



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Response to the Public Consultation on Train Station Ticket Offices

1. Background

- 1.1. I am responding to this consultation on behalf of those I represent across Banbury, Bicester and the surrounding villages.
- 1.2. My Banbury constituency includes three manned stations operated by Chiltern Railways: Banbury, Bicester North and Bicester Village. We also have the unmanned Heyford station, operated by Great Western Railways.
- 1.3. Some constituents are already familiar with the arrangements planned in the consultation, given that Bicester Village operates under the customer focused station model.
- 1.4. Since the launch of the consultation, I have been contacted by a number of constituents who have concerns about the proposals for Banbury and Bicester North stations. Those who fear they will be adversely affected include the elderly and people living with a disability. Broadly speaking, their concerns can be grouped into the following three categories.

2. Staffing

- 2.1. My constituents are concerned that these proposals will lead to an overall reduction in staff numbers in these stations. During the consultation process, Chiltern Railways have stated that their proposals will result in 19 fewer positions across their network. However, it is not clear where these reductions will be made.
- 2.2. I have received no assurances that there will be a constant staff presence on station concourses during the current operating hours of ticket offices. While it is proposed that there will be the same number of staff operating within a station, my constituents fear that, in practice, staff may be needed for tasks elsewhere which would take them away from assisting passengers with purchasing tickets.

3. Flexibility

- 3.1. The proposals will lead to a reduction in the number of options available to passengers when purchasing tickets. Chiltern propose that customers should purchase travel online or use Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) in stations if this is not possible.



However, not all ticket types are available through TVMs. Those passengers affected will rely on a staff member with their own device to help them with their ticket purchase. This is concerning given that no guarantees are yet to be given about staffing arrangements at specific stations.

3.2. The presence of TVMs in stations for those who cannot purchase their tickets online is not without its challenges. Chiltern have indicated that there are no current proposals to install additional TVMs in stations, despite the increased use and pressure on reliability. Constituents have also highlighted that not all machines currently accept cash, again reducing flexibility for passengers.

4. Accessibility

4.1. My constituents are concerned that these proposals will reduce the accessibility of rail travel as a whole. A large proportion of rail passengers are commuters purchasing the same ticket types. Yet, my constituents tell me that they regularly seek assistance from ticket office staff in planning their journeys and navigating a complicated and often counter-intuitive range of ticket options.

4.2. Ticket offices provide a fixed base for staff. For elderly or disabled passengers, or those for whom English is not their first language, a friendly face in a familiar location can provide invaluable assistance with their travel. Constituents are therefore concerned by the loss of a permanent base for staff, with no guarantee that they will be present on concourses during manned hours.

While efforts to modernise our railways and make them more efficient should be welcomed, we must not allow the accessibility of rail travel to be diminished in the process. Despite ticket offices only being responsible for 12 per cent of all current ticket sales, the services which they provide to passengers who need them should not be underestimated. Ultimately, we must ensure that any proposals remove barriers to rail travel, rather than create them.

I trust that my constituents' concerns will be considered fully as the proposals for our stations are assessed.

Rt Hon Victoria Prentis KC MP
1 September 2023