

YORKSHIRE BRANCH

NORTHERN TICKET OFFICE CONSULTATION – RAILFUTURE YORKSHIRE RESPONSE

Railfuture Yorkshire Branch has 165 individual members, and 20 group members (Rail User Groups/Rail Action Groups who between them have over 5000 members and registered supporters). **We are writing to formally object to the proposals by Northern to close the great majority of its ticket offices.**

Note that this response includes those parts of Northern's East Region which are outside Yorkshire, including three stations scheduled to lose their ticket offices (Thorne North, Worksop and Appleby).

Yorkshire has a population of nearly 6 million. **If all the proposals were to be enacted, Yorkshire would have only eight railway stations with ticket offices** –Northern with 4 (Bradford Interchange, Harrogate, Skipton, Leeds), LNER – 2 (York and Doncaster), TPE -1 (Huddersfield), EMR -1 (Sheffield). Even the City of Hull (a TPE managed station but with several Northern services) would be without a booking office, as would all stations in the metropolitan areas of Calderdale, Wakefield, Barnsley and Rotherham, and the East Riding Council area. This includes the city of Wakefield, large towns like Halifax, Barnsley, Rotherham and Dewsbury; major seaside resorts (Scarborough and Bridlington); the large towns of Keighley, Beverley, and Northallerton (note that Northallerton is a TPE managed station); and a number of small to medium sized market towns.

Railfuture believes in a bigger and better railway. A better railway is one that provides a better service to passengers (and freight customers). A better railway seeks to increase passenger numbers, not put up barriers to travel. **A better railway has an efficient and easy interface between actual and intending/potential passengers, and railway staff; ticket offices are a vital part of this.**

We consider that this three week consultation about the closing of nearly all ticket offices, and specifically in this case, all but 18 of Northern’s including all but 4 in Yorkshire, is deeply flawed, and possibly illegal.

We are not against change, but it has to be change that grows the railway, not change to suit the short-sighted and short-term needs of HM Treasury. We accept that there may be a few ticket offices that probably should not survive in their present form, **but any and all ticket office closure proposals should be done on an individual basis, and involving an option appraisal** (more details near the end of this submission).

The Rail Minister, the RDG and Northern keep referring to “only” 12% of tickets (16% in the case of Northern) being purchased from ticket offices, but fail to mention how many millions of tickets that represents. In the case of Northern, the 16% of tickets purchased from ticket offices in the latest quarter was 3.044million tickets, equivalent to 12million a year. This is not our definition of “only”.

In our view, there are many reasons why most ticket offices should be retained.

1. **As mentioned above, Northern’s ticket offices provide 12 million customer purchase transactions a year. In Yorkshire, 329k transactions took place in Q1 at the 27 stations proposed to lose their ticket offices, equivalent to c1.21million a year.** That is a lot of purchases. Volumes at these stations in Quarter1 were in excess of 5000 transactions at each of 20 of these stations, with 34k transactions at Halifax, 34k at Keighley and 29k at Barnsley (all major sub regional centres). Of the other stations, three (Bingley, Bradford FS, and Shipley) had sales of between 20k and 24k, Hebden Bridge had 16k transactions, six stations (Todmorden, Bridlington, Guiseley, Ilkley, Meadowhall and Horsforth) had between 11k and 15k transactions, and another seven (Worksop, Beverley, Garforth, Menston, Settle, Rotherham and New Pudsey) had 5k to 9k transactions at their ticket offices in this first quarter. When **the ticket office percentages of ticket sales** from each of these stations is considered, fourteen had between 16% and 36% of tickets sold from ticket offices, with eleven of these between 16% and 25%. At a further seven stations, between 11 and 15% of sales were from ticket offices. At only two staffed Northern stations in Yorkshire were there more sales

from TVMs than from ticket offices (Driffield and Goole), both stations with very restricted ticket office opening hours.

2. **Ticket office closures will severely affect the already financially disadvantaged members of society.** This can be deduced from examining **the percentage of transactions which take place in cash** (nearly all of which will be from ticket offices, as only 9 TVMs across all of Northern take cash (2 being at Leeds)), whilst a few may be on-train transactions. Percentages at ticket offices across the region range from 15% to 47%, with only three less than 21%. **There is strong correlation between the stations with the most cash transactions and social deprivation.** In descending order of transactions, these are Thorne North, Barnsley, Keighley, Bradford FS, Rotherham, Mexborough, (Bradford interchange), Goole, Worksop, Swinton, Halifax, Todmorden, Meadowhall, Bridlington, and Shipley. So **these proposals go against the concept of “Levelling up” in that potentially they effectively bar people without bank or credit cards from using trains.** There are currently estimated to be 1.4 million such people in the UK.
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(<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmtreasy/1642/164205.htm>)
Cash is legal tender , and all public services (which trains are) should accept cash.
3. **Disabled people. Ticket office closures will impact adversely on everyone and anyone who through physical, mental, neurological or sensory disability, is unable to use TVMs and/or the internet. This is clearly discriminatory and may be illegal.** Northern’s proposed “Journey Makers” will not be selling tickets. Although they will be giving advice and help, their hours are much reduced on most stations compared to current ticket office hours; the average reduction is 58%, and in the most extreme case, 91%.
4. **Ticket office closures will adversely impact anyone and everyone who needs advice that only ticket offices can give, whether in terms of the best routing, interchange information, or the cheapest suitable tickets.** Few, if any, ticket machines sell the complete range of tickets (and railcards) that are available from ticket offices. To take one example, that happened to acquaintances of one of our members. *They wanted to go to York for the day. They went to Hebden Bridge ticket office and were sold a West Yorkshire Family Day Rover covering the journey to Leeds (£15) and a Northern Duo*

ticket from Leeds to York (£20.70) Total cost £35.70. The TVM would have given them two Day Returns at £44. Saving£8.30.

We fear that ticket office closures will result in a backdoor rise in train fares for some passengers – often those who can least afford them.

5. **Ticket office can sell tickets for complex journeys**, whether on the day or in advance and including tickets starting at stations other than that station. Try getting those from a TVM. The same applies to Rover Tickets, very useful and cost-saving tickets that, sadly, are not well promoted by the railway.
6. **Ticket offices can issue refunds and amend /replace tickets.** Skilled ticket clerks are unlikely to make mistakes that can occur when buying from a TVM.
7. **Ticket offices provide a local place where property accidentally left on the station can be handed in and retained for easy collection.** They can also report suspicious packages.
8. **Digital ticketing on smartphones is not suitable for everyone.** Some people do not have smartphones, so they are immediately excluded; if also they cannot for whatever reason use a ticket machine, they will be excluded from the railway. This raises equality issues. Others have a smartphone, but do not want their train ticket on it. There are several reasons for this. Fear of loss of battery power. This example shows how law abiding and loyal customers can be treated like a criminal due to their phone being dead. <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/student-19-fuming-over-100-27388352> Other reasons include fear of losing their phone (more likely with every removal from a safe storage place in a bag or zipped pocket); dislike or refusal to purchase on line for security reason; and fear of phone or software malfunction causing the ticket to be lost within the phone. Others cannot have a ticket on a smartphone as their physical condition (e.g arthritis) means they cannot manipulate the keypad easily. And people without debit or credit cards cannot purchase on a smartphone. **Digital purchasing directly discriminates against older, poorer, intellectually and sensory impaired people, and others who are not computer literate.**
9. **On line purchasing on a computer is not for everyone.** Several reasons. Some people do not have a PC, or are not computer-literate. Some have a PC but no functioning printer (and may not have the confidence to purchase a ticket for collection from a machine). Others do not do on-line purchasing for

security reasons. Some cannot do on-line purchasing as they do not have debit or credit cards.

10. **Passenger safety.** Despite what is often said by proponents of ticket office closures, ticket office staff do come out “from behind the glass” and help passengers on the platforms, including helping on/off trains, informing about last minute platform changes, coping with train breakdowns etc. There may be stations at which the ticket office staff could be relocated “onto the platform” (all platforms?), but we think given the design of stations, these are a very small minority. The platforms at many stations are semi-exposed to the elements i.e they have a canopy over some of the platform, but this does not protect against driving rain or strong winds. Ticket offices are generally well located. Whilst “Journey Makers” would, presumably carry out some of the functions of ticket office staff, they are planned to work many fewer hours, and their future is not guaranteed.
11. **The presence of staff acts as a deterrent against anti-social, criminal, and dangerous behaviour,** and staff come out of their offices to deal with this. Ticket offices have CCTV monitors and the ticket clerks monitor them. If they see misdemeanours, they can act immediately. They also know where on the tape the incident is recorded, should legal action be necessary. This can help vulnerable passengers, such as many older people and women, feel safer; if people do not feel safe, they may decide not to travel by train. Furthermore, serious vandalism may occur outside staffed hours, and this can be especially serious at stations that are Listed Buildings, and those with toilets. Given that the “Journey Makers” will be present for much reduced hours, they cannot completely take over this vital function.
12. **“Journey Makers”.** As stated above **Journey Maker hours will be fewer than ticket office staff.** We have seen an overall figure of 58% fewer hours quoted. **The Journey Maker role, as proposed by Northern, is restricted.** Whilst they can give advice and information to passengers, **they will not be selling tickets.** They can show people how to use a ticket machine; this is fine for easy transactions, but we doubt whether it will be helpful for more complex ones. And what if for reasons given above, passengers cannot use a TVM? **If these closure proposals are accepted, then they must be amended so that Journey Makers can sell the full range of tickets and work at least the same hours as ticket office staff.** There is also no indication of how

future -proofed the JM presence will be, and whether the JMs will be of the same calibre as the generally excellent and experienced Ticket Office staff. We suspect not, as this is clearly a cost-cutting exercise. In short, **JMs are not an acceptable substitute for ticket office staff. The statement in the RDG press release that the “proposals mean more face-to-face support across the network to choose the cheapest tickets and advise on journey planning” is clearly arrant nonsense, a lie, when Northern’s proposals are examined.**

13. **Waiting rooms, toilets and lifts.** On those stations with lockable indoor, warm, waiting rooms, and toilets, the ticket office staff unlock them at the beginning of their day and lock them at the end. How will these essential facilities be made available in future? Note that the facilities in some/many waiting rooms have been enhanced due to the activities of the volunteers of station Friends/Adopters groups, in some cases with funding provided by third parties e.g. Parish Councils. In the case of toilets, bear in mind that Northern’s 195 and 331 CAF train sets were specified with inadequate toilet provision (one toilet on 3 car units, some of which perform 3 hour journeys). So station toilets are of great importance. Are there still passenger lifts that can only operate when a station is staffed? If so, any reduction in hours will surely violate the Equalities Act in terms of access to services by disabled people.
14. **Station cafes may have to close if station toilets are unavailable.** It is a legal requirement that toilets must be available for staff of cafes, and for customers if the café has more than ten seats. Station cafes are, of course, of great benefit to passengers, provide employment and or small business opportunities, and probably help to attract people to train travel.
15. **TVMs are often not fit for purpose, even when not out of use.** Pasted below is the experience of one of our members: “ *I would like to comment on the issue of the ease of use - what might be called the intuitiveness (!) of ticket machines, and their reliability. I find Northern's machines clunky and unintuitive to use. I still find myself making mistakes when using them, most recently last week when I bought two tickets, but only added the senior railcard for one of them. They also sometimes just won't work. You get part way through a transaction and the machine will go no further. I have found that sometimes the touch*

screen needs a much firmer press with two fingers rather than one at the ticket selection stage. I shouldn't have to find this out because the machine shouldn't behave in this way. I was at a staffed station and used the ticket office instead. An option that would be no longer available. And the machines are sometimes simply not working. The one I use most is the one at Silkstone Common, which appears to use an internet connection to function. I have been using it for six months now and have probably made a dozen journeys. Three times the machine (and there is only one) has been out of order, not even allowing me to obtain a 'promise to pay' ticket. So if I get on the train I risk being fined £100. So I ask the conductor before boarding, which is a distraction for him/her at a time when they are performing a safety critical task. I know that keeping existing ticket offices open would not solve this particular issue as Silkstone Common is an unstaffed station, but it seems certain that many more passengers would be faced with the same choice if everyone has to rely on these machines."

Railfuture nationally has produced a paper outlining a range of adverse issues pertaining to TVMs. It can be found at

<https://onedrive.live.com/view.aspx?resid=D986780BACD52660!9790&ithint=file%2cxlsx&authkey=!AByV5KW2N4EvY44>

We consider we have supplied very many reasons why the current proposals to abandon ticket offices should be abandoned. We accept that there are some ticket offices whose continuation in their present form may not be justified due to very low patronage. **Our answer is that if a TOC wants to close a ticket office (whether effectively told to do so by the Department for Transport and HM Treasury, or not), there should be specific station public and stakeholder consultations involving an option appraisal.** Options to consider would include:

- Ticket office continues in its current form
- Ticket office functions expanded to include other types of retail
- Ticket office hours amended (up or down)

- Ticket office closure, but with additional TVMs including at least one that takes cash, and with separate TVMs for (a) simple journeys (which take cash) and (b) more complex transactions. The number of TVMs required should be part of the scope of the Option Appraisal

Such option appraisals would take in account future developments in terms of tap-in/tap-out travel including the possibility of selling and topping-up “Oyster like” cards at retail shops in the nearby towns and villages, including the ability to purchase them with cash.(as happens in London with Oyster card top-ups)

Additionally, all stations, even those with ticket offices, should have very simple machines that only issue **Permission to Travel Tickets**. Given that getting on a train without a ticket can now lead to a £100 Penalty fare, even if the traveller has no intention of defrauding the railway, this safeguard is important, and will be more so if there are longer queues at TVMs.

CONCLUSION.

Northern’s consultation document is entitled “Changing how we support customers at our stations”. A more honest title would have been “How we plan to reduce support to customers at our stations”. We are being asked to accept an inferior service, dressed up as “modernisation”. **We oppose these proposals and call for their withdrawal.**

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