



# Policy Briefing

July 2023

## Act now to save your ticket offices

The Rail Delivery Group, with the government's support, has formally launched its plans to close virtually all 1,000 of our ticket offices.

While it is sold as 'modernisation' that will 'get people out from behind the glass', this is a smokescreen.

The truth is that this is a historic act of vandalism that is about further de-staffing of our stations. Statutory redundancy notices have already been issued for hundreds of railway workers, which the RMT will fiercely oppose. The arrangements for ticket office opening hours, set out in Schedule 17 of the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement, are the only statutory regulation of station staffing. Once the ticket offices are gone and the regulations no longer apply, there will be a further bonfire of jobs that will only serve the interests of corporate profits.

The attempts to close our ticket offices are catastrophic news for passengers in general and in particular for any elderly, disabled and vulnerable passengers trying to access the rail network. 180 million journeys were made last year by people who used ticket offices. Attacking these services is not in the interests of passengers, it only serves the short-termist and selfish interests of train operating companies.

Time is short. Opposition to these closures must be registered with Transport Focus and London Travelwatch by the time the statutory consultation ends on 26th July.

In this briefing we explain the background to this issue and set out what you can do to save your ticket offices.

### Background

Over the past year, RMT has been campaigning to oppose the Government and Train Companies' plans for wholesale ticket office closures. After initially denying there were any such plans the Rail Delivery Group and the government have now formally announced plans that will see most of the nearly 1,000 ticket offices across the country close.

This process for closing ticket offices is set out in Schedule 17 of the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement. This requires train companies to put proposals for ticket office closures (or cuts to hours) out for a three-week public consultation, overseen by the passenger watchdogs Transport Focus and London Travelwatch. At the end of the public consultation, the watchdogs can either accept or reject the train company's proposals. If the proposals are rejected, it will then go to the Secretary of State for a decision.

Ticket offices are the only form of regulated station staffing and if they are closed, there will be no more statutory regulation for staffing at stations. This will undoubtedly mean that the train companies proceed with a massive reduction in station staffing across the network.

This relates to the ticket offices managed by the UK Government controlled train companies that have ticket offices (Avanti West Coast, Chiltern, C2C, East Midlands Railway, Greater Anglia, GTR (encompassing Great Northern, Thameslink and Southern), Great Western Railway, LNER, Southeastern, South Western Railway, West Midlands Trains (including London Northwestern Railway), Transpennine Express and Northern).

The Welsh and Scottish Governments which control the TfW and ScotRail franchises are not currently proposing ticket office closures.

## **Public consultation has started**

The Train operating companies have submitted their proposals for a three-week public consultation overseen by the passenger watchdogs Transport Focus or London Travelwatch (for stations in London and surrounding areas). These consultations opened on 5<sup>th</sup> July and will close on 26<sup>th</sup> July.

After the three-week consultation, Transport Focus/London Travelwatch will review the responses and either accept or reject the train companies' proposals. If proposals are rejected by the passenger watchdogs, the decision will then be escalated to the Transport Secretary Mark Harper MP.

The Government's approach throughout this process has been opaque and disingenuous. Early in 2022, it changed its guidance on how it deals with applications for ticket office closures. Previously, where ticket offices averaged over 12 transactions an hour, they would not normally be permitted to close. The Government has removed this threshold, which means that any ticket office, regardless of ticket sales, could be permitted to close.

## **Why ticket office closures must be opposed**

Instead of ticket sales, a number of criteria will now be taken into account when the passenger watchdogs review the consultation responses. Our view is that ticket office closures would represent a significant worsening for passengers in relation to these factors:

### **1. Access to rail products**

The ticket office is the only way for passengers to ensure they get the appropriate and best value fare for their journey. There are a range of products and services available at ticket offices which are not available at Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs). This includes refunds, disabled persons' discount, seat reservations, ferry/bus connections and many more.

Demand for the ticket office remains high. While the Government says that 'only' 12% of tickets are sold at ticket offices, in 2022/23, there were 1.5 billion passenger journeys in the UK, which equates to around 180 million journeys being facilitated by ticket offices.

### **2. Accessibility**

There has been widespread and universal opposition to ticket office closure from disabled peoples' organisations including Disability Rights UK, National Federation of the Blind UK, Transport for All, RNIB, RNID, Guide Dogs, Scope, Thomas Pocklington Trust, Winvisible, Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People and the MS Society.

Already, disabled people face numerous barriers in accessing the railway, and are three times less likely to travel by rail than non-disabled people. There is the real risk that if these closures go ahead, many disabled people would no longer be able to travel by rail. This is discriminatory and

we believe would be in breach of the Government and train companies' legal duties.

At many stations, ticket office staff are the only staff present, and passengers requiring assistance will only travel at times when they know there is a staffed ticket office open. Ticket offices provide a fixed location for passengers to locate staff, and therefore advice and assistance. This is particularly important for many disabled people who would not be able to search a station for a roving member of staff, who may or may not be present at the station. Guide dog users report that their guide dogs are trained to learn the route to the ticket office.

### **3. Quality of service**

Ticket offices provide passengers with dedicated advice and expertise about their journey and onward travel. They can tailor their service to meet their customers' needs in a way that TVMs or online ticketing is unable to. At many stations access to facilities such as toilets, disabled toilets, waiting rooms and lifts is dependent on ticket office staff.

### **4. Safety**

Ticket offices provide a place of safety for both staff and passengers. The presence of staff deters abusive and anti-social behaviour. There is a consistent theme emerging from passenger research, which is that passengers like and value the presence of staff. Having staffed ticket offices supports passenger perceptions and feelings around safety, and closing ticket offices could lead to passengers no longer feeling safe when travelling.

### **5. Cost effectiveness**

To support their proposals, the train companies are able to use arguments around 'cost effectiveness'. It is difficult to see how train operators could demonstrate cost savings unless their intention is to reduce staffing, as we believe is the case. We believe that any supposed cost efficiencies cannot be used to justify a policy that will worsen passenger safety, service, accessibility, security and access to rail products. Ticket office closures also risk denting revenue by deterring passengers from using rail.

### **6. Future monitoring of change**

Also of significant concern is that if ticket offices are closed, there would no longer be any statutory regulation of staffing provision at stations and the passenger watchdogs would have no formal role in monitoring this. Undoubtedly this will lead to reduced staffing provision at stations.

## **What you can do:**

1. Respond to the consultation. You can do this using our model response copied below. All the email addresses for responding to your train operating company's consultation are also copied below. Alternatively, all the details are on our website here: <https://www.rmt.org.uk/campaigns/rail/save-ticket-offices/>
2. Post your support on social media using the hashtag #SaveTicketOffices
3. Support our forthcoming days of action on 13<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> July. More details will be circulated soon.

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