



Department
for Transport

Councillor Barry Wood
Leader of Cherwell District Council
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From the Minister of State
Huw Merriman MP

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31 July 2023

Dear Councillor Wood,

Thank you for your letter of 27 July to Mark Harper about changes to railway station ticket offices. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this issue.

I appreciate the Council's concerns about the proposed closure of Banbury and Bicester North station ticket offices.

There has been a significant shift in the way passengers purchase tickets, with just one in every ten transactions taking place at a ticket office in 2022/23, down from one in three a decade earlier. An estimated 99 per cent of all transactions made at ticket offices last year could be made at ticket vending machines or online.

Together with the rail 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. We have been clear that no currently staffed station will become unstaffed as a result of this reform.

To propose any changes to the opening hours of a station ticket office, or to propose its closure, train operating companies must follow the longstanding process set out in the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement.

Train operators must consult on any proposed changes, advertising them at the relevant stations and inviting members of the public who wish to comment to write to the relevant passenger body (Transport Focus or London TravelWatch).

Regarding the decision made by train operators to extend the ticket office consultation period by five weeks until 1 September, I am pleased that operators have listened to feedback following continued engagement with stakeholders, including accessibility groups.

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 sent to other operators and passenger groups. We would also expect operators to consider other equality-related needs and make this clear in their consultation.

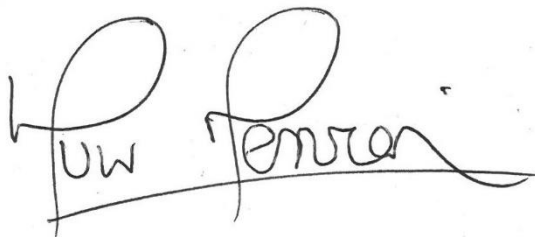
The Passenger Assist service will continue to help disabled passengers, and those with additional needs, to use the rail network with confidence and in safety. Since April 2022, passengers have been able to pre-book their assistance up to two hours in advance of their journey, at any time of the day. This ensures that reasonable adjustments and special assistance can be provided at a wider range of times, with minimal planning ahead required.

The Department recently hosted roundtable discussions with industry and accessibility and transport groups to discuss this matter. We continue to engage with the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee.

To ensure your views are taken into consideration, I would ask you to send your comments on the proposed changes to Transport Focus at the freepost address: RTEH-XAGE-BYKZ, PO Box 5594, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 9PZ. Further information about the proposed changes will be available at stations and on the train operating company's website.

Thank you once again for your letter. I hope this response has been helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Huw Merriman'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

HUW MERRIMAN MP

MINISTER OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT