

Andrew Hodgson, President
National Federation of the Blind of the UK
Sir John Wilson House
215 Kirkgate
Wakefield
WF1 1JG

23 January 2023

Dear Mr Hodgson,

Thank you for your letter and attached petition regarding the safety, security and accessibility at railway stations in the UK.

Please let me know if you require this letter in an alternative format, and I would be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

I'd like to reassure you that the Rail Delivery Group, and individual rail operating companies, take safety and accessibility very seriously across the whole of the railway network.

We regularly engage and meet with national accessibility and inclusion organisations to help shape our plans to better meet the needs of older and disabled people, customers with complex needs, or those who are less comfortable using digital technology.

I will address each petition request individually:

1. “For all ticket offices to remain open and all manned stations to remain staffed at all times with safe level of staffing.”

While there are no final plans for changes to the way we sell tickets at stations, we are looking at changes designed to move staff closer to customers. The intention is to increase, not reduce, the help available to all customers.

With just 12% of customer transactions now taking place at a Ticket Office, there is a clear opportunity to locate colleagues elsewhere on the station where they are closer to customers and better placed to help with a wider range of issues.

The creation of a new multi-skilled role would train and better equip staff to take on a wider range of responsibilities to meet the range of needs of all customers, including help in buying tickets and supporting those with accessibility needs – which can't effectively be done from the confines of a ticket office.

There are a number of safeguards in place designed to protect customers, and no changes can be made to station retailing until after a full statutory consultation process for each station change. The consultation would be run by industry watchdogs Transport Focus and London TravelWatch, and will include Equality Impact Assessments of each proposal.

Should there remain any outstanding issues at the end of this process, the Secretary of State for Transport has the right to make a final decision on any proposed closure to ticket offices.

2. “For all trains to have guards (also known as train managers or conductors) at all times.”

I believe you are referring to the proposed changes around which members of staff open doors on trains – also known as Driver Only or Driver Controlled (DOO/DCO) door operation. Although some interpret this as meaning the driver is the only member of staff on board, that is not the case. Indeed, the proposal made to the RMT by the rail industry last year specifically included a commitment to continue rostering a second person on board trains that have them today.

However, since then these proposals have been withdrawn, and this method of operation is no longer part of the proposed national reforms we are currently discussing with trades unions.

It is worth noting that DOO/DCO is already present across 45% of services carrying 55% of passengers and this mode of operation has been in use in the UK for almost 40 years.

Although DOO proposals have been removed from the RMT offer, individual train operating companies could still choose to negotiate that as part of local agreements.

3. “For all unmanned stations to become staffed at all times with safe level of staffing.”

There are currently no plans to make any changes to unstaffed stations. You may be aware that last year we enhanced the Passenger Assist programme, so booking is now only needed two hours in advance of travel, any time of the day and for any rail journey. This is down from six hours previously, and critically includes the first train of the day.

The [‘Passenger Assistance’ app](#) makes it easier and quicker for disabled people to request assistance for their train journey, and the [‘Passenger Assistance’ web app](#) provides customers with an additional way to request assistance prior to travelling. Passenger Assistance app users are able to rate the service received within the app, thus supporting industry in making further improvements for the future.

Additionally, last year we also [launched an information card](#) and other aides for people supported by assistance dogs on trains, where assistance dog owners are able to book a free extra seat in advance on some services for their dog to lie under.

I hope the information above is helpful and reassures you that our plans are designed to improve customer service at our stations. Should you have any further questions on any of the above, please feel free to get in touch with me. I would be happy to arrange a meeting to talk through any further questions.

With best wishes

Jacqueline Starr