

OUR RAIL OUR FUTURE



YOUR TICKET OFFICES

TSSA Briefing July 2023



Railway Ticket Offices Are Under Threat

Urgent briefing paper from rail union TSSA on the proposed closures of hundreds of ticket offices across England.

Prompted by the Government at Westminster, Train Operating Companies (TOCs) are being asked to consult over plans which would see the end of virtually all ticket offices. If these go ahead it will have a huge detrimental effect to the railways – hitting passengers and communities in both rural and urban areas.

Closing ticket offices will make stations less safe, restrict passenger access, make it harder to get the best deal on tickets and result in hundreds of job losses.

As many as 360 million rail journeys stem from ticket office sales each year – showing that ticket offices are as popular and vital to the railways as ever. <https://www.tssa.org.uk/news-and-events/tssa-news/tssa-exposes-government-claims-over-ticket-office-use>

TSSA strongly opposes these plans and we are asking, now, for YOUR HELP whether you are an MP, political candidate, local councillor, community activist or concerned rail user.

Please highlight our campaign to keep this vital service. Tell the government they are on the wrong track and must think again.

Right now, we need you to do all you can to make sure the public engage with the consultation. London – <https://www.londontravelwatch.org.uk/ticket-offices-have-your-say/>

Outside of London – <https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/train-station-ticket-office-consultation/>

We don't have much time – the public consultation runs until Wednesday 26th July.

Once the ticket offices are gone they won't come back so resistance is essential. Anyone who uses the railway can respond to the consultation – so please let the train companies and the government know all about your concerns.

TSSA is the union for Ticket Office staff – our members are concerned and angry. They know our railways need our ticket offices to remain open in the public interest.

Getting rid of ticket offices would be a hugely damaging backward step for England's railways and is not taking place in other parts of the country.

Millions of rail users need ticket offices – for many reasons:

*Getting the best deals on tickets

- The National Rail ticketing system is often so complex that travellers only feel they can buy the right ticket once they have taken advice from a Ticket Office staff member.

Some types of ticket can still only be bought at the Ticket Office – eg those who are to pay for their ticket with a Rail Warrant.

*Accessibility

Disabled people require assistance to use the railway, whether to:

- board or alight from a train
- obtain a Disabled Persons Railcard
- plan their journey or
- receive advice on the appropriate fares.

Passenger Assist is a national railway scheme to help disabled people travel but it relies on the presence of staff at stations and on trains. At many stations, the person in the ticket office is the only employee available to help but when they are not available, unless there is a conductor on the train (bearing in mind that about 30% of trains are Driver Only), no one will be present to provide assistance.





“At a national level, between 9-12% of people who booked Passenger Assist reported receiving no assistance each year from 2017-18 and 2020-21.” It is highly likely that more people will have this experience after the ticket offices are closed.

All station and train operators must publish and follow an Accessible Travel Policy which also covers the ability to purchase tickets. That includes being able to purchase a Disabled Persons Railcard (DPR). Without the ticket office, a DPR could be obtained online or from telesales (according to GWR) but without internet access how can the disabled person secure a card that gives them the discount that they are entitled to?

Loss of ticket offices will mean that disabled people will have to purchase tickets online – but Transport for All have found that **23% of disabled adults have no access to the internet**² – which would mean having to use a TVM (Ticket Vending Machine)

Most TVMs:

- **do not accept cash** meaning that there is a requirement to have a bank account which penalises some people.
- TVMs also **do not display all the ticket options or available discounts** meaning that disabled people would be unable to receive their **50% discount**³ (via their DPR) on a **First Class/Standard Anytime Day Return ticket**.
- Discounts for the use of DPRs have to be secured through the ticket office – penalising disabled people who will then have to **pay higher fares than they should, adding to the cost of being disabled** (SCOPE estimate the Disability Price Tag in 2023 as at least £583 a month)⁴. This is at a time of a cost of living crisis.

TVMs also create problems because they are not tactile, often not signposted and can be at the wrong height for wheelchair users.

When TVMs fail, it is usually someone from the ticket office who will sort the problem out. One TSSA rep at Euston has told us that she spends as much as a third of her shift sorting out issues with the TVM. Those issues aren't restricted to disabled people but to anyone seeking to use that facility.

LNER, for example, specifically tell passengers to go to the ticket office if they have issues with getting a ticket from a TVM⁵

***Digital exclusion** – According to Ofcom 6% of UK households do not have access to the internet at home. Those more at risk of digital exclusion included older citizens; the most financially vulnerable; those not working; people living alone; and people impacted by a limiting condition, eg hearing or vision impairment. They also cited user choice, cost issues, and a lack of skills or confidence as all contributory factors in digital exclusion.⁶

***Diminishes communities** – The planned wholesale closure of booking offices is likely to reduce rail usage by the groups we have discussed above – the elderly, people with disabilities, people on low incomes/unemployed and dependent on cash, and those with without access or knowledge/confidence in using the internet.

These groups are also least likely to be able to travel by car instead, and in many rural areas these groups are already adversely affected by the loss of bus routes.

Reduced opportunities for travel will hamper their ability to engage in the community, or (where relevant) seek work, it will contribute to loneliness, isolation, and unhappiness.

***Safety – Passenger security** – Transport Focus research from February 2016, "Passenger attitudes towards rail staff", highlighted that "passengers like and value having staff around" and that a visible staff presence assisted with concerns about personal security, especially at smaller rural stations." With significantly reduced staffing levels as a consequence of the ticket office closures it is likely that passengers concerns about their safety will increase.

Staff security: At a time of increased assaults on staff, a station ticket office means that staff have a refuge. If the ticket office is gone – locked up, potentially being used for something else, where will their refuge be? This is a particularly pertinent question as the TOCs proposals include reduced staffing levels and more lone working. A single female member of staff, working on her own at a station, without a ticket office, will be in a particularly vulnerable position.

***Job losses** – We are aware of 1,923 planned job losses, and have yet to receive planned numbers from Southeastern and TransPennine Express. This will be the biggest loss of ticket office jobs since rail privatisation.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Page 36, Commons Library Research Briefing "Access to transport for disabled people" July 2022: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN00601/SN00601.pdf>
- 2 <https://www.transportforall.org.uk/campaign/ticket-office-closures/>
- 3 <https://www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk/using-your-railcard/other-discounts/>
- 4 <https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/extra-costs/disability-price-tag-2023/#:~:text=Scope's%20previous%20Disability%20Price%20Tag,extra%20cost%20was%20%C2%A3645.>
- 5 <https://www.lner.co.uk/support/faq/tickets-booking/ticket-on-departure/problem-collecting-tickets-from-the-vending-machines/>
- 6 Page 3, Digital exclusion: A review of Ofcom's research on digital exclusion among adults in the UK https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/234364/digital-exclusion-review-2022.pdf