and pay later, perhaps not knowing how much their fare will cost. This would be perverse and does not happen on other forms of public transport.
 - (vi) Ticketless travel. Currently, passengers are told not to travel without a valid ticket, often at the risk of a £100 fine, but it is proposed to change the rules so that if a passenger cannot buy their ticket at the start of the journey, they should buy their ticket on the train from the conductor, break their journey at one of the 24 category 1 stations meaning the journey would take longer, or pay at their destination. This is a significant change for passengers which some may find uncomfortable, while others may simply travel without paying at all - causing further revenue losses.
 - (vii) Increased ticketless travel could result in more "anti-social" behaviour on trains (common among fare dodgers), discouraging passengers by reducing the attractiveness of rail travel, and losing further revenue.
 - (viii) Personal safety and security issues for vulnerable passengers. Current ticket offices are areas where passengers can wait safely until their train is due. With the ticket office closed these are unlikely to offer the same sense of security that a staffed office provides. Knowing where you can find a member of staff provides essential reassurance for many. This is particularly important at stations such as Cosham where there have been security concerns.
 - (ix) Longevity of staffing provision at the category 2 stations. Further economies could be required due to the financial position of the railways and wider Government finances. The proposals could therefore be a precursor to a withdrawal of all staff from these stations. Any further reductions would not require similar consultation.
- 7.2 The four staffed Portsmouth stations have toilets, but these are unlikely to be available outside of staffed hours. For example, Cosham is currently staffed on Sundays but will not be under the proposals. These difficulties for passengers could become a deterrent to rail travel for those we are encouraging to use their cars less and a potential barrier to travel for those who rely on the train. Many vulnerable users, older passengers, and those travelling with children, could have their

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independence and travel choices reduced as could those with disabilities raising concerns about equality and inclusivity as well as compliance with the Equality Act 2010.

- 7.3 If some passengers are deterred from rail travel and others are able to evade fares, revenue will be lost. However, SWR have not provided any data on the reduction in revenues that could result.

8. Conclusion and next steps - South Western Railway Station Change Proposals

- 8.1 The proposals appear to be rushed and driven by the imperative to make cost savings. For example, the promised simplification of rail fares and the updating of TVMs is not expected to be completed before ticket offices are closed while many would see this as a necessary precursor of any change. The likely impacts on vulnerable, disabled and digitally excluded citizens have not been adequately considered or mitigated. There are therefore likely to be adverse impacts on some of Portsmouth's residents who travel by rail - although SWR have not provided the ticket sales data that would enable this effect to be quantified.

9. Portsmouth City Council's Response to South Western Railway

- 9.1 The Leader of Portsmouth City Council and the Cabinet Member for Transport have written separately to Claire Mann, Managing Director, South Western Railway expressing the Council's concerns about the impacts on independence and inclusivity for many Portsmouth residents, who will lose choices or face higher travel costs, the inadequacy of the alternative arrangements proposed, the rushed timescale and the resulting deterrent to rail travel which will have negative environmental consequences.

10. Background - Southern Railway West Coastway Timetable Consultation

- 10.1 Southern Railway have reviewed the Coastway west service which suffers from considerable reliability issues, in part due to the short turnaround time at Portsmouth or Southampton. This has resulted in many trains terminating short of their destination at Fratton or Fareham railway stations, meaning passengers must change trains to complete their journey. In addition, the timetable for both the Portsmouth and Southampton routes are not evenly spaced. For example, at Cosham station there are gaps of 15 and 45 minutes between trains every hour to Southampton or Chichester as one train goes to or from Brighton and the other to London Victoria via Gatwick Airport.

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- 10.2 The consultation proposes the withdrawal of the 'all stations hourly stopping service' between Portsmouth Harbour and Littlehampton, which is the least used of all the services and the direct train between Portsmouth and Brighton. As part of this proposal Portsmouth Harbour would see the return of half hourly direct trains to London Victoria via Gatwick Airport, which will also maintain the direct service from the smaller stations between Havant and Chichester and a regular 30-minute interval service from Emsworth.
- 10.3 Although Portsmouth Harbour will see the reinstatement of the half hourly service to Gatwick Airport and London Victoria, additional station stops will be added making journeys longer and uncompetitive with car. Passengers travelling from Portsmouth to Brighton will need to change trains at Barnham or Chichester, leading to inconvenience and longer journey times. This change will also mean that Cosham will get a half hourly direct train to Brighton but will lose its direct service to Victoria.

11. Portsmouth City Council's Response to Southern Railway

- 11.1 The Council welcomed the reinstatement of London Victoria services through to Portsmouth Harbour on weekdays, following their curtailment at Portsmouth & Southsea since 2020. This will improve connectivity and support our local transport strategy [[Portsmouth Transport Strategy 2021-2038](#)]. The Council also welcomed the doubling of this service to half-hourly.
- 11.2 The Council are very disappointed with the increases in travel times from Portsmouth as we saw this as likely to increase car use. Under the proposals, travel times from Portsmouth to London Victoria would rise by 12 minutes or 10% and those to Gatwick Airport by 16 minutes or 19%.
- 11.3 Fast travel times are a key advantage of rail travel for important journeys such as Portsmouth to Gatwick. These changes would significantly damage the competitiveness of rail compared with car travel, as shown below.

	Portsmouth – Gatwick travel time (minutes)
Current rail	84
Proposed rail	100
Car*	88

*Google maps

- 11.4 The proposed rail travel time would be 14% longer than that possible by car, which will affect residents' choices.
- 11.5 These additional travel times seemed to reflect a 50% increase in the number of station calls from 10 to 15, with all the new stops added west of Chichester.

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Although we understood that major new housebuilding is taking place near to many of the stations between Havant and Chichester and that the new residents would be potential passengers to Portsmouth, we requested possible measures to reduce rail travel times be investigated and considered as a matter of urgency.

- 11.6 The Council is very unhappy with the proposed withdrawal of direct Portsmouth to Brighton trains, which have been a feature of the West Coastway line timetable since 1938. This would reduce access to Portsmouth and increase travel times by 13 minutes (including 7 minutes connection) or 16%. Rail travel times would be 12% longer than those possible by car as shown below.

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	Portsmouth – Brighton travel time (minutes)
Current rail	83
Proposed rail	96
Car*	86

*Google maps

11.7 This change would affect travel choices and thereby increase car mileage. We therefore requested that the possibility running additional fast Portsmouth – Brighton direct services at busy times to be considered as a priority.

12. Conclusion and next steps - Southern Railway West Coastway Timetable Consultation

12.1 The Cabinet Member for Transport has written in response to the Southern Railway West Coastway Timetable Consultation in the terms above to ensure that the interests of Portsmouth residents and businesses are heard. Every opportunity to put forward the interests and concerns of the city are taken through the regular meetings with Train Operating Companies, Network Rail and the Department for Transport.

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Signed by (Director)

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
South Western Railway Station Change Consultation	South Western Railway Station Change Proposal
Southern Railway West Coastway timetable consultation	