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04.11.22

Dear MP,

Accessibility and transport policies

We are writing to you regarding the impact of ongoing transport policies on the accessibility of the rail network for disabled and older people.

As you may be aware, it has been extensively reported that the Government and train companies are seeking a widespread closure of ticket offices across the rail network, with around 1000 at risk. The Secretary of State recently confirmed that she has asked the rail industry to launch consultations on ticket office provision.

Furthermore, the Government has also stated publicly that it wishes to recommence the roll out of Driver Only Operation (DOO). We believe that these policies would inevitably lead to an extensive de-staffing of the rail network and that there would be a significant impact on the accessibility of the railway for your constituents, particularly deaf, disabled and older people.

We understand that the following ticket office/s are in your constituency and at risk of closure:

Disabled people already face numerous barriers in accessing the railway, and subsequently are three times less likely to travel by rail than non-disabled people¹. Staff play a vital role in ensuring the rail network is accessible and many disabled and older people rely on the presence of staff to be able to travel.

Staff provide assistance to passengers at the station at on to the train. At many stations facilities such as toilets, lifts and waiting rooms are dependent on the presence of staff. A report by the Steer Group in 2019 found that 57% of assistance provided by station staff, came from ticket office staff.²

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/972438/transport-disability-and-accessibility-statistics-england-2019-to-2020.pdf

² <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/commons-committees/transport/chris-heaton-harris-mp-to-lilian-greenwood-dft-effects-of-modes-of-train-operation-on-disabled-passengers-09-10-2019.pdf>

The ticket offices provide a central point of contact for passengers. Moving staff to multifunctional or 'mobile' roles means many disabled and older people will be unable to locate staff at the station.

The alternatives to ticket offices, such as online ticketing and Ticket Vending Machines are not accessible for many disabled and older people, who are also less likely to have access to the internet. 23% of disabled adults had no access to the internet in 2019 compared to just 6% of non-disabled adults.³ The impact of ticket office closures can be particularly acute for blind and partially sighted people for whom technology is not always accessible and face-to-face support can be vital in enabling rail travel.

In 2019, the Equalities and Human Rights Commission wrote to the Chair of the Transport Select Committee and warned that the combination of DOO and unstaffed stations could 'represent a diminution of protection for disabled people' and 'potentially be a breach of the Equality Act'. The Government's Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC) has repeatedly raised concerns about the 'toxic combination' of DOO and unstaffed stations.

We believe that there is a very real risk that the current policies being pursued by the Government and rail companies could ultimately mean that many disabled people are excluded from using the railway altogether. We believe that this would be a breach of equalities legislation.

In light of the reasons raised in this letter, we are calling on you to oppose policies that will worsen the accessibility of the railway for disabled and older people. We would be grateful if you could respond to this letter, by emailing s.ward@rmt.org.uk to confirm if you support your ticket office/s remaining open and are opposed to any further extension of Driver Only Operation.

We would also be grateful if you could take up these concerns with the Government.

Yours Sincerely,

Stephen Brookes MBE, Rail Policy Adviser, Disability Rights UK

Mick Lynch, General Secretary, RMT

Teri Devine, Associate Director for Inclusion, RNID

The Equality Trust

Thomas Pocklington Trust

Katie Pennick, Campaigns and Communications Manager, Transport for All

³ Office for National Statistics (2019). Exploring the UK's digital divide. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/2p92bfbp>