

Railways Closures Guidance

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport (Tom Harris): I am today laying before Parliament new guidance on the arrangements for making, assessing and determining applications to close rail services, stations and infrastructure, as provided for in section 43(1) of the Railways Act 2005. I will shortly be making orders to bring the guidance, and the related provisions of the 2005 Act, into effect in England, Scotland, and Wales from 1 December. Draft guidance on these arrangements, was issued for consultation on 26 January, and the final version published today reflects the comments received during the consultation exercise.

This guidance will ensure that safeguards and standard practices are applied to any proposals for changes on the rail network. For the first time, statutory guidance will be put in place on rail closures, making procedures clearer and more transparent. It will also ensure certain procedures are taken into account before any rail closure can be considered. The guidance requires that:

- All alternatives are considered
- A full consultation takes place and that this includes passenger groups
- The current and future impact on passengers are considered as well as the safety, economic and environmental costs or benefits
- In contrast with current procedures, where the Secretary of State determines closure proposals, the independent Office of Rail Regulation must be satisfied that a robust economic analysis has been performed.

The guidance covers separate processes in England and Wales, and Scotland. But to ensure consistency across the railway the two processes have been aligned and brought together in one guidance document.

I have also placed in the libraries of the House copies of the Government's response to the consultation exercise on the draft guidance.