

# **RDG - RAILWAY TICKET OFFICE CLOSURE PLANS - Summary**

July 2023

The English Train Operating Companies (TOCs), coordinated by the Rail Development Group (RDG) and pushed by Government, are proposing the mass closure of railway ticket/booking offices (BOs) and Travel Centres (TCs) with staff redeployed into roaming floorwalker roles, together with more self-service machines (TVMs). The plans were issued at very short notice, but TOCs have been moving in this direction for some years, so the announcement came as no surprise - except for its suddenness and brutality. If implemented, these plans will have a disastrous impact on the quality of service to railway passengers.

## **Why their arguments are wrong :**

Publicity for the plans is full of words like “modernise”, which is simply a euphemism, meaning “CUTS”. During recent years various new ways of purchasing and obtaining tickets have become available (or at least more widespread) including: Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs), Telesales, Online bookings via websites, Apps, Smartcards and Contactless payment with bank card, working like a smartcard. All of these are promoted as offering more choice and making journeys easier. Whilst there are some advantages (e.g. can help those with language difficulties) there are also many DISADVANTAGES and problems compared to the traditional method via BO/TCs. Now they want to shut most of the BOs, which is not offering a choice – it is DENYING CHOICE.

Sales of these other means of buying tickets have gone up whilst BO sales have declined. This is often presented as if it happened by magic - or at least by customer preference. This is a totally false picture. TOCs have gone to great lengths to drive trade away from their own sales outlets! Passengers have been encouraged, bribed or forced into using other ways of getting tickets.

A few examples :

- \* ALL publicity and promotion for ticket sales, wherever you see it, is aimed at persuading passengers to book online, download the app, use the TVMs... anything but use a BO/TC.
- \* Many special promotions have been run, with tickets available online or in an app only.
- \* Many fares have been offered cheaper online than they can be bought over the counter - mainly "Advance" train-specific tickets. Often these tickets are available for purchase online on the day of travel but only for advance bookings over the counter. This amounts to BRIBERY.
- \* Many railcards can be bought at stations but some are offered online only (3 year railcards, 26-30 railcards). This discriminates against those who do not have internet access, particularly older people.
- \* M-Card (West Yorkshire zonal season ticket) sales were taken away from BOs.
- \* SPLIT TICKETING is massively complicated and adds to the already hideous complexity of the railway fares structure, but it can save you money. Various websites offer this facility. BO/TC staff are willing to help passengers by doing the same, but the software to easily search for all options has not been provided for BO/TC staff.
- \* There is no attempt to promote the use of BO/TCs - or even to mention their existence.

## **Advantages of Ticket Offices :**

- \* You know just where to find them and don't have to search around the station - unlike roving staff.
- \* They are a “one-stop shop” for information, assistance, tickets and anything you need for a rail journey.
- \* Staff are trained and familiar with the complexities of the railway ticketing system, so can offer expert advice to help passengers find the best deals, and avoid various pitfalls with fares.
- \* No hidden extras such as booking fees and credit card payment fees (unlike some websites/apps)
- \* Make special arrangements to help disabled/less mobile passengers.
- \* For collection of prepaid tickets they are more versatile than TVMs (to which all websites point you)
- \* They can do anything that a TVM can - usually more easily, quickly and reliably.

## **Problems with TVMs :**

- \* Some ticket types, discounts and services not available (see separate list)
- \* Very difficult or impossible to use for people with restricted mobility or vision.
- \* Complicated, often difficult and slow to navigate, leading to many wrong tickets bought.
- \* They only sell tickets - no information about train running (you need to look elsewhere for that)
- \* Unreliable.
- \* Some “improvements” to TVMs are proposed to counter the loss of ticket offices. These can only make them even more complicated, confusing, slow and unreliable than they already are.

### **Tickets and services you can get at a Ticket Office, but not at a TVM :**

- \* Rover & Ranger tickets
- \* Multi-modal tickets (e.g. day rovers)
- \* Railcards
- \* Season tickets (longer periods - monthly to annual)
- \* Seat reservations (when not included as an integral part of a ticket)
- \* Tickets to "London International" – if connecting with Eurostar
- \* Platform tickets (at stations with ticket barriers)
- \* Excess fares for extensions, upgrades, changes of route etc.
- \* Some discounted fares, including discounts for disabled passengers with no railcard
- \* Split payment (part card, part cash)
- \* Payment by travel warrant
- \* Transfer of funds between stations to rescue stranded passengers
- \* Refunds on unused/part-used tickets
- \* Collect prepaid tickets if there is a discrepancy with the collection code/bank card, or TVM printer problem

### **Problems with Apps and mobile tickets :**

- \* You often don't know what you're buying - you see a journey & price but not the conditions that go with that fare, often leading to problems later
- \* Frequent problems downloading tickets and apps
- \* Tickets downloaded to the wrong mobile phone/other device cannot be transferred
- \* Flat battery means the ticket dies along with the mobile phone
- \* Changes to travel plans requiring changes to the ticket are impossible with this ticket format
- \* Tickets in app for multiple passengers who now want to travel separately - cannot be split
- \* If you have any of these problems, you can ask at the ticket office. They can advise, but they probably can't help because it was bought from a different company (which is often difficult or impossible to contact)
- \* Many tickets/services listed above (not available on TVMs) are also not available on apps

### **Discrimination**

- \* Assistance for DISABLED PASSENGERS is given some attention in the proposals, which try to present them as an improvement. In fact it will be the exact opposite. The process for arranging assistance involves collecting a considerable amount of information about the journey and the exact requirements for the type of assistance, then making sure this information goes to the right places. This can only be done at a desk or counter - exactly the places that are proposed for abolition.
- \* Discounted fares are available for disabled passengers with railcards. Some discounts are also available for blind or wheelchair-bound passengers without railcards. These fares are available only from a BO/TC - not in TVMs - it would cause great confusion if they were added to TVMs. Add this to the fact that TVMs are usually difficult or impossible to use for many people with disabilities - the proposals represent DISCRIMINATION against disabled passengers. The TOCs are facing at least 2 legal actions over this issue (source: DPAC)
- \* The proposals also represent DISCRIMINATION against older people - maybe not quite to the same extent as disabled, but still significant - in general they are less likely to have access to the internet.

### **Roaming "Customer Host"/Floorwalker staff cannot adequately replace Ticket Offices**

- \* RDG/TOC answer to all these problems : "Yes but staff will still be on hand to help"... OH NO THEY WON'T! Many staff will be moved out of the BO onto the stations as floorwalkers or "Customer Hosts" but there will be cuts, and the result will be a lot of stations effectively (or actually) unstaffed.
- \* Floorwalkers and TVMs are useful IN ADDITION to a BO/TC - NOT as replacement for it. In the absence of a BO/TC, they are less able or totally unable to do significant parts of the job. Very often the best thing they can do is point passengers towards the BO, where all information and resources needed to do the job are ready at hand, for the help they need. This is compounded by the general disappearance of a lot of useful information (timetables etc.) from display around stations.
- \* "Putting staff closer to passengers" is a mantra in these proposals - is over a desk/ticket window not close enough? If you have a problem and want to ask somebody about it, is it more convenient to search the whole station than go straight to where you know there are staff - i.e. the BO/TC??
- \* With no ticket offices, where will passengers go to change their tickets if they are wrong - or ask for refunds of the fare if not using the tickets?
- \* If BO/TCs shut down, problems will be so massive that we will want them back. It will cost far more to reopen than to keep them as they are.