

Response by Sian Berry AM to proposals to change the way ticket offices are staffed



Key information

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By email to

I write in response to the

. It is important that the full breadth of opposition to these changes is heard not only by the rail companies but the Government as well.

A staffed ticket office is important to supporting rail travel, not just for buying a ticket but also for organising assistance such as ramps for those who need them. Nobody who has ever used a cumbersome ticket machine in a station would believe it can replace a friendly ticket office - particularly when you need a ticket changed or refunded.

The scale of the proposed changes in London is shocking. The fact that even London Euston could be left without a ticket office makes clear that the scale of these proposed changes is unrealistic, and presents a risk of new barrier to travel on the railway. The Government's justification for its decision to close ticket offices is weak. It should be supporting access to rail travel, not adding new barriers. These closures would cut jobs and the level of service when our railways need improvement more than ever.

I have heard the concerns from Londoners and campaigners about the possible consequences of these changes for groups of Londoners ranging from families to older people, the digitally excluded and disabled people. The impacts go far beyond just changing the hours of operation for ticket offices. Any attempt to justify these changes based solely on the number of tickets sold will ignore the wider benefits of a staffed ticket office at a station.

Given the number of responses you are having to handle, I will outline my specific concerns as succinctly as possible:

- The original time for this consultation was too short (just 21 days) and, even with the extension in time for responses, the whole approach has not been fair.
- Consultation materials have been poor, and failed to have any consistent approach between train companies – this has meant that Londoners have had to understand half a dozen different ways of presenting the same information.
- Equality Impact Assessments were published too late in the process, and with too little information.
- London TravelWatch and Transport Focus have been given too little time to respond to the consultation responses to make their final decisions, just 28 days – no account has been taken of the scale of the changes in the process adopted.
- The ticketing structure on the railways needs expert advice to navigate. A member of staff in a ticket office can far better navigate the options available than a passenger struggling with a ticket machine in a hurry for a train. Some consultations admit that passengers will have to travel in order to be able to purchase the right ticket at another station. The aim of changes to the railway should be to simplify travel, not add new barriers.
- Some tickets such as the D50 and D34 for wheelchair users and visually impaired passengers are only available from ticket offices.

• Disabled people will be excluded from the transport system if they cannot rely on the certainty of locating staffing at a ticket office for turn up and go services.

- The impact on disabled people is so serious that I believe it to breach the Equality Act (2010) and the existing guidance on ticket offices for the Secretary of State.

• The reduction in staffing at many stations may lead to other station facilities being unavailable, including toilets. A reduction in the availability of toilets would be particularly severe in London where toilets at rail stations are often the only toilets

available on the local transport network.

Given all of these points, the only sensible way forward is to stop all proposals to close or reduce the opening hours of ticket offices, engage with stakeholders and instead think of proposals that would improve the railway.

There is so much potential for the railway to offer more to Londoners and the rest of the country. With proper investment we should be having new services and improving the ease of getting a ticket, and the ability to get around.

Yours sincerely,

Sian Berry, Green Party Member of the London Assembly