

Call for rethink on de-staffing stations plan

Edinburgh city council has called on Scotrail to rethink plans to cut opening hours at the city's Gateway railway station as part of a nationwide plan to slash staffed office times by a third across the nationally owned network.

The rail operator says the changes will improve customer support, increase passenger assistance, and improve staff visibility.

But a motion by Councillor Katrina Faccenda backed by the city council this week highlighted that violence against women and girls on the transport network had risen by 20% in a year.

Conservative Councillor Marie-Clair Munro added an addendum, accepted by Councillor Faccenda seeking guarantee that no jobs would be lost.

Councillor Faccenda told a meeting of the full council: "Safe and accessible public transport is essential and the fact that Scotrail is already under public ownership would actually make you think it would be a priority for them to maintain staff at stations and in ticket offices because that is absolutely crucial to people feeling safe.

"We need to increase the use of public transport and trains. Speak to any ticket office worker and they will tell you how

important their job is in navigating the complicated ticket service. They'll also tell you about how dangerous it is to be out on the concourse or the platform as well.

"We need the Scottish Government to step in on the side of rail users."

Councillor Munro said that Scottish Government research carried out during the last proposed cut of staffing hours in 2022 had shown that "women and girls feel safer when ticket offices are staffed during journey times."

She added that cutting hours would disproportionately affect travel by disabled and blind people who already face multiple barriers to using public transport.

"If ScotRail cuts these hours it will worsen passenger safety," she said.

Council accepted Councillor Faccenda's motion and the Conservative addendum.

Unions have renewed their criticism of proposals to reduce staffed hours at stations first mooted in 2022 by national rail companies. At the time ScotRail was owned by the Dutch firm Abellio. It has since been taken back into Government ownership by the SNP Holyrood Government.

The council heard a deputation from RMT the largest rail staff union before the debate.

ScotRail's plans are a scaled back version of those proposed in 2022. In total 54 stations would see reduced hours next year mainly across the central belt and in and around Glasgow.

The rail operator says that hours would be extended at 12 stations; there would be no change at 77 stations.

ScotRail currently operates more than 2,000 train services

through 359 stations, of which 143 have staffed ticket offices across the country.

Opening hours for ticket offices have by and large remained unchanged in over 30 years.

Outlining plans on its website the publicly owned operator said: "The proposed changes would impact 120 stations. Some locations may see minor changes whilst other locations may see reduced opening hours to align with customer usage.

"No staff will lose their jobs and will instead be redeployed to provide enhanced customer service on the frontline. A total of three ticket offices are proposed to close but the stations will remain open with all other facilities remaining, such as ticket vending machines, help points where customers can speak to staff, and 24-hour CCTV."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter