



**CITY OF DURHAM  
PARISH COUNCIL**

Learning from the past.  
Building for the future.

Transport Focus  
PO Box 5594  
Southend on Sea  
SS1 9PZ

City of Durham Parish Council  
Office 3 D4.01d  
Clayport Library  
8 Millennium Place  
Durham City  
DH1 1WA

Sent via e-mail only to: [TicketOffice.LNER@transportfocus.org.uk](mailto:TicketOffice.LNER@transportfocus.org.uk)

19<sup>th</sup> July 2023

Dear Sirs,

**RE: Consultation of proposed closure of Durham Railway Ticket Office**

The City of Durham Parish Council writes to express its strong objection to the proposed closure of ticket offices at LNER and urges Transport Focus to reject these proposals without delay.

Firstly, the Parish Council wishes to express its disappointment at the lack of engagement or advertising of this consultation as well as the extremely limited timeframe of 3-weeks in which to respond to a consultation. These proposals will have a huge impact on many of the most vulnerable passengers of LNER's services and it is wholly unacceptable to carry out a consultation in this manner. The Parish Council, like many other organisations with a democratic structure and a monthly meeting schedule, have had difficulty in putting this consultation on their regular schedule of meetings.

The Parish Council strongly believes that passengers would no longer have widespread and easy access to the purchase of rail products and best value fares if the ticket offices closures went ahead. Durham has the highest number of passengers from among the stations where LNER propose to close the ticket office and demand for the ticket office in Durham remains high.

No source is given for the *Customer ticket purchasing habits information* in the information booklet<sup>1</sup>. The relevant year is not given, and during the Covid pandemic people were reluctant to buy tickets face-to-face. The actual number of passengers has not been given but from data

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lner.co.uk/globalassets/lner2233-wfr-information-booklet---digital-v13.pdf>

provided by the Office for Rail and Road<sup>2</sup> we learn that in the past four years the numbers using Durham Station were as follows:

Year (April to March)	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Entries and exits	2,822,860	2,732,836	472,580	2,092,432

Numbers are still recovering and it seems probable that Durham station in a “normal” year will have around 2.8 million travellers. This number has been on an upward trend: in 2000/01 1.2 million travellers used Durham Station. Assuming entries and exits are equal, the 1% figure is 14,000 tickets bought at the ticket office, but because we do not know which year or whether the 1% is 0.8% or 1.4% it could be considerably higher.

While the Government says that ‘only’ 12% of tickets are sold at ticket offices, in 2022/23, there were 1.5 billion passenger journeys, which equates to around 180 million journeys being facilitated by ticket offices.

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.

Using TVMs is a one-sided process, there is no interaction between customer and retailer like there is in the ticket office. In contrast, ticket office staff can ask customers questions about their journey and requirements to ensure they get the right ticket for their journey and can offer a range of routes and classes.

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. In addition, the TVMs at Durham railway station are often unreliable and we are aware of anecdotal evidence of the TVMs not working.

The table on the web page <https://www.lner.co.uk/station-changes> lists where the various types of tickets may be bought. Only the Customer Information Centres will sell the full range of tickets and the one nearest to Durham is in Newcastle. A passenger needing to make a journey at short notice will not be able to buy or renew a railcard unless they have a smartphone, which many older people do not possess.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/media/1908/table-1415-time-series-of-passenger-entries-and-exits-and-interchanges-by-station.ods>

Unlike ticket office staff, TVMs do not automatically offer passengers the cheapest ticket for their journey, or clearly explain restrictions on certain fares, such as operator-specific tickets. Indeed, there is no requirement in the DfT's Schedule 17 guidance for TVMs to offer all fares. This risks passenger losing widespread and easy access to a range of products and fares.

Moreover, Durham is unique in the high percentage of overseas students at the university, often whose first language is not English and, although tech savvy, have a poor grasp of the complexities of multiple operators and complex fares structures which means they often rely on the face-to-face detailed explanations of how to navigate these.

Ticket office closures would cause a significant worsening of the facilities and support offered to disabled, deaf and older people. 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. Twenty-two percent of the population had a disability in 2020/2 and since 2002/3 the number of people reporting a disability has increased by 3.8million (+35%).

There has been overwhelming opposition to ticket office closures from disabled people's organisations, including our own local Durham Access for All Group, Disability Rights UK, National Federation of the Blind UK, Transport for All, RNIB, RNID, Guide Dogs, Scope, Thomas Pocklington Trust, Winvisible, Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People and the MS Society.

The presence of staff is vital for ensuring the railway is accessible to all. 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. TVMs are not accessible for many disabled people, the functionality is poor and there is no interaction, unlike in the ticket office. Disabled people are much less likely than non-disabled people to have access to the internet, and therefore online ticketing is not accessible for many.

Ticket offices provide passengers with dedicated advice and expertise about their journey and onward travel. They can tailor their service to meet their customers' needs in a way that TVMs or online ticketing is unable to. At many stations access to facilities such as toilets, disabled toilets, waiting rooms and lifts is dependent on ticket office staff.

Having 'roving' staff, no longer based in the ticket office, not only makes them more difficult to locate, which is particularly problematic for many disabled and older people, but also diminishes their ability to give tailored and one-on-one advice.

Staffed ticket offices have an important role in supporting passenger safety and security. Ticket offices provide a place of safety for both staff and passengers. Requiring staff to undertake transactions out on the platform puts both passengers and themselves in a more vulnerable position.

Ticket office staff are trained and experienced in dealing with difficult incidents, indeed many staff at Durham are trained in first aid (including mental health first aid), and the presence of staff deters abusive and anti-social behaviour.

Ticket office staff provide support and assistance to passengers during times of disruption or in response to emergencies and their role often includes carrying out safety and security checks at the station throughout the day.

As the passenger watchdogs will be aware, there is a consistent theme emerging from research, which is that passengers like and value the presence of staff. Having staffed ticket offices supports passenger perceptions and feelings around safety, and closing ticket offices could lead to passengers no longer feeling safe when travelling.

It is difficult to see how train operators would be able to demonstrate that their proposals would make cost savings, unless there is the intention to reduce staffing. The Parish Council is wholly opposed to any cuts to station staffing and believe any supposed cost savings cannot be used to justify a policy that will worsen passenger service, accessibility, safety, security, and access to rail products.

The Parish Council also believes that ticket office closures will be counterproductive in terms of revenue, as it would disincentivize rail travel for many. Already disabled people are much less likely to travel by rail, and there is the real risk that many people will not be able to travel by rail at all if these closures go ahead. Surely the rail industry cannot afford to lose the circa 180 million annual journeys which are facilitated by the ticket office?

The Parish Council is deeply concerned that the Government and train operators have given no commitment that staffing numbers will not reduce as a result of ticket office closures.

It is also of significant concern that if ticket offices are closed, there would no longer be any statutory regulation of staffing provision at stations and the passenger watchdogs would have no formal role in monitoring this. Undoubtedly this will lead to reduced staffing provision at stations.

Consequently, for the reasons set out above, the Parish Council urges Transport Focus to reject all the proposals to close ticket offices at LNER.

Sincerely,

**Adam Shanley**  
**Clerk to the City of Durham Parish Council**

**CC: Mary Kelly Foy, Local Member of Parliament for the City of Durham constituency**  
**The Rt Hon Mark Harper MP, Secretary of State for Transport**  
**Huw Merriman MP, Minister of State for Rail and HS2**