



Abena Oppong-Asare MP

Member of Parliament for Erith and Thamesmead

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Mark Harper
Secretary of State for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

6th July 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Closure of Rail Ticket Offices in England

I am writing to express my concern over plans to close rail ticket offices in my constituency.

On the 5th July, the Rail Delivery Group confirmed plans to move staff out of ticket offices and into stations, with the consultation on these significant changes to last just 21 days¹.

That news will be deeply worrying to my elderly and disabled constituents, the hundreds of thousands of people employed in our rail industry, the staff employed in my own constituency, and all those who rely on the support and advice provided by staff in ticket offices.

You may know that on Thursday 1st December last year Minister Merriman, Steve White, Managing Director at Southeastern, and I met to discuss the new Southeastern Timetable, that came into force late last year. In that meeting, I raised if there were any upcoming plans to close rail ticket offices. The answer was no. Can I ask how long you have been looking into these plans of ticket office closures on the Southeastern line?

My constituents in Erith and Thamesmead will be very concerned about the proposed ticket office closures at Belvedere and Erith Stations. Given the fact that many of my constituents relying on ticket offices will be elderly and disabled rail users that may otherwise struggle to use digital alternatives, it is vital that you offer assurances that those rail users will still have access to the support they need to use our rail network with confidence.

As you are aware, one in nine tickets are still sold at physical ticket offices². That represents over 150 million of the 1.4 billion rail journeys recorded over the past year³.

Research by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), for instance, has found that only 3% of people with sight loss said they could use a ticket vending machine without problems and 58% said it was impossible⁴.

¹ <https://media.raildeliverygroup.com/news/proposals-to-update-the-railway-for-how-passengers-use-it-today>

² <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-06-27/191337>

³ <https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/usage/passenger-rail-usage/>

⁴ <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/ticket-office-closures-announced-stations-england-b1092299.html>

Given those serious concerns for my constituents, I would appreciate answers to the following questions:

- What will happen to the rail staff currently deployed in rail ticket offices in my constituency of Erith and Thamesmead?
- What will the impact be on their job security?
- What the impact of ticket office closures will be on the safety and accessibility of the rail network for disabled and elderly passengers?
- When will digital and pay as you go ticketing technology be available across the whole of the rail network?

Passengers in my constituency are already suffering due to the chaos on our railways. They should not have to face any further disruptions to their travel plans due to your poor management of our rail networks.

Under this Government, private operators have been allowed to profit whilst cancellations have reached record highs⁵, basic services like Wi-Fi are at risk of being taken away⁶, plans to bring forward legislation to reform services have been scrapped⁷ and now ticket offices are facing closures without thought for the vulnerable users that rely on them.

Our rail network is already failing passengers in my constituency and is in desperate need of reform. But the people of this country have lost confidence in your Government to deliver a rail network that works for passengers.

Finally, following my previous correspondence regarding the new Southeastern Timetable, I asked if a review was going to take place to evaluate the impact of the timetable changes. At the time the Minister and Steve White emphasised that upcoming rail strikes may possibly reduce the accuracy and ability to do this review. Can you please provide an update on whether this review has taken place, what the outcome was and whether there has been any discussions about changing the timetable following this evaluation?

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



ABENA OPPONG-ASARE MP
Member of Parliament for Erith and Thamesmead

⁵ <https://www.cityam.com/rail-cancellations-swell-as-figures-reveal-2022-23-worst-year-on-record/>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/may/22/rail-passengers-in-england-could-lose-wifi-access-amid-cost-cuts>

⁷ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/rishi-sunak-boris-johnson-great-british-railways-rmnm23grx>