

**Debate Pack**

11 September 2023  
Number 0180 (2023)

By Dr Roger Tyers,  
Stephanie Cunningham

---

# Railway ticket offices

<b>1</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Parliamentary Material</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Press Articles</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Press Releases</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Further Reading</b>	<b>15</b>

# 1 Background

There will be a ninety-minute Westminster Hall debate on railway ticket offices on 13 September 2023 at 9.30am. The debate will be led by Chris Loder, Conservative MP for West Dorset.

## 1.1 Ticket office closure consultation

On 5 July 2023 all Train Operating Companies (TOCs) under contract with the Department for Transport (DfT) started a consultation on proposals to close, or reduce the opening hours of, most train station ticket offices in England. The [consultation closed on 1 September 2023](#), following an extension by train operators in July.<sup>1</sup> The operators involved are:

- Avanti West Coast,
- C2C,
- Chiltern,
- East Midlands Railway,
- Greater Anglia,
- GTR (Great Northern, Thameslink and Southern),
- Great Western Railway,
- LNER,
- Southeastern,
- South Western Railway,
- West Midlands (including London Northwestern Railway),
- Transpennine Express and
- Northern.

---

<sup>1</sup> Transport Focus, [Train station ticket office consultation](#), 2 September 2023

The [consultation received over 680,000 responses](#). Two government-funded watchdogs, Transport Focus and London Travelwatch, are now analysing the responses, before they respond to the train operators by 31 October.<sup>2</sup>

The consultations and proposals were co-ordinated by the [Rail Delivery Group](#) (RDG) which represents train operators. An [announcement by the RDG](#) said the proposed closures, affecting 974 stations, would help operators reflect a shift in passengers increasingly buying tickets online rather than in-person, and allow staff more flexibility in assisting passengers around stations, rather than being confined to ticket offices:

These proposals are designed to move staff out of ticket offices and onto station platforms and concourses to support better, face-to-face interactions, with the potential to close ticket offices in a number of locations.

New, multi-skilled ‘customer help’ roles – which are already in place at many stations – will mean staff are able to help more customers across a whole range of needs, from buying tickets, to offering travel advice and helping those with accessibility needs.

If accepted, the proposed changes would be phased in gradually. Ticket office facilities will remain open at the busiest stations and interchanges, selling the full range of tickets. [...]

The proposals would help bring station retailing up to date from the mid-90s, when the rules on how to sell tickets were last reviewed, long before the invention of the smartphone. Back then, an estimated 82% of all sales were from ticket offices, compared to just 12% on average today.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2

## Financial position of Rail industry

The [Rail Minister Huw Merriman said in July 2023](#) that “our railways are currently not financially sustainable”.<sup>4</sup> While he has also said that the [ticket office closure proposals are “industry-led”](#) and a matter for the train operators, the Government does have a significant financial stake in the rail industry.<sup>5</sup> The Government has been providing extensive subsidy to the industry since the start of the Covid pandemic, when passenger numbers and revenue fell dramatically, and the Government changed the nature of its contracts and took over revenue risk from the operators.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Transport Focus Press Release, [Ticket office consultation closes with over half a million responses received](#), 4 September 2023

<sup>3</sup> Rail Delivery Group, [Customer Focused Stations - What is being proposed?](#) [Accessed 7 September 2023]

<sup>4</sup> PQ 194369 [[Railways: WiEJ](#)], Answered on 20 July 2023

<sup>5</sup> PQ 194001 [[Railways: Staff](#)] Answered on 20 July 2023

<sup>6</sup> The Commons Library research briefing CBP-8731 [Rail FAQs](#) (7 September 2022) has more information on how railway funding has changed since the Covid pandemic

The [Office for Rail and Road \(ORR\) estimate that](#) the Government provided £13.3 billion in taxpayer subsidy to the rail industry in 2021/2.<sup>7</sup> In [November 2022 the Rail Minister said](#) the Government expected to spend £2.7 billion in subsidy on the railways in 2022/23.

Passenger numbers on the railways have not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels. In [June the ORR reported that rail usage](#) in the first quarter of 2023 was 88% of that in the same period before the pandemic.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.3 Objections to ticket office closures

Concerns about the proposed ticket office closures have centred around accessibility for disabled passengers, passenger safety and security, passenger access to the full range of rail products (some of which are currently only available at ticket offices), and job losses.<sup>9</sup>

On 19 July 2023, the [National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers \(RMT\) published their submission to the ticket office consultation](#), co-signed by a range of charities and campaign groups representing older people and people with disabilities.<sup>10</sup> The letter summarised many of these concerns, including the importance of ticket office staff for passengers, substantial demand for ticket office, and the inaccessibility of ticket vending machines for many people with disabilities or those who only use cash:

Already, disabled people face numerous barriers in accessing the rail network and are three times less likely to travel by rail than non-disabled people. [...]

At many stations ticket office staff are the only staff present, and their responsibilities often include assisting passengers on to trains, including with ramps where required and meeting them off the train. [...]

Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) are not accessible for many disabled people, the functionality is poor and there is no interaction, unlike in the ticket office. [...]

There is substantial demand for the ticket office. 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 Britain, which equates to around 180 million journeys being facilitated by ticket offices. [...]

---

<sup>7</sup> ORR, [Rail industry finance \(UK\) April 2021 to March 2022](#), 29 November 2022

<sup>8</sup> ORR, [Passenger rail usage January to March 2023](#), 8 June 2023

<sup>9</sup> BBC News, [Backlash sparks delay over rail ticket office closure plans](#), 5 September 2023

<sup>10</sup> The full list of co-signers is: The RMT, EqualityTrust, End Violence Against Women Coalition, Disability Rights UK, Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC), Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People, Inclusion London, National Pensioners’ Convention, Transport for All, WinVisible (Women with visible and invisible disabilities). RMT Press Release, [RMT writes to Transport Focus and London Travelwatch on Ticket Offices](#), 19 July 2023

There are a range of products and services available at the ticket office, which may not be available from Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs). This includes refunds, season ticket changes, ranger and rover tickets, ferry/bus connections, park and ride, group save, disabled persons discount, season tickets over one month in length, advance fares, rail card purchases, off-peak tickets before 9.30am, changes to ticket classes, seat reservations, cycle reservations, photocards for season tickets, scholar tickets, sleeper bookings and car parking. [...]

Many TVMs do not take cash, or permit a part cash, part card payment. Given that people on lower incomes and older and disabled people are more likely to use cash, these groups stand to be disproportionately affected by ticket office closures and may find it difficult to travel as a result.<sup>11</sup>

Separately, the [RMT have said that the plans will lead to](#) a “massive de-staffing of the rail network”. Similarly, the Labour Shadow Transport Secretary [Louise Haigh told the Commons on 6 July 2023](#) that the “process is merely a prelude to job losses”.<sup>12</sup> In response the [Rail Minister Huw Merriman linked any possible job losses](#) to the ongoing industrial dispute in the rail industry:

The honourable lady mentioned job losses. [...] In the event that there are some that don’t wish to make that transition, then of course the train operators will need to look to that.

The sad reality of this situation is that there is an offer on the table which would have guaranteed no compulsory redundancies up to December 2024. But the union leaders refuse to put that offer to their members. So if there is any impact on job concerns then perhaps the RMT, and those who they back financially, might wish to take some responsibility for that.<sup>13</sup>

On 31 August 2023, the Government refused a Freedom of Information request from the disability campaign group Transport for All, which had asked them to disclose their Equality and Impact Assessment of the ticket office proposals.<sup>14</sup>

The DfT said they were withholding the information under the “Formulation of government policy” exemption permitted under law.<sup>15</sup> Train operators have published their own [Equality and Impact Assessments](#), which detail how they intend to mitigate any negative effects of ticket offices changes in the individual train stations they operate. [Transport for All argued that these](#)

---

<sup>11</sup> RMT Press Release, [RMT writes to Transport Focus and London Travelwatch on Ticket Offices](#), 19 July 2023

<sup>12</sup> [HC Deb 6 July 2023 c930](#)

<sup>13</sup> [HC Deb 6 July 2023 c930](#)

<sup>14</sup> Transport for All, [Government refuses to publish Impact Assessment of ticket office closures](#), 1 September 2023

<sup>15</sup> [Section 35\(1\)\(a\) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000](#)

[individual assessments are inadequate](#) to understand the “cumulative impact of closing ticket offices across the network as a whole”.<sup>16</sup>

## 1.4 The consultation process

The process for an operator wishing to change ticket office opening hours is set out in the rail industry’s [Ticketing and Settlement Agreement \(TSA\)](#). The [DfT has published guidance](#) on this process.<sup>17</sup>

Under [clause 6-18 \(1\) of the TSA](#) [PDF], changes to opening hours are considered a “major change” and may be made if:

1. the change would represent an improvement on current arrangements in terms of quality of service and/or cost effectiveness and
2. members of the public would continue to enjoy widespread and easy access to the purchase of rail products, notwithstanding the change.<sup>18</sup>

An operator wishing to make a major change must display details of the proposed change at affected stations and invite people to make representations to Transport Focus (or London TravelWatch for stations in the wider London area).<sup>19</sup> The TSA specifies a 21-day consultation period, although in this case the period was extended by an extra five weeks.<sup>20</sup>

Transport Focus and London Travelwatch receive responses from the public. Informed by these responses, the watchdogs may then object to a train operators’ proposals on the closure of specific offices (or changes to their opening hours) if they do not meet one or both of the criteria above. If the train operators disagree with the watchdogs’ decision, then the Secretary of State will make a final decision.

Transport Focus and London Travelwatch say they have [received over 680,000 responses to the consultation](#), with the main themes of concern being:

- accessibility,

---

<sup>16</sup> Transport for All, [Government refuses to publish Impact Assessment of ticket office closures](#), 1 September 2023

<sup>17</sup> DfT Guidance, [Secretary of State for Transport's Ticketing and Settlement Agreement ticket office guidance](#), 21 February 2023

<sup>18</sup> Rail Delivery Group, [Ticketing & Settlement Agreement \(TSA\) Main Agreement \(Volume 1\)](#), Clause 6-18, p147

<sup>19</sup> Transport Focus, [Transport Focus's role in assessing major changes to ticket office opening hours](#), 5 July 2023

<sup>20</sup> Evening Standard, [Rail ticket office closure consultation extended after outcry from passengers](#), 26 July 2023

- safety and security,
- issues with ticket machines, and
- how stations will be staffed in future.<sup>21</sup>

The two watchdogs will publish the response to each train company's proposals online with an overview of the number of responses received, and the main issues raised in the consultation. [Transport Focus have published the criteria they will use](#) to assess any proposals received:

- Passengers can easily buy the right ticket for the journey they want to make.
- Passengers requiring assistance to travel receive that assistance in a timely and reliable manner.
- Passengers can get the information they require to plan and make a journey, including during periods of disruption.
- Passengers feel safe at a station.
- Passengers are not penalised if they cannot buy the ticket they require from the station.
- Passengers can continue to use facilities at a station.<sup>22</sup>

If the watchdogs object to an operator's office closure proposals, the train company can then refer its proposal to the Secretary of State for a final decision. The [DfT has published guidance which sets out the approach the Secretary of State](#) (SofS) will take if this happens. For ticket office closures or reductions in opening hours, the considerations are:

Where proposals have been objected to and are submitted to the SofS to consider, the SofS will take into account:

- How any changes represent an improvement on current arrangements in terms of quality of service and/or cost effectiveness;
- How members of the public will continue to enjoy widespread and easy access to the purchase of rail products; and
- How any changes help deliver the Williams-Shapps Plan for Rail, including:
  - Modernising customer service at stations.

---

<sup>21</sup> Transport Focus Press Release, [Ticket office consultation closes with over half a million responses received](#), 4 September 2023

<sup>22</sup> Transport Focus, [Transport Focus's role in assessing major changes to ticket office opening hours](#), 5 July 2023

- Staff providing a more personal service, which can be crucial for those who need additional support at stations and those who cannot or do not want to use contactless or mobile tickets.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> DfT Guidance, [Secretary of State for Transport's Ticketing and Settlement Agreement ticket office guidance](#), 21 February 2023



## 2 Parliamentary Material

### 2.1 Parliamentary Questions

#### Assistance at stations

**7 September 2023 | UIN 197482**

**Asked by: Karl Turner**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what steps he is taking to help ensure that assistance is provided at stations without ticket offices for people who have difficulties with automated systems.

**Answering member: Huw Merriman | Department: Transport**

Together with industry, we want to improve and modernise the passenger experience by moving staff out from ticket offices to provide more help and advice in customer focused roles. The consultation period has now closed, and we expect train operators to work collaboratively with the passenger bodies in the coming weeks, to listen to the concerns raised and to refine their proposals accordingly.

We have been clear that no currently staffed station should be unstaffed as a result of industry changes, and operators should ensure that staff are well located to meet passenger needs in future. This includes ensuring that staff remain available to help passengers use ticket vending machines, or their own devices to purchase tickets and they can assist those who need additional support or do not wish to use digital tickets. Exact staffing arrangements would vary by train operator and station and are subject to ongoing discussions with staff and their trade union representatives.

#### Opposition to ticket office closures

**7 September 2023 | UIN 197482**

**Asked by: Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many hon. and Rt hon. Members have contacted him to oppose the closure of railway ticket offices

**Answering member: Huw Merriman | Department: Transport**

We have received correspondence on the topic of ticket offices or similar from various parties, including Mayors and Councillors as well as Hon. and Rt hon. Members. Many of these items will have been sent to us by MPs on behalf of

their constituents (often named in the correspondence), rather than being concerns from the MPs themselves.

### **Railways: Ticket Offices**

**20 July 2023 | 195436**

**Asked by: Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, how many rail journeys were undertaken by passengers who purchased their tickets from a ticket office in (a) 2021 and (b) 2022.

**Answering member: Huw Merriman | Department: Transport**

In 2022/23, around 1 in 10 transactions occurred at a ticket office; this is down from around 1 in 3 a decade earlier and equates to 13% of total revenue.

### **Impact on staffing levels**

**20 July 2023 | UIN 194001**

**Asked by: Wera Hobhouse**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what estimate he has made of the potential impact of proposed rail ticket office closures on (a) the number and proportion of booking office staff who will retain their role and (b) the number and proportion of stations that will have (i) no change, (ii) a reduction and (iii) an increase in staffing levels; and if he will make a statement.

**Answering member: Huw Merriman | Department: Transport**

This is an industry-led process. The outcomes of the consultations will not be known until the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement process has been concluded.

Train operating companies will discuss employment matters with trade unions as part of their own collective bargaining processes.

### **Ticket types**

**20 July 2023 | UIN 194563**

**Asked by: James Wild**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with the Rail Delivery Group on the potential impact of proposed rail ticket office closures on the availability of ticket types; and whether he is taking steps to ensure the availability of all ticket types at train stations.

**Answering member: Huw Merriman | Department: Transport**

We recognise there are a wide range of fares and tickets offered to passengers, and that not all products are offered consistently online or at ticket vending machines. However, an estimated 99% of all transactions made at ticket offices last year could be made at TVMs or online.

The rail industry is looking to expand digital ticketing options and make them even easier for passengers to use through upgrades to ticket vending machines and digitisation of more tickets and processes.

When proposing major changes to ticket office opening hours, including closures, operators are required to take into account the adequacy of the proposed alternatives in relation to the needs of all passengers. This includes ensuring that passengers can easily buy the right ticket for the journey they want to make, with consideration of the product range available at the station and what support is available to help with purchase.

Passengers will not be expected to travel out of their way to buy a ticket and will be able to buy en-route or at their destination.

### Passenger numbers

**17 July 2023 | UIN 193252**

**Asked by: Lloyd Russell Moyle**

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he has made an assessment of the potential impact of closures of railway ticket offices on levels of passenger numbers on trains.

**Answering member: Huw Merriman | Department: Transport**

Industry is getting on with modernising our railway and bringing it more in tune with modern consumer expectations. Together with industry, we want to improve and modernise the experience for passengers by moving staff out from behind the ticket office screens to provide more help and advice in customer focused roles and additional support to those who need it. We have been clear that no currently staffed station will be unstaffed as a result of this reform.

When proposing major changes to ticket office opening hours, including closures, operators are required to take into account the adequacy of the proposed alternatives in relation to the needs of all passengers; and to include this in the notice of the proposal sent to other operators and passenger groups.

## 2.2

## Early Day Motions

### Future of Railway Ticket Offices

**EDM 1418 (session 2022-23)**

**5 July 2023**

**Claudia Webbe MP**

That this House notes with concern the planned mass closure of rail ticket offices, leaving many of the over 1000 train stations unstaffed; recognises that railway ticket office staff are a vital resource for many passengers who might struggle to manage online booking processes and for the security of children, women, disabled and other vulnerable passengers on the rail network; further notes that station staff including ticket office staff are essential to the smooth running of the rail network; agrees with the Royal National Institute for the Blind that the closures would be hugely detrimental to the blind and partially sighted; notes that the future of ticket offices is a key item in the ongoing rail worker dispute; and therefore calls on the Secretary of State for Transport to reject The Rail Delivery Group's proposals in full.

## 2.3

## Debates

### [Railway Ticket Office Closures](#)

13 July 2023 | House of Commons | 905931

### [Rail Ticket Offices](#)

6 July 2023 | House of Commons | vol 735

## 3

## Press Articles

[Ticket office closures: London train firms reveal they have stopped hiring new counter staff](#)

Evening Standard  
6 September 2023

[Backlash sparks delay over rail ticket office closure plans](#)

BBC News  
5 September 2023

[Unions urge ‘final push’ to save England’s rail ticket offices](#)

The Guardian  
1 September 2023

[Railway ticket office mass closure consultation extended](#)

BBC News  
26 July 2023

[Dorchester MP slams railway company as ‘morally bankrupt’ for proposing cuts to staff hours](#)

Dorchester Nub News  
20 July 2023

[Plans to shut train station ticket offices could lead to 2,000 job losses, documents reveal – as RMT boss Mick Lynch says he has not met government minister since January as rail unions prepare for strike action this week](#)

Daily Mail  
16 July 2023

## 4

# Press Releases

### [RMT Save our railway ticket offices campaign](#)

RMT (Rail, Maritime and Transport Union)

### [Our campaigning goes on as train ticket office consultation closes](#)

RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People)

1 September 2023

### [Station Change Proposals](#)

South Western Railway

### [Proposed changes to ticket offices](#)

West Midlands Railway

### [Train station ticket office consultation](#)

Transport Focus

2 September 2023

### [Equality Watchdog submits response to rail ticket office closure consultation](#)

Equality and Human Rights Commission

1 September 2023

### [Government refuses to publish Impact Assessment of ticket office closures](#)

Transport for All

1 September 2023

## 5

# Further Reading

## Websites

### [Take action to stop rail ticket offices closing](#)

RNIB

7 July 2023

### [Ticket office closures](#)

Transport for All

### [Secretary of State for Transport's Ticketing and Settlement Agreement ticket office guidance](#)

Department for Transport

### [Left behind Londoners](#)

London Travelwatch

## Reports

### [RMT Briefing – opposing ticket office closures – briefing for MSPs](#) [PDF]

RMT

1 June 2023

## Committee Correspondence

### [North East Joint Transport Committee to Transport Focus in relation to rail ticket office closure consultation](#) [PDF]

## Campaigns

### [Save our railway ticket offices!](#)

## Petitions

### [Require train operators to keep ticket offices and platform staff at train stations](#)

### Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing '[Legal help: where to go and how to pay](#)' for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

### Sources and subscriptions for MPs and staff

We try to use sources in our research that everyone can access, but sometimes only information that exists behind a paywall or via a subscription is available. We provide access to many online subscriptions to MPs and parliamentary staff, please contact [hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk](mailto:hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk) or visit [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources) for more information.

### Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email [papers@parliament.uk](mailto:papers@parliament.uk). Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk). If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email [hcenquiries@parliament.uk](mailto:hcenquiries@parliament.uk).

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk).

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe) or scan the code below:



 [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk)

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)