



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Transport Focus
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ScotRail Ticket Office Consultation

Dear Transport Focus,

I am responding to this consultation to oppose the proposals to reduce opening hours at 117 ScotRail ticket offices including closing three ticket offices altogether.

I believe these changes will have an unwelcome impact on Scotland's rail users, hitting older customers and customers with disabilities the hardest. The changes proposed do not offer value for money, limiting the services available to customers at a time when customers are expected to accept yet another increase in train fares in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis.

While ticket vending machines have their place in provision of services at ticket offices, they cannot replace the services provided by staff. Research published by Transport Focus in October 2020 found that 'staff play a central role in helping passengers feel safe and secure' and passengers want to see more staff, not less. Ticket office staff can make seat reservations, exchange tickets, answer queries and, crucially, advise on the cheapest travel options available to customers – expertise that is not provided by ticket vending machines.

Ticket office opening hours guarantee a staff presence at stations. With the proposed changes, there would be no guarantee of staff outside of ticket office hours which could have an impact on accessibility for disabled passengers. Studies show that disabled people are less likely to use the railways generally and more likely to use the railways less frequently. Studies also show that disabled people would like to use railways more often than they do but believe there are barriers that prevent them from doing so. Rather than meeting this feedback head on and tackling the barriers that block disabled people from utilising train travel, ScotRail is proposing cuts that will only serve to make trains less accessible, removing vital support in the form of guaranteed staff at stations. Should proposed cuts be successful, ScotRail will be operating a system where disabled customers would be expected to book in advance to secure necessary support boarding trains, an expectation that is not made of customers without disabilities. What assessments have been made of the impact of these cuts on accessibility for disabled customers?

The proposals will further exclude older passengers, disabled passengers, people on lower incomes and people with lower levels of literacy as the expectation of use of digital ticketing options or ticket vending machines may not be an expectation that can be met by all people. According to a University of Cambridge study into digital exclusion, 22% of the UK population lack basic digital skills.



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Only 51% of households earning between £6,000 and £10,000 have access to internet at home. How can these members of the public be expected to make the move to digital ticketing?

There are also questions to answer on the redeployment of existing ticket office staff. ScotRail has insisted that there will be no staff cuts from these changes and instead, staff will be redeployed as a mobile team, using them to, as per the ScotRail ticket office consultation document, 'move around the network as a visible presence at stations and on trains during times when customers need it most.' Does this mean removing the stability of single-location job roles? How would this redeployment work in practice? Are staff being redeployed on a permanent basis to ticket offices already identified as being overwhelmed by demand or would this be on a real-time response basis? These are questions that must be answered in order to argue for increased efficiency without degradation of the working environment for employees affected by these changes.

Ultimately, I believe that these proposals will only serve to put off customers from returning to Scotland's railways as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and look to recovery from its impact. Many rail customers have already been priced off the railways as they cannot afford to use trains, these proposals will lead to even more people not being able to access rail.

In this time of climate crisis, more than ever we need a dependable, affordable, and low carbon form of transport accessible to all with ease. I am deeply concerned that the cuts proposed would achieve the opposite of this. For the reasons set out above, I am calling on Transport Focus to object to ScotRail's proposals to reduce ticket office hours and close three stations.

Kind regards,

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