The Access Association

www.accessassociation.co.uk

Ref: AA/ROC/1
Date: 21 August 2023

Please reply to:
web@accessassociation.co.uk

Letter to Train Operating Companies,

We wish to express our deepest concern with your proposal to close numerous Ticket Offices within your area.

Perhaps we can best explain our concern by explaining what a Ticket Office (TO) means to thousands of disabled people, with various levels of ability, who endeavour to travel by train. A TO is somewhere that is easily identified in a convenient location at the entrance to the station, that houses a readily available individual who can offer advice on the most appropriate ticket to purchase and provide that ticket, and who can also provide advice on journey times and other journey planning information. Can you give details of where facilities within that station are and how to get to them and access them by any other means? TO staff can also, if necessary, contact personnel to provide assistance through the station and onto the train.

If you can provide the equivalent to all of this, then the loss of the TO should not be a problem to the many thousands of disabled people who travel on trains every year.

We assume that you either watched, or are aware of, the recent DfT Select Committee enquiry into travel for disabled people, where the Committee was left in no doubt that travel on the rail network for disabled people, whether for work, health or leisure reasons, is very often, if not always, a very negative experience. The planned closure of Ticket Offices has the potential to make that experience even worse.

Whether for physical, sensory, neurodiverse or mental health reasons, many people find Automatic Ticket Machines (ATMs) daunting and to many they are an insurmountable hurdle. This can be due to the design of the machine or, in many cases, to the complexity of the ticketing system. The TO provides a solution to this problem.

Many disabled people either do not possess, or are unable to use, or cannot use to its full potential, the type of digital device that enables remote booking. A high proportion of disabled people are in the lowest decile in terms of financial status; when travelling, being able to purchase the cheapest ticket is essential and not just a hoped-for benefit. Many have difficulty with identifying the cheapest ticket option, either because of the complexity of the relevant app, or due to the lack of clarity of the ticketing system or the sheer myriad of service options offered by operators. Again, the TO is a readily identifiable location for overcoming such problems.

We have so far been provided with no detail of how the nominated individual(s) will be identified. Will they be wearing a modified uniform, or will all station staff be suitably trained to provide ticketing information, and also have the ability to sell tickets? As an aside, what will happen with cash transactions? Where, and how, will tickets be obtained? Will a disabled person have to accompany the member of staff to wherever this might be? This might take some time, especially where disabled travellers have a more complex route, or are slower moving. Will there be an accessible route to this location? Alternatively, is it intended that the member of staff will accompany disabled people to the ATM to assist with purchasing a ticket? Many blind or partially sighted people cannot see an ATM; do they have to trust an unidentified individual with their means of payment? Should somebody seeking assistance trek around the station trying to locate the appropriate member of staff, who may well be moving around the station, or be inside a room that is not available to the public? Will all station staff carry equipment that will enable them to communicate with people who are hearing impaired, and have a means of communicating with people who are deaf?

It is claimed that Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) have been carried out for the proposed changes. If so, and if they were undertaken fully and correctly, then the issues we raise will surely have been identified and addressed. Could a copy of the EqIAs be forwarded to us, so that we can review the content and identify which stakeholders, particularly those representing disabled people, were consulted?

We are also concerned that the proposed changes will lead to reduced staff availability and compromise the ability of operators to provide safe emergency evacuation for disabled people. Can you confirm that the current proposals, and any subsequent related ones, will not lead to a reduction in the safety of disabled people, or restrictions on their use of stations? Furthermore, we are aware that the railway industry should have conducted an Operational and Safety Review of the proposed procedural changes and revised operating arrangements. Did these not identify the issues we raise

and provide suitable solutions? Could a copy of any such review be made available?

Disabled people are very disadvantaged by the actions they currently have to take to enable them to travel on the rail network and we feel that, in the 2020s, we should be making journeys by rail so much easier to undertake. Disabled people should be able to use trains with the same spontaneity as everybody else. This need has been recognised since the 1990s, but here we are, in 2023, going backwards and making journeys harder to undertake. This is detrimental to not just the individual, but also the industry, since, if the facility to readily travel by train is removed, more vulnerable people will either instead make journeys by car, or simply not travel at all. This will ultimately lead to a poorer and less healthy nation, with increased environmental pollution and lower levels of wellbeing.

We will add that the problems and issues highlighted here will be experienced by many other groups of vulnerable people, in addition to disabled people, to a greater or lesser extent. These might include older people, people with young children, women travelling alone and those for whom English is not the first language.

Finally, we are also disappointed that the proposals seem to have been developed without the involvement of disabled people. If such engagement had taken place, we might not have needed to be writing to you.

The Access Association is a national network of individuals who are passionate about access and inclusive design. Our aim is to encourage the creation of a barrier free inclusive environment that is accessible foreveryone; including disabled people. The Association is about providing peer support, sharing knowledge and having an influential voice.

Yours sincerely



Sue Fox
Access Association Vice-President
Email web@accessassociation.co.uk
Web www.accessassociation.co.uk