



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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London TravelWatch  
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19 July 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write in response to the ongoing consultation on ticket office closures. While I will focus my comments on the three stations within my constituency included in this initial phase of the consultation – Bickley, Bromley North and Sundridge Park, as well as Shortlands, which borders Bromley and Chislehurst and many residents use - the points contained are of relevance regardless of location and will, no doubt, be raised again when other stations are consulted on later this year.

Understandably, these proposals have generated significant concern locally. Station staff, including those in ticket offices, are highly valued members of their respective communities who many of us who travel on the railway have got to know well over the years. Although I suspect the overwhelming majority of passengers would appreciate the need for ticketing systems to evolve with changes in purchasing trends, ticket office closures must not act as a precursor to job losses.

As the consultation rightly acknowledges, the staff at our local stations help passengers with a range of requirements, from boarding trains and helping those with mobility issues to assisting customers with itinerary planning and ticket purchases. I do not, therefore, have any fundamental objection to staff being moved out on to platforms and concourses to continue offering that vital support, as long as they do, indeed, remain on site to provide assistance – including with ticketing – rather than being redeployed elsewhere. Ultimately, all stations, no matter their size or the frequency of departures, should remain sufficiently staffed to assist passengers throughout the duration of their operating hours.

Great strides have been taken in recent years to make the rail network more accessible, but I am particularly concerned that these proposals, if not properly managed, will mark a significant step backwards. Frankly, step-free access, handrails and tactile paving will count for little if those with mobility issues are deterred from travelling due to concerns, perceived or real, that they will not receive the face-to-face support they need once at the station. That risk will be compounded at stations, like Sundridge Park, where there is not step-free access to both platforms.

Equally, elderly passengers and individuals with disabilities may find it challenging to purchase tickets online or at a machine, especially when embarking on a more complex journey with multiple changes. I do not think the impact assessments for each individual station give sufficient weight to that consideration, particularly in a borough like Bromley





where there is a higher proportion of elderly residents. The reassuring presence of station staff to many lone and female passengers, especially late at night, should also not be underestimated.

Frequently, machines do not accept cash, and if these proposals are to be taken forward, it is imperative that information is made more readily available on the different fares that are available, their cost, and the restrictions each option might entail.

It is welcome that Sundridge Park will be restaffed under the proposals, although this necessary improvement should not be dependent on a remodelling of ticket offices. Were the proposals to be taken forward, I believe it is sensible that Bromley South would become one of fourteen Travel Centres across Southeastern's network. However, given its very small ticket hall relative to a station of its size and popularity, I would be interested to know whether any assessment has been undertaken to ascertain whether the station can accommodate the increase in footfall these proposals may lead to.

Finally, I wish to raise a number of concerns regarding the consultation process itself. From what I understand, at the time of writing, London TravelWatch has received over 100,000 responses. There is considerable interest in these proposals and I can see no justification for such an exceptionally short consultation window of just three weeks.

Many of those who will potentially be impacted to the greatest extent by the proposed changes - including elderly residents and individuals with physical and learning disabilities - may be digitally excluded. Commuting on the network every day, I have seen very few adverts promoting the consultation at either stations or on trains, and no mention on whether it is available in hardcopy or different formats, including, for example, plain text and Easy Read. The risk that a large number of rail users are excluded from taking part in this exercise is very real and unacceptably high.

I would be grateful if the issues I have raised can be actively considered by London TravelWatch, Southeastern and the Department for Transport, with lessons learnt before the second phase of the consultation is initiated. For completeness, I will be sending copies of this letter to the Rail Minister, Huw Merriman, and the Managing Director of Southeastern, Steve White.

Yours faithfully,

**Sir Bob Neill MP**

cc. Huw Merriman, Minister of State, Department for Transport  
Steve White, Managing Director, Southeastern