



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

18 July 2023

Transport Focus
 RTEH-XAGE-BYKZ
 PO Box 5594
 Southend on Sea SS1 9PZ

Dear Sirs

Greater Anglia – Station Ticket Office Change Proposals, 6 July 2023

A. Introduction

I am the Member of Parliament for the Waveney Constituency, which includes the town of Lowestoft, and I am writing with my comments on the above consultation.

Lowestoft Station, formerly known as “Lowestoft Central”, is the UK’s most easterly railway station and occupies a location close to the town centre. It is served by two railway lines as follows:-

1. The East Suffolk Line to Ipswich, which links into the Great Eastern Line from Norwich to Liverpool Street and the Cambridge Line via Bury St Edmunds.
2. The Wherry Line, that serves Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth which connects into Norwich where ongoing services are provided on the aforementioned Great Eastern Line and a service to Cambridge.

The railway played an important role in the development of Lowestoft in the 19th century and it is a very important component part of the current plans to regenerate the town centre.

At present Lowestoft is a fully staffed station including a ticket office. Greater Anglia’s proposals are to close the ticket office and to reduce the hours that the station is staffed as follows:-

Monday – Friday	Current: 06.40 – 17.05	Proposed: 06.30 – 13.30
Saturday	Current: 06.40 – 17.05	Proposed: 06.30 – 13.30
Sunday	Current: 08.00 – 16.15	Proposed: Regular visits by mobile teams

Whilst in principle I do not have objections to staff providing a more flexible service, I believe that the plan to significantly reduce the hours that Lowestoft Station is staffed are a retrograde step and that arrangements similar to the existing ones should be maintained.

Continued . . . 2 /

I set out in more details the reasons why I have reached these conclusions in the next two sections, though I make the following brief comments on the proposed flexible staffing:-

1. The existing staff at Lowestoft are held in high regard by local rail users. They are diligent, courteous and friendly and it is important that their best interests are fully taken into account in making any changes.
2. It is important that Customer Hosts are both visible and accessible to rail users at all times and should not be required to carry out work such as cleaning WCs and wash facilities and clearing litter bins at times when they must be immediately available to customers, including those with disabilities and visual impairment.
3. Greater Anglia advise that WC and other amenities, such as indoor waiting facilities, will remain open in all stations.

It is thus concerning that at Lowestoft there have been delays in the carrying out of improvements to the existing WC facilities and Ticket Hall, which is used as a waiting room. It is vital that these works take place immediately so as to ensure that Greater Anglia is fully able to honour this commitment.

4. Litter and cleaning duties are best carried out at the end of the day and this in itself is a good reason to retain the existing hours.

B. Lowestoft Bucking the Trend

In Greater Anglia's briefing document for the consultation they advise that their proposals are predicated on a significantly reduced usage of ticket offices for buying tickets, the challenge of the pandemic and its adverse impact on demand for rail travel. These factors have led to an increase in the need for the rail industry to be more financially sustainable.

A figure of 12% has been quoted for the amount of ticket sales taking place in ticket offices nationally across the rail network. I am advised that in the Greater Anglia area the figure is at least 16% and in stations such as Lowestoft, which serve a relatively large catchment population, evidence suggests that the figure is even higher.

I would urge that accurate figures are obtained for individual stations, including Lowestoft, so as to properly ascertain the level sale of tickets. This way bespoke decisions that are in the best interests of rail users in local communities can be made, rather than them being of a "blanket" nature.

The Covid pandemic has undoubtedly impacted rail usage, but generally use of non-commuter lines has recovered better and quicker than on the commuter lines. This is the case with the East Suffolk and Wherry Lines. The use of the former has increased significantly in the past decade as the result of the introduction of an hourly service and it is envisaged that in the future further improvements, such as regular and faster services and a through service to London Liverpool Street will lead to increased use of passenger services from Lowestoft.

One of the reasons provided by Greater Anglia for reducing the hours that stations are staffed in the afternoon and at weekends is that most tickets are sold during the morning on weekdays.

From the information I have been provided this is not the case at Lowestoft, where there are fewer commuter travellers and more shopping and leisure rail users, whose journeys, particularly during the summer months, are more spread out across the day.

At weekends both services are well used by fans going to watch both Norwich City and Ipswich Town. Both Carrow Road and Portman Road are readily accessible to their respective stations and one can anticipate that with both teams being in the Championship this coming season there will be an increase in activity at weekends.

It should also be pointed out that the improved frequency of service on Sundays means that the station is well used on that day.

C. "Lowestoft Central": Central to Regeneration Plans

Like most town centres across the UK Lowestoft, is in need of regeneration.

Plans have been prepared to achieve this and are in the process of being carried out. These include the construction of the Gull Wing Bridge and a flood defence scheme and various projects being carried out with funding secured by the Towns Fund Bid.

Lowestoft Station, due to its strategic location, will play a lead role in these regeneration plans in bringing more people to and from the town centre, where it is intended there will be a more diverse leisure, shopping, cultural and business offer.

It should be pointed out that there is a vibrant community rail support group, the Lowestoft Central Project, who are carrying out a variety of enhancement works at the station. They very much work in a partnership with the existing Greater Anglia team. If there are periods when there are no staff present there is a concern that they would not be able to run the various successful community activities which they put on throughout the year.

It is anticipated that the use of Lowestoft Station will increase significantly in the next few years and this necessitates the station being staffed throughout the day.

I briefly highlight the following:-

1. The station is already being used more at weekends for such activities as the First Light Festival and the Lowestoft Heritage Open Day Festival.
2. The Town Improvement Plan, being funded by the Towns Fund, will see the Station and its surrounds significantly enhanced and it will link into the other improvement areas, such as the cultural and heritage quarters, the Power Park in the outer harbour and the South Beach. It is envisaged that Lowestoft Station will be a vital means of access to all these new facilities and attractions.
3. The opening of the Gull Wing Bridge in 2024 will result in less traffic going through Station Square, thus making travel by rail more attractive.

4. The construction of the Sizewell C Nuclear Power Station is due to commence in the next 18 months.

There will be a very large number of people working on the site during the 10 - 12 year construction period and the developers are seeking to ensure that they travel to and from the site in as environmentally sustainable way as possible. This will involve rail, with a park and ride being provided next to Darsham Station, on the East Suffolk line.

It is envisaged that many people from Lowestoft will work on the site, using Lowestoft Station and this will lead to a significant increase in passenger use.

D. Conclusion

Transport Focus advise that in making a decision as to whether to make changes to ticket office hours they will be following the process set out in the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement.

Under Clauses 6 - 18 of the TSA, changes to opening hours may be made if:-

- The change would represent an improvement on current arrangements in terms of quality of service and/or cost-effectiveness and
- Members of the public would continue to enjoy widespread and easy access to the purchase of rail products, notwithstanding the change.

Taking into account this criteria, I am of the view that Greater Anglia's proposals do not meet these requirements and should thus be rejected. They should be replaced with an arrangement where Lowestoft Station is staffed throughout the day on weekdays and up until the late afternoon at weekends.

I would be most grateful if you could take this submission into account when making your decision with regard to the future staffing of Lowestoft Railway Station.

If there are any issues that require clarification, please let me know.

Yours faithfully



Peter Aldous
Member of Parliament for Waveney