

To.: Office of Rail Regulation.

From: The Association of European Rail Agencies.

Good morning,

I have recently received a forwarded copy of your email of the 18th February requesting feedback on the current ticketing methods in the railway industry at present. This email was forwarded to our association by one of the member agencies of the organisation.

My association feels that the scope of the review should be as wide as possible, and there should be a wide consultation process. We are happy with the timetable.

Our major concerns are the current moves to cut down on ticket offices and replacement by ticket vending machines. We know from feedback from our customers that the machines are not popular with the public at all. There are many groups of customers who always prefer to talk to somebody face-to-face to seek guidance, as the rail system is quite complicated and the ticket offers are also very complicated and need simplification. Prior to rail privatisation BR introduced the tickets to the Red White and Blue period system, which was a French idea and was in use on SNCF and Air France. It was simple and people became accustomed very quickly to it and it was a great success. It was also a great success on BR, and British Airways adopted it for internal flights and Natex Coaches adopted it as well. The public also understood the system fairly rapidly, and once having it under their belt privatisation came along on the railways and it was replaced by a kind of lottery which quite frankly nobody really understands. This something the ORR should take into account.

My organisation has no problem with new methods being used, but these should be additional to and not replace more tried and tested methods of ticket distribution. For example, our members are rail specialist or agencies that also additionally sell rail, particularly to the continent and overseas; our clients wish to be ticketed from the UK through to their destinations, and have many concerns and questions which cannot be answered by machines, the internet, or UK railway stations. Many of them are unaware of the existence of the CIV connectional ATOC ticket, for example. The sale of tickets through agencies has increased throughout Europe including the UK, based on the information we have received from Railfuture and the European Passengers Federation, whilst the Internet usage for tickets has decreased. This is particularly true for international journeys, so we see an expanded role for the (rail) travel agency in the future.

Our experience with the internet based companies selling ATOC tickets is mixed. We have noticed that customers have serious issues when seeking a refund and the care offered to them by the companies after travel or ticket purchase online. The industry needs to tread very carefully when offering online companies contracts to sell tickets online.

We as an association would very much like to attend the workshop on the 8th May, I apologise for the late application but we did not receive a direct invitation. If possible we would like to send two people, myself and one other to be notified.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Kind regards,

Bob Hex, Chairman, Association of European Rail Agents (AERA).

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