

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: [Accessible transport: legal obligations - rail ticket office closures](#), HC 580

Wednesday 13 September 2023

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Members present: Iain Stewart (Chair); Jack Brereton; Sara Britcliffe; Paul Howell; Karl McCartney; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith.

Questions 171–255

Witnesses

[III](#): Richard Allan, Managing Director, Chiltern Railways; David Horne, Managing Director, LNER; Andy Mellors, Managing Director, Avanti; and Simon Moorhead, Chief Information Officer, Railway Delivery Group.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Richard Allan, David Horne, Andy Mellors and Simon Moorhead.

Chair: Before we introduce our third panel, do you wish to declare an interest, Karl?

Karl McCartney: I declare an interest in that I know David Horne quite well.

Q171 **Chair:** Thank you. Welcome to our third and final panel today. Will each of the witnesses give their name and organisation, please.

Richard Allan: Good morning. I am Richard Allan, managing director of Chiltern Railways.

David Horne: Good morning. I am David Horne, managing director of LNER.

Andy Mellors: Good morning. I am Andy Mellors, managing director of Avanti West Coast.

Simon Moorhead: Good morning. I am Simon Moorhead. I am the chief information officer at the Rail Delivery Group.

Q172 **Chair:** Thank you for your time this morning. Let me start with the basic question that we are considering today. Why do you wish to close the vast majority of ticket offices?

Richard Allan: We have heard today some examples of what Chiltern operates at stations like Bicester Village, Oxford Parkway and Aylesbury, which is an open-plan environment out from behind the glass. Our proposal is to extend that principle at the rest of our staffed stations. We are talking about 20 stations in total, so keeping the same hours of staffing at the moment but taking colleagues out from behind the glass into a multi-skilled, multi-purpose role that is flexible and available, and doing that on the same principles that we already have at several stations which we have operated successfully for several years.

David Horne: It is really important that we look to modernise our railway to serve the needs of current and future customers. I actually started my career working in ticket offices, about 30 years ago. At that time everybody bought their ticket through ticket offices because the internet did not exist.

At that time, very few people had accessibility requirements on the railway. I do not think the railway was as accessible as it is today. What we see today is, of course, many more people buying their tickets online and through ticket vending machines. We also see many more people who have accessibility requirements and a need for assistance from staff when they travel by train.



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It is about shifting how staff are utilised on the railway so that, instead of being under-utilised in ticket offices, we are able to bring them out from behind the glass, close to the customer, to help customers whether they have accessibility needs or not.

Andy Mellors: I echo what colleagues have already said in terms of the shift in customer behaviour and buying habits, not just since the railways were privatised and the ticketing and settlement agreement was put in place 30 years ago, but in how that trend has been exacerbated since the pandemic. This is actually about making sure that we have greater visibility of our staff and better support for customers, creating a more visible and reassuring presence.

Simon Moorhead: I certainly echo the point that we are looking to put our staff where our customers need them, making sure that they are in place to be able to support customers when they need their help. Secondly, it represents a generational shift in the way our customers buy their tickets. We see that through the data that we get every day, with more and more people shifting to digital and to tap in, tap out for many more of our services.

The final thing that has not quite come up yet is that we have to have regard to the cost of running the industry and the support that the Government currently give the rail industry. The Government are currently giving £10 million a day to subsidise the railway. We want to get back to a place where we attract more people on to rail and make sure that we can have the farepayer properly reflecting the cost of rail.

Q173 **Chair:** I understand the rationale for making these sorts of changes. Nothing stays static in life, whether it is banks or supermarkets; they all innovate new ways. I am keen to know why right now, and why in such a comprehensive way, given that there are other reforms happening in the rail industry? There is the move to GBR and the ticketing reform. Why does it all have to be done at once in every operator, when perhaps it would be more sensible to do it on an organic basis individually with each operator?

Richard Allan: From my perspective, the pandemic has delayed change. The stations we talked about earlier were adapted or built several years ago. We lost two or three years of development during covid, so we are trying to catch up. Certainly, I am keen to improve that experience and to change the facilities for customers, and for colleagues. Some of our stations are a bit tired. They need some investment. As part of that, we would like to invest in the physical space to improve the retailing. We are going to replace all the purchase machines that you heard about earlier. We are doing that in the course of this year. There are things that we need to do, and this seems a good opportunity to change how we deploy our colleagues on our stations at the same time as we look to improve the physical space and the retailing. We recognise that that takes some years to get through. We have a funding challenge, as Simon explained.



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We need to start on that thinking now so that we can make the railway more self-funding and create the space for further investment.

David Horne: To build on what Mr Allan said, when you look at the figures, I would point to the fact that over the course of the pandemic years we saw an even greater switch to online purchasing than there was just before the pandemic. There was also an increase in the number of passengers travelling who require assistance.

We have to respond to that change. We all know, in our own lives, how purchasing by using cards rather than cash has changed through the pandemic, as we were encouraged to use contactless forms of payment. The industry has already seen those changes coming through, and now is the right time to bring forward these changes so that we modernise our industry and it is fit for the future.

Andy Mellors: From an Avanti West Coast perspective, I can point to how we have progressively evolved our retailing arrangements in recent years. Somewhere like Birmingham International is open plan; staff are available to sell tickets and support customers using ticket vending machines. We have made significant investment in our ticket vending machines over the past four or five years, such that the overwhelming majority of products are actually available on them. It is a continual evolution that has been happening in response to changes in customer demand and requirements.

Q174 **Chair:** Before you come in, Simon, representing the RDG as the umbrella group, I am still really keen to know why this is happening so comprehensively at once across the industry. Would it not be more sensible, as we heard from Anthony Smith in the previous panel, to pilot some innovations and changes to see how they bed down, and then learn from that before making wider reforms? There is a lot of public concern that this is just happening across the board for, as you perhaps alluded to, purely cost reasons.

Simon Moorhead: Cost is a part of it, but primarily we are following the needs and demands of our customers. This year, around 80% of the tickets that have been issued were either bought online through digital channels or were with customers tapping in and tapping out from gatelines or machines on platforms. With 80% of our customers not going anywhere near a ticket office, only about 7% of tickets are issued from ticket offices through this year and about 10% are issued at ticket vending machines.

The customer trends have been very clear over recent years. Part of our dilemma is that, if we pilot and take this piece by piece, what we find very often in the rail industry is that there are lots of reasons not to do things. We are going ahead with this as one of the proposals and as part of not only workforce reform but reform to our fares and ticketing systems, to try to make fares simpler for customers. There is a whole set of parallel activities that we are looking at, alongside these ticket office



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proposals, to make sure that we make it easier for customers to buy the tickets they need.

Q175 **Chair:** I have a couple of supplementaries. First, you say you are listening to your customers. Yes, there are lots of people—I am one of them—who rarely use a ticket office. I buy online or at a machine. But there is a minority who need it. The analogy was given by my colleague of those who do not want to use the scan-and-go at the supermarket but want to go through the normal checkout. There are people who do not have access online and people who have access needs. There are tourists who do not understand the rail system. Are you listening to them?

Simon Moorhead: Absolutely. We are listening to our customers through this consultation process. We think it is actually a better offer for those customers to have our staff moving out from behind the ticket offices into a place where they can engage with those customers and understand their needs more directly through a direct conversation with them.

Q176 **Chair:** We will dig into some of these issues, but there is one final question from me at this point. Has this proposal genuinely come from the industry, or have you been asked by Government to initiate it?

Simon Moorhead: I think there is consensus that there is a need for reform. The Government agree with that with their plan for rail. The industry agrees with it. I think our staff agree and support the need for reform as well. The unions do as well, so there is consensus about the need for reform. These proposals are ones that have come from industry as a way of, again, making sure we can follow our customers' needs when they need help from our staff, and making sure that we can hit some of the other targets that we have across the industry.

Q177 **Chair:** I appreciate that the proposals come from you, but were you asked by Government to bring them forward?

Simon Moorhead: We are always asked to manage the costs of the industry tightly under the current contracts across the industry. We are also absolutely listening to the needs of our customers, and we think these proposals do both.

Q178 **Karl McCartney:** I want to come straight back to Richard Allan. You have used the example of both Bicester and Oxford on your line. I would say they are outliers. How many of the other stations on your line enjoy the levels of customer service that you provide at those two stations, which respectively have a shopping village and a tremendous number of outward visitors—that is, inward tourists?

Richard Allan: They are new-build stations, built in the mid-2010s, but we have also converted an existing traditional station building at Aylesbury. That does not have a glass window. We serve customers there in an open-plan environment, where staff are free to walk around the



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station. We want to take that principle and that experience and adopt it on our other network stations.

Q179 **Karl McCartney:** How many other stations on your line experience the same levels of customer service or opportunity—your normal daily passengers or those who are perhaps infrequent travellers—as the people who visit, wherever they are from?

Richard Allan: There are 23 staffed stations. The two that I have described with a new open-plan environment were purpose-built. If that is a model or principle to follow, we have two of them. We also have a hybrid model at Aylesbury, which converted and adapted an existing interior environment in a traditional building. The rest are fairly traditional, where you have colleagues behind a glass with one, two or three windows available at different times of the day.

Q180 **Karl McCartney:** One of the other panel members talked about reform. You would accept reform, obviously, but would you accept regulation to ensure that stations that currently have levels of customer service with people in a ticket office had to have the same number of man hours every week or every month serving customers, your passengers, on the concourse? Would you accept that regulation? It is a yes or no answer. I will put you on the spot: yes or no answer. Don't be a politician. Yes or no answer.

Richard Allan: No, I am going to explain my thinking, and then I will give you an answer. I would like the ability to reflect demand and, where we change our service specification, if we change our timetable and we have different services starting earlier or later, how we deploy our people. I would like, as the MD, the flexibility to deploy the people who work at Chiltern in a way that, with consultation with trade union reps, best meets the needs of customers. In terms of Bicester Village and Oxford Parkway, we are not proposing to change how we deploy staff there because that works.

Q181 **Karl McCartney:** That is a necessity because you have the number of people. I am thinking of the rest of your passengers—

Richard Allan: I have a substantial amount of—

Karl McCartney: —who commute and who would like to have the same levels of service.

Richard Allan: We have substantial regulation, as you heard from Stephanie. In my case, we have a contract of 500 pages with the Department for Transport. We have a lot of things that we need to comply with. One of the things that we are happy to talk about with the DfT is to say, "We've got 900 people. This is how we are deploying them. This is how we intend to serve customers at those stations." The right thing to do is to serve those customers in the way that I have described.

Q182 **Karl McCartney:** You understand the concerns of the previous panel



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members this morning. Simon, you said you have accepted reform. Would you accept, yes or no, regulation being put in place to say that you have to have the same number of staff hours, customer facing?

Simon Moorhead: The point about regulation and schedule 17 is really about ticket sales and ticket offices. It only refers tangentially to staff numbers and staff members. We think the proposals that we have will both maintain and improve the interaction that our staff have with customers. We do not think that is really guided by schedule 17. We are happy to make the commitment that these proposals improve our interaction with staff.

Q183 **Karl McCartney:** Mr Mellors, what do you say?

Andy Mellors: I think it is important, as Richard outlined, that we have the flexibility to make these changes in response not just to changes in customer behaviour but to the regular changes that happen in respect of the timetable. Ultimately, we want to grow our railway back. As has already been said, we are £10 million a day more dependent on the taxpayer now as an industry than we were. We need to get the industry back to being—

Q184 **Karl McCartney:** We all get that, but would you accept some regulation on making sure that customers saw staff?

Andy Mellors: The devil is in the detail.

Karl McCartney: As always.

Andy Mellors: The industry needs to be responsive to customer needs. I guess there is a materiality sense as well in how you draw the line with those sorts of numbers.

Q185 **Karl McCartney:** David, I will give you the opportunity to answer as well before I hand back to the Chairman.

David Horne: In practice it is not an issue. At LNER our plans will always be to staff our stations from first train to last train. We need that for accessibility needs, for operational needs and for security needs. Having additional regulation will not make a difference to what we do at a practical level at our stations.

Q186 **Gavin Newlands:** During an urgent question before the summer recess, I expressed concern about consistency, as did many Members. A letter that I have just received from the Minister, which is a bland letter with not a lot in it—as a lot of Ministers' letters are—says that train operators are responsible for setting out how to ensure sufficient access to ticketing services at their stations.

Looking at LNER and Avanti, the figures on the LNER website state that at Edinburgh Waverley and London King's Cross only 6% of ticket sales are currently at a ticket office. With Avanti, the only figure I can get is 12% from ticket offices. Would either of you dispute the figures of 6% for LNER or 12% for Avanti?



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Andy Mellors: I would say that on our website it is very clear, on a station-by-station basis, what the sales are through ticket offices. At Glasgow Central it is 1% of journeys.

Q187 **Gavin Newlands:** It is 1% at Glasgow Central.

Andy Mellors: Yes, indeed.

Q188 **Gavin Newlands:** That doesn't explain the queues that I see at Glasgow Central ticket office on a regular basis. Would you dispute that there are queues at the Glasgow Central ticket office?

Andy Mellors: There are certainly people interacting with our staff in the ticket office at Glasgow Central, but the thrust of our proposals is to make sure that we have staff more readily visible and accessible to customers when they arrive at the station. Many customers who go to the ticket office go there with queries that can be more readily answered by staff on the concourse. That is what we are proposing to do.

Q189 **Gavin Newlands:** As has come up in a previous session, how do you register or count how many people currently come up to the ticket office with queries, as opposed to folk who are buying tickets?

Andy Mellors: While we measure transactions in terms of sales, I am not aware of any mechanism to capture other queries. None the less, our teams on the ground have great insight into what is actually happening. I have personally spent time with ticket office colleagues and seen that quite a significant proportion of interactions at the ticket office counter or from behind the window are actually in relation to queries for tickets that have already been sold.

Q190 **Gavin Newlands:** I would be keen to engage further with you on your figures for Glasgow Central and interrogate them following the Committee this morning. What changes to your staffing complement do you envisage at Glasgow Central if these changes go ahead as planned?

Andy Mellors: As David just said for LNER, we staff stations from first train to last train. Avanti West Coast is the station operator at 16 stations and also lead retailer to a further four stations which are managed by Network Rail. That includes Glasgow Central. In our consultation, we have very clearly set out that we intend to continue to provide a staffing presence from first train to last train, to support customers and to support their accessibility needs.

Q191 **Gavin Newlands:** How many jobs will be lost at Glasgow Central? What percentage of current staffing hours will be lost at Glasgow Central?

Andy Mellors: We are part of a live consultation. It is a meaningful consultation. As Anthony said earlier, it is not a done deal. The industry and individual operators are listening to feedback. At the moment, we have an outline position which we have provided to our trade unions, as we are legally obliged to do under the relevant legislation. Clearly, the end position will depend on how the consultation is concluded.



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Q192 **Gavin Newlands:** I appreciate that. You have just stated that you have current plans. You will be aware of the consultation in Scotland for the ScotRail ticket offices, which fundamentally changed the proposals as a result, so there may well be changes. However, you have a current plan, so how many jobs will be lost at Glasgow Central if your plans go ahead?

Andy Mellors: On the staffing hours—I will come to the details—we are not proposing any reduction there at all. The station will be staffed from 4 o'clock in the morning until half past midnight. We are only one of several organisations that have staff there.

Q193 **Gavin Newlands:** I appreciate that. So there will be staff there, but how many staff will be there compared to the current staffing levels?

Andy Mellors: We have about 27 staff at the moment at Glasgow Central. These proposals, if they were enacted in full as we have proposed, would reduce that number by about nine or 10.

Q194 **Gavin Newlands:** Nine or 10.

Andy Mellors: But I must stress that we are only one of the organisations that provides customer support and presence at that station.

Q195 **Gavin Newlands:** I appreciate that. I am grateful for the answer. I will come to LNER. You are currently planning to keep your ticket office open.

David Horne: Yes.

Q196 **Gavin Newlands:** These are both extremely similar services in the central belt of Scotland. There are additional services, but they are largely from Edinburgh Waverley to London and from Glasgow Central to Euston. Why is there a different approach? I would also ask, in terms of jobs, how many jobs you expect to lose in Edinburgh despite keeping a ticket office open? How many jobs do you expect to go? And why a different approach?

David Horne: First of all, in response to the number of staff, I do not have the precise number for Edinburgh. I will come back to you afterwards in writing, if I can.

I will take you through the process that we followed at LNER. We have 13 stations where we have a ticket office that we manage. Our plans are to keep six of those open and to move the staff at seven of them from behind the glass on to the concourse. What we did, in deciding to make changes where we have consulted, was to look at the ticket sales at each station. We looked at the demographics as to who was using each of those stations, how many customers used the ticket machines and things like that. We assessed it on that basis.

Stations such as Edinburgh Waverley, York or London King's Cross are characterised by the high number of tourists who use them, for example, as well as the people who currently use the ticket office for specific



needs. We crunched all of that data through, considered what our future customers needed and built our proposals around that. We will be making changes at Edinburgh Waverley station. We are looking to change the footprint of the travel centre so that we can provide new customer features, such as a passenger assistance lounge so that passengers who have booked assistance have somewhere comfortable to wait. That is the process that we have followed.

Q197 Gavin Newlands: Is Andy wrong to close the ticket office at Glasgow Central? Would you make the same decision?

David Horne: As you will be aware, there are a couple of ticket offices at Glasgow Central station. There is also a ticket office at Glasgow Queen Street. I am sure that Andy and his team have taken into account their customers' needs in the future. They are completely different routes serving different communities. Each train operator is able to assess the needs of their customers for themselves, and clearly that is what Andy has done and that is what we have done at LNER.

Q198 Gavin Newlands: I wasn't expecting you to throw Andy under the bus. I would appreciate it if you could both write to the Committee giving us some more detail on the ticket sales at Edinburgh and Glasgow so that we can compare and contrast the approaches. That would be useful.

Back to the 12% figure. We have heard this many times. Obviously, Glasgow Central seems to be incredible at 1%, but 12% is the average of tickets now bought at ticket offices. What do the operators know about the characteristics of the customers who are responsible for that 12%?

Richard Allan: In terms of our overall transaction level, the number of journeys that are being retailed at the ticket office has halved in the last three years. It is now down to about 18% of journeys.

Q199 Gavin Newlands: Eighteen per cent.?

Richard Allan: Eighteen per cent. of journeys are retailed at the ticket offices. That is half of what it was three years ago. Depending on the level of investment that different companies have had, that journey has been either accelerated or is playing a bit of catch-up. Our ability to retail through other means will need a bit of investment and to upgrade the TVMs, as we heard earlier. We are replacing the purchase machines in the course of this year.

We have around about 5% of transactions through cash. The rest are non-cash transactions across all the journeys bought on Chiltern. We are very keen to make sure that we have complementary, parallel progress of investing in the retail, but in that transition period we also have the devices on which we retail at our ticket offices. They are portable and we will still have them available to retail existing products that you can buy today over the ticket office counter when we come out from behind the glass, so that we are satisfying current needs and current products as we transition and invest in the retail.



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Q200 **Gavin Newlands:** That is useful because it answers my next question. The question that you didn't pick up was, when it comes to Chiltern, what are the characteristics of the 18% of people who are buying tickets from the ticket office? Is it mainly elderly people? Is it disabled people? What are the characteristics? Have you been able to measure who is buying tickets?

Richard Allan: I need to come back to you on that specific breakdown, but I can give you examples. Even yesterday, I was at High Wycombe ticket office, looking at the number of people buying straightforward transactions and looking for information. Some of the journeys could easily have been bought on the machine and were bought on the machine. It would vary by location. I will come back to you with that breakdown. I don't have that to hand.

Q201 **Gavin Newlands:** On that question, David, do you have a figure for LNER?

David Horne: Yes. I will characterise it rather than give you specific figures. I think there is a group of people who use ticket offices who could use other modes of purchasing tickets, but they need help and human interaction, frankly, because our ticket structure in the UK is probably a bit too complicated.

Q202 **Gavin Newlands:** We can all agree on that.

David Horne: Indeed. People need reassurance from a member of staff. That is one of the things that we will be looking to preserve through the changes. It is just the case that instead of the member of staff being behind a pane of glass and behind a counter, they will be in front of that pane of glass and able to help the customer on a more personal basis.

Yes, certainly from the customers I have spoken to, elderly customers are concerned about these changes. That is probably reflected in the range of consultation responses that there have been. We have to think about that. We have to take that into account in designing what we do, going forward. As a train operator at LNER—I am sure I speak for my colleagues—we are taking on board the feedback from customers. We will be reviewing the responses alongside Transport Focus so that we get it right for people.

Q203 **Gavin Newlands:** Andy, do you have any figures for the 1% at Glasgow Central but 12% elsewhere?

Andy Mellors: Across our 20 locations, where we either run the stations ourselves or are the lead retailer in the Network Rail managed stations, it is on average 6%. Some stations are more than that, but our review of the tickets that are sold through the ticket office suggests that the overwhelming majority of tickets—something like 99%—could be available through other means.



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As David said, part of these proposals for making our staff more visible and supporting customers when they arrive at the station will enable those tickets to be sold, either through the TVMs or through the retailing equipment that the specialist people will have on the concourse.

Q204 Gavin Newlands: I would say yes, if you are moving about the concourse, but if you are removing 40% or thereabouts of the workforce, visibility is certainly diluted, to say the least. Further to that question, do all three of you have figures for the total number of tickets that are sold each week through your current ticket offices, in terms of the total number of transactions?

Richard Allan: In terms of journeys on Chiltern this year, we are forecasting about 22 million or 23 million in terms of the journey, and taking a rough rule of thumb, it is 18%. Some of those journeys will be returns or seasons. I will come back to you with the detail. Some of them will be seasons, weeklies, and so on; 22 million does not mean 22 million transactions.

Q205 Gavin Newlands: I accept that. If you guys don't have the detail to hand, again feel free to write to the Committee. It is a useful figure for us to have. Do either of you have figures to hand for the total number of transactions at ticket offices each week?

David Horne: I have it as a percentage. We will get you the total number.

Q206 Gavin Newlands: If you could do that, it would be very useful. Last from me, you have already mentioned complexity and we would welcome a full review of the complexity of ticket fares in this country. Why do you think this proposal is being made before any fare simplification, given the complexity that we currently have in the country? That would make these proposals a lot simpler, as would any other ticketing reforms that are promised in the plan for rail. Why are we putting the cart before the horse, in other words? I will start with Simon because I have left you alone for a bit.

Simon Moorhead: Thank you. Maybe I can add in part of the answer to your previous question as well. I will come back to your "Why now?" question.

In terms of the breakdown of people buying tickets at ticket offices, I think we see the full range of customers buying from ticket offices. One data point that might be of interest is that, when we look at our disabled person railcard holders, more than 50% of tickets sold to disabled person railcard holders are bought digitally. Only about 20% of those tickets are actually bought in ticket offices.

I think we sometimes forget that, for some types of disability, having the confidence that you have bought your ticket and you do not have to queue up at a ticket office means the level of anxiety is reduced because you know what you are buying and you know what you have paid for



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before you get to the station. You do not necessarily have to arrive half an hour beforehand to deal with the uncertainty of waiting at the ticket office. It is helpful, and that is right for some of our customers.

Q207 Gavin Newlands: Would you accept, though, that 20% is quite a large percentage of that cohort?

Simon Moorhead: Of course. Again, we are looking at ways to make sure that not only can we support better access to tickets through digital means and ticket vending machines, but many of our customers will be served by the same staff coming out in front of the glass and serving them directly, sometimes helping them with the machines, and sometimes selling them a ticket through mobile ticket sales machines as well. In many of our stations that is how the system will work.

Q208 Gavin Newlands: Why now, before fare simplification?

Simon Moorhead: Reform is overdue. We have been waiting for this for many years. It was delayed by covid. The plan for rail was published some time ago. There are teams working on specific changes to make fares simpler and tickets easier to access as part of this proposal. The specific things that can only be bought from ticket offices we will start to unpick. In the background as well, there is a whole team of people working as part of a separate reform programme—fares and ticketing retail reform—which aims to simplify the fares system overall. A new fares model is being prepared.

Q209 Gavin Newlands: Should that reform have happened before this reform?

Simon Moorhead: I think I should say, because it has not really come up in any of the panels so far, that we are looking for more people to use the railway. We are looking for more people to be able to buy tickets. We are looking not only for more people with accessibility needs to use the railway, but for those people who do to use it more. We will not let the changes that we are making get in the way of more people using the railway. If somebody cannot find the ticket on the TVM or cannot find somebody to buy a ticket from in a station, we will have signage at the station to encourage them to just board a train and buy their ticket at the next available point.

Q210 Grahame Morris: That is an interesting point, Mr Moorhead. I have a constituent who did just that and was fined £1,000.

Simon Moorhead: I think we will roll out these changes with new guidance to our staff who, understandably, are concerned about fare avoidance and fraud. That is an issue on the railway. First, we will give new guidance as part of these proposals, and there is a whole load of work around training for staff to make sure that the railway is more inclusive. I think that will carry on bearing fruit across each of the train operators.

Q211 Gavin Newlands: I am conscious that I have taken up far too much



time. This question is for the three of you. Would it have been better had fare simplification taken place before this current proposal?

David Horne: As Simon said, fares reform is overdue. Our customers tell us very clearly that it should have happened a long time ago. I think we would agree that it should have happened by now. At LNER, we are actually doing a couple of pilots to test it and bring it forward. In an ideal world we would have reformed our fares structure already.

Q212 **Gavin Newlands:** So yes is the answer. Before this reform we should have carried out the other reform, but we are doing better. Is there any disagreement from Richard or Andy?

Richard Allan: I think fare reform and simplifying how we retail our journeys would preferably go hand in hand, but, as I have explained, the investment in modernising how we serve our customers and stations is overdue in some cases. It is certainly overdue in my train company. I want to press on with that. I hope that fares reform comes along quickly so that we can do both and give our customers a better experience and grow the railway, which I think all of us want to achieve.

Gavin Newlands: Thanks to you all, and thank you for your patience, Chair.

Q213 **Chair:** Thank you. As a supplementary, I want to probe how you, as individual operators, in developing your proposals for each station co-operated with other operators. For example, at one of my local stations—Milton Keynes Central—the ticket office is London Northwestern, but Avanti is a significant service provider. How did you liaise with them? London Northwestern was in the lead for the proposal for that station, but did they speak to you about what your needs were at that station?

Andy Mellors: Certainly, I can speak for Avanti. You talk about Milton Keynes, Chair. There was dialogue, not just with other operators but with Network Rail, recognising, as I said earlier, that we are lead retailer at four Network Rail managed stations. As part of the ticketing and settlement agreement and the schedule 17 consultation, any lead retailer proposing a change also has to consult affected operators. That has happened as part of this TSA process as well.

Chair: Is that all your experience as well across the process? Everyone is nodding. Thank you.

Q214 **Sara Britcliffe:** This builds on a point that was made previously. When the proposals were made, were they signed off by the DFT or Ministers before they were published?

Simon Moorhead: We said earlier that the need for reform was widely understood by the Department and by the train operators as well. We have shared and given previews of the proposals that are being made, but they are made by the rail industry. They are triggered under the ticketing and settlement agreement, which is the rail industry's rule set. Our engagement and our consultation, which is a genuine consultation



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with passengers, goes through the passenger bodies. The Department has a role, but it is at the end of this process rather than at the beginning.

Q215 **Sara Britcliffe:** The Department at no point signed off the proposals that you have made.

Simon Moorhead: They all have to be contained within a business plan that is shared with the markets teams that are a part of the Department for Transport. They have to have a commercial plan behind the people impact and the changes to ticket hours and staffing hours. Those had to be shared with the Department as part of the preparation, to make sure that the business plan was understood and was sound as part of those market teams, so they could have a look at it beforehand.

Q216 **Sara Britcliffe:** The RMT has basically said that the ticket office closures are a done deal, involving redundancies and, especially in Avanti's case, the leasing of some ticket offices. Andy, is that correct? Is Avanti looking to let some of the ticket offices already? When we look at this as a consultation process, obviously when you see this happening potentially on the railways, then it is saying one thing and doing another.

Andy Mellors: Absolutely not. No plans at all have been hatched in terms of existing ticket office spaces being repurposed. This is a genuine consultation. We want to hear what our customers and stakeholders have to say as an industry. We are already starting to receive feedback from the passenger bodies. We will respond and reshape our proposals accordingly.

Q217 **Sara Britcliffe:** There are no ticket offices currently up for let.

Andy Mellors: No.

Q218 **Sara Britcliffe:** In terms of the redundancy notices, is there anything across the railways that we are seeing there with the operating companies?

Andy Mellors: Under the relevant legislation there is a requirement to issue section 188 notices if there is potential for a certain threshold to be met. That was why those notices were issued by some of the operators at the start of this process, but that was part of the legal obligation.

Q219 **Sara Britcliffe:** Simon, do you want to comment?

Simon Moorhead: I agree with that. My understanding is that we have a co-ordinating role among the operators in the consultation. The section 188 notices were shared and then paused. The staff were put on notice of potential redundancy, but then that process was paused while we go out and consult with our customers and with the passenger bodies as well. That means that there are no formal proposals until we get to the end of the passenger consultation process. There are pretty much no implications for the staff until we get to the end of this, and then we will have clarity about the proposals that exist at that point.



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Q220 Sara Britcliffe: I understand that, but can you see the problem? The message to everybody is, "We are not looking to reduce staff or hours. The staff members that are there are going out on the platforms and helping in other ways." But then, with some of the companies, we are seeing a reduction in the hours. It completely contradicts what is being said by the train operating companies.

Simon Moorhead: There is a variety of proposals across the country, largely driven by the estates that those operators run. Some have very big stations and only a handful of them; some have some very small stations and very many of them. That is why there is a variety of proposals. The nature of those proposals changes and they have to be operator by operator, which is why we are grateful to Transport Focus for being flexible in having a station-by-station consultation. That is the right thing to do. At the end of that, we will be listening to the customer feedback that we are getting, and if there are changes necessary to those proposals we will make them.

Q221 Jack Brereton: First, Simon, in terms of the number of stations that are going to be left without as many staff as they have now, and which stations are going to see fewer staff than is currently the case, under the current proposals, how many of those would be left without staff altogether? Do you have any figures on that?

Simon Moorhead: The figures for each individual operator are published. This is not a new situation. Something like 43% of the population of stations across the country at the moment are unstaffed. Another 40% are only partially staffed.

Q222 Jack Brereton: We understand that. We are trying to understand how much it is going to reduce. How many of the stations that are currently staffed are going to see fewer than they have? How many of those stations are going to be reduced from the current situation? I totally understand that we have stations up and down the network which have fewer people using them and do not have staff at the moment. Quite right, but we want to understand how many stations that currently have staff and have been designated staffed are not going to have them in the future.

Simon Moorhead: I will write to you with a specific number around that. It is partly because I am conscious that we are right in the middle of a consultation at the moment, and it is entirely possible that those proposals will change by the time we get to the end of this consultation period. We have had some robust and very useful feedback from customers and we are listening to it.

Q223 Jack Brereton: In terms of the hours, Sara just mentioned some of the issues. This question is directed at Andy. At Stoke station, for example, you were going to reduce quite significantly the hours of ticketing support that are available. I have the figures here. Currently, Monday to Friday, the ticketing support availability is from 5.55 in the morning until 8



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o'clock at night. That is going to reduce to 7.15 in the morning to 4 o'clock in the afternoon, which is quite a significant reduction, isn't it? How many of the stations across Avanti's network are seeing similar reductions?

Andy Mellors: As part of the proposals to move our staff from behind counters or glass in ticket offices to be more customer facing, we have taken the opportunity to redefine the hours during which that retailing support would be available, based on the data. You have quoted the hours for Stoke. The reality of it is that at the end of the day, in the early evening, very few ticket sales are actually happening. This is all about making sure that we provide the right level of resource in the right way to support customers going forward.

Q224 **Jack Brereton:** Is that sort of reduction in hours happening at every single station across the network?

Andy Mellors: I can talk for the 20 stations where we are lead retailer. We are taking the opportunity to change those hours. The extent of the change varies from one location to another, depending on customer requirements, but it is a data-driven approach.

Q225 **Jack Brereton:** What should somebody who arrives at 4.30 on a Monday afternoon do if they cannot buy a ticket? How will they deal with that sort of situation once these proposals have gone ahead?

Andy Mellors: We have said that our stations will be staffed from first train to last train. At somewhere like Stoke, there is a gateline that is very close to the ticket vending machines.

Q226 **Jack Brereton:** How will they buy a ticket? How will they be supported to buy a ticket? There is not going to be any ticketing support after 4 o'clock.

Andy Mellors: There will not be specialist ticketing support, but under the proposals, other staff will be there at other times of day and will be able to provide some—

Q227 **Jack Brereton:** What is the difference between specialist and—

Andy Mellors: It is in the level of knowledge that individuals would have of specific ticket products and so on.

Q228 **Jack Brereton:** People will not get the level of service that they would get during those hours.

Andy Mellors: Equally, this is a data-driven approach to determining the propensity for customers to turn up in those hours and require that level of support. That is why we have made the proposals that we have made.

Simon has talked through how, as an industry, we need an approach when customers are not able to buy tickets. Earlier, we heard about the accessible travel policies that train operators have. At Avanti, our ATP already has provision so that a customer who arrives at a station and,



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due to a disability, is not able to purchase a ticket can get on board the train and buy a ticket on board without any financial penalty. Those arrangements already exist where customers with accessibility needs are not able to purchase a ticket.

Q229 Jack Brereton: Is the situation similar for LNER and Chiltern? Are you going to see a significant reduction in the hours of ticketing support?

David Horne: Yes. In relation to the stations where we are proposing to close the travel centre and move people forward, we are going to upskill our people so that they can provide ticketing assistance to customers. We have not yet determined the hours in which that will be provided at those stations. We have to work through that detail, but we are very focused on providing an excellent customer service for our customers. We want to win more people back to the trains. If we need to provide staff at any time of the day to help customers, we will work towards that and look to do that, but we have not made such detailed plans yet.

Q230 Jack Brereton: Richard, have you made detailed plans for a reduction in hours?

Richard Allan: The hours when we have our stations open, where we have staff currently, will stay the same under these proposals. What we are proposing is to extend the “out from behind the glass” principle, as we have talked about, and to have the ability both to retail through the current system and to improve the ticket machines and provide that functionality. We can then have a look at that as we get into the next two or three years. At the moment, the proposal—subject to listening to feedback—is to have the same hours and the same staff availability as we have today.

Q231 Jack Brereton: I have one further question for Simon about RDG’s proposal to have new mobile assistance teams. What will they actually look like in terms of the support that they can offer at stations that no longer have any staff in them?

Simon Moorhead: There are two separate things. One is that some operators have proposed that there might be roving teams that are able to be in particular locations at a particular time of day or that can be managed accordingly if they understand that there is a particular need, a particular local event is going on or whatever it may be.

I would also pick up on something we have not really touched on in this panel, although it was touched on in the previous one, with ORR. That is around the passenger assistance functions. We have seen a very significant growth in the number of our customers with separate accessibility needs who use Passenger Assist. In the main, that is pre-booked support to make sure that there is a member of staff waiting for the customer either to help them to buy tickets or to help them on to a train, if they need accessibility support to get on to the train. We have seen a very significant rise in the use of that. We have also seen an increase in the satisfaction of customers who use it.



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Q232 **Jack Brereton:** Obviously, people with a disability do not want to travel at just one time of the day. They often want to travel at different times of the day. How will that roving support be aligned to co-ordinate it with the support that is needed when an individual actually travels?

Simon Moorhead: None of that restricts the turn-up-and-go railway. The turn-up-and-go railway is still there. If there aren't staff on the station at a particular time, we will get people to them as soon as we can, either through the passenger assistance function or through the mobile teams you have referred to. I counsel that the mobile teams are part of a proposal that is being consulted on, so all of that is still up for discussion. We need to get the full feedback from Transport Focus and London TravelWatch before we conclude that. Passenger assistance, however, carries on growing in its capacity and ability to support those with different needs.

Q233 **Jack Brereton:** How beneficial would it be to have a team there for just one hour of a day? That does not seem incredibly beneficial for people who want to travel throughout the week.

Simon Moorhead: It is difficult. It will be a learning exercise for operators to try to optimise their use of staff across a particular network, but they do that with the knowledge and experience of when customers are travelling within that network and the pattern of responses or needs that they see both historically and in the future. That then becomes a planning exercise for those operators. Again, I caution that this is all part of the consultation. Let's see what we come to at the end of that.

Chair: Sara has a quick supplementary.

Q234 **Sara Britcliffe:** It is a very quick one. Simon, you mentioned the turn-up-and-go plan. Earlier, we heard that it could be up to an hour before somebody actually gets to the station to assist someone. How is that classed as turn up and go when someone could be waiting 45 minutes for support to get on to the train they need to get on?

Simon Moorhead: As Stephanie from the ORR described, over the past few years the commitment for passenger assistance has moved from a 24-hour booking period right down to a two-hour booking period. We encourage people who need help to get on to a train, in particular, or other help at the station to seek to book that assistance so that we can make sure that there is somebody when they need it. There is absolutely the option for anybody to turn up at a station and, if that station is not staffed at that particular moment, to call us to engage more help. We will get somebody to them as soon as we possibly can. If there is somebody at a nearby station, we will seek to get that person to them. If somebody has to come from further afield, the commitment to meet that person within two hours is still there.

Q235 **Sara Britcliffe:** I have a further point on the reduction in staffing hours. At my own station, in Accrington, there is usually only one person working. We know that ticket offices do more than just sell tickets. You



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state that you are getting this person out there, while Andy has just said that the data is being driven on the sales of tickets. How do you justify the claim that the reduction in staff correlates with getting people back out on to the stations when there is nobody there from the hours that now exist in certain stations to what is being proposed?

Andy Mellors: I suggest that that question is better directed in respect of the station operator for Accrington. I can talk for Avanti stations.

Q236 **Sara Britcliffe:** There is an overall picture.

Andy Mellors: We have considered customer requirements when formulating these proposals and will keep the proposals under review as a result of the feedback that we get from the passenger bodies. It has been an evidence-driven proposal, based on the change in customer behaviour—how and when customers buy tickets.

Simon spoke about the accessibility element of passenger assistance—getting customers who require assistance on and off trains and through stations. Those arrangements in respect of Avanti won't change as a result of this.

David Horne: Can I add something? In addition to ticket sales data, we have passenger assistance data. When passengers book assistance, that all goes into a system. We are able to analyse at which stations people requiring assistance travel, the times they travel, the days they travel and so on. That data is also available when we design future staffing.

Q237 **Sara Britcliffe:** If someone enters a ticket office and says, "Look, I just need slight support," would that be logged with the train operator?

David Horne: Yes. Rail Delivery Group has introduced a new digital system that staff now use across the network. Turn-up-and-go assistance is put into that system, so it is available to analyse after the day of travel.

Chair: I have a set of questions about the accessibility of the formats for the consultation, but I will return to those in a minute. I want to bring my other colleagues in first.

Q238 **Greg Smith:** Simon, perhaps I could come to you first on the question of the future of ticket vending machines. Rail Delivery Group said in evidence that, "where needed" ticket vending machines "across the network will be improved and upgraded." What is not clear in that is what to. What is the future of those vending machines?

I will come to Simon first and bring in others afterwards. Given that there are issues with ticket vending machines, both in understanding them for general users—they can be very complicated—and for people with very specific needs, what are you doing to address that, to have machines in stations that people can understand and use? If you want to have a transition to everyone doing what, hands up, I do—buying everything on an app—isn't there a requirement to make those vending machines the



same as the layout and screen that they would see on their laptop, their phone or whatever device they are using?

Simon Moorhead: It is really important for us to try to get the balance right in terms of how accessible some of these machines are. That is not just for those with particular additional needs but for all of our customers, to try to make it as simple as possible.

I will address this in two ways. Some of our commentary so far in some of RDG's public statements has been about making sure that we can upgrade the capability of some of the machines to make sure that they cover the same sorts of tickets that are available in ticket offices. There should be functions to make sure that customers do not miss out if the ticket office is no longer available and that they can still access those tickets through the machine.

That is not quite where you were heading with the question. There is almost a second layer, which is making sure that the machines are as accessible as possible. There are two parts to that. One is that we have trials under way at the moment with two ticket vending machine manufacturers to have video interaction with a person on the other end of the ticket vending machine. Clearly, we have to be sensitive to those with hearing needs as well and make sure that we can help them, but even those with some level of hearing loss can sometimes get an advantage from having a high-quality video image of the person they are talking to. Those are trials to see whether they are effective.

More widely, we make the assurance that any new machines that go into the network will be accessible. Fixing the current estate is probably a challenge for us right now, but it is a challenge that we address by making sure that we have the staff we talked about earlier available around ticket vending machines to help people to use them or to sell them a ticket from a mobile device that they might have with them. There are different forms of being able to access tickets, only one of which is the vending machine itself.

Q239 **Greg Smith:** Let's accept that there is a future, at least in the medium term, for vending machines. At the moment, they are all different across the whole network. They are all still fairly old tech, if I can put it in that way. Earlier I said that I cannot remember the last time that I haven't just bought tickets on my phone—it has been at least 10 years. During the disruption from the strikes earlier in the summer I found myself having to drive over to Tring to get a train into London because, sadly, Chiltern was not up and running in time. I was quite surprised that I still had to put this great long XYZBQYZQ code into the machine. You would not normally hear me arguing for standardisation, but is there a need for greater standardisation across the ticket vending machines across all operators and stations in the country?

Simon Moorhead: The variety of ticket vending machines reflects the fact that they come from different manufacturers and, partly, are bought



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by different train operators. If you are a customer who routinely uses the same station, as many of our customers do—they have a consistent pattern of usage—you become familiar with the functions in an individual ticket vending machine, but you are right that then it is more difficult to go to a completely different station.

Earlier, we heard challenges that ticket vending machines are not going to be extended. I really do not recognise that. Some contracts for some operators are coming to the end of life, but they will be re-contracted. There will be either an extension to the existing arrangements or, potentially, a procurement of new ticket vending machines that come out into the market. Again, the specification for those machines will make sure that they are as accessible as they can be, supported by the people who will be available to help customers to use them.

Q240 Greg Smith: Richard, David or Andy, do you have anything to add on that point?

Richard Allan: The industry has installed machines at different points when there has been available investment, so you have seen some that are quite old. We heard about the very old machines that we are replacing this year. We recognise that the user experience varies. We understand that. In my particular case, given the age of the machines that we have, that is why we will continue to have our portable device that currently sits in the ticket office available alongside the machines for the transition period. We have not defined that yet because we are still listening to the feedback.

Q241 Greg Smith: That is very helpful. Can I move on? Some of these themes came up in earlier questioning. I just want to try to bring them together in one. It is around people's concern about how you find staff once they are out from behind the glass—that single point where they know where to find those staff.

To use personal experience, at stations like Princes Risborough or Haddenham in my constituency, which are not that big, it is very straightforward, unless the staff are hiding out on the other side of the car park, which is unlikely. What about some of the bigger stations? Aylesbury—central Aylesbury, not Aylesbury Parkway—might be a good example. What have you learnt from operating Bicester Village, Oxford Parkway and now Aylesbury in terms of customers being able to find those staff, particularly those customers who have a visual impairment and are relying on their guide dog to help them to find where they need to go, or similar?

Richard Allan: It is really important to have a focal point—a reception desk that says that this is the heart of the station and the place where you will find colleagues. Colleagues know how their customers behave. They often know their customers individually. They recognise them, as they come in at the same time. I was at one of our smaller stations last week. Anna in the ticket office does a brilliant job. She was telling me



that customers come into the car park, they run for the train and she puts their registration number into the machine to print out their car park ticket, because she can remember that. That is brilliant customer service. That is great knowledge.

Colleagues working in these stations know when the busy times are and when customers are likely to need help. They already go out and about. They go and look at the car park, they deal with litter on the platform and any issues around the station estate. It is really important that we listen to feedback from colleagues and accessibility groups to build in that focal point, a reception desk. It is really important that we have that heart of the station and everyone knows where it is. Why would it be a different place from where the current ticket office is? We should provide that continuity, but design it in a way that brings colleagues out from behind the glass.

Q242 Greg Smith: That makes sense, but it is more complicated than that, isn't it? In a small station like Haddenham and Thame Parkway or Risborough, you might have only a limited number of station staff available. If, for example, one member of staff is already over the bridge, on the other side, helping a passenger who needs assistance to get a wheelchair on to the train or whatever it might be, while someone else is trying to plug someone's registration into a ticket machine, that might be it. There will be no one on the reception desk.

I fully accept that there is a great service for the regular customers that the staff get to know, but isn't it the case that more often the people who are going to have a problem with buying a ticket or asking for advice on a route are not the regulars, but people those staff may have never seen before? They might be a tourist, or visiting someone. Who knows? They might be coming for a medical appointment, or whatever it might be. How are you going to get around that problem?

Richard Allan: In our smaller locations, which tend to have a single staff member, the hours will stay the same in the future, and, generally speaking, there are one or two platforms. Therefore, the staff member is able to see customers arriving and go to that point.

In our large locations, we will have to think it through when people come out from behind the glass. You will have more than one member of staff. Does that mean that the person on the southbound platform at Haddenham has something that says, "A customer has arrived at reception. They've pressed the buzzer. Can you come and help them?" If somebody is over on the far side, in the car park, as you know, helping a customer there, how do they understand that there is a customer waiting for them? We will build that system in. We have not prescribed it because we want to listen to the feedback. I think that it will require bespoke design for local stations because they all have their specific circumstances.

Q243 Greg Smith: Do any other members of the panel have views on this?



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Clearly, Chiltern is already operating some stations like this. Are you operating any like this? Do you have plans for how you will make staff visibly accessible?

David Horne: We are not using the model yet. One of my colleagues who used to manage a station came up with the concept of a HICSA—a high-impact customer service area. Basically, he used that as a device to say to his team, “Our customers gather at these points. I want to see you at these points whenever you can be there.” Whether it is on a platform or on a station concourse, a member of staff is always looking out for customers who need assistance.

Our staff do many things. Sometimes they will be dispatching a train. Sometimes they will be getting other customers on board. It is all about creating an atmosphere where our staff are flexible, agile and, ultimately, providing the personal service that we aspire to deliver.

Q244 **Greg Smith:** Is there anything else?

Andy Mellors: At 12 of our 16 stations, the ticket office is currently the recognised place for accessible travel needs. As part of our proposals, we have identified alternatives and will put those plans in place, subject to the consultation. It is very much along the lines of what David outlined. There would be a recognised place that is geographically appropriate for how customers arrive at the station.

Chair: I would like to conclude this session by 12. Grahame, we need quick questions and answers.

Q245 **Grahame Morris:** I will be quick. I was going to ask Mr Horne some questions about the service for my area, but I will go straight to Mr Moorhead. It says on the CV that you are the chief information officer. Does that mean that you are responsible for gathering as well as disseminating information? The reason I ask is that I would like to know whether you have met any of the organisations we heard from in the first panel: Age UK, RNIB, Scope and Transport for All. I mean you personally.

Simon Moorhead: There are two parts to that. I am leading the work that we are doing to co-ordinate the activity on participation.

Q246 **Grahame Morris:** I understand that, but have you personally, as the chief information officer, met those organisations?

Simon Moorhead: My colleagues have been meeting them for more than a year.

Q247 **Grahame Morris:** So you haven’t. That is all I wanted to know.

You are arguing the cheat, really, in the Committee today, aren’t you? Points were made about schedule 17. The only protection that we have as regards these ticket offices is that bit of legislation. Once you close the ticket offices, there are no guarantees about staff. You can talk about interaction and discussions, but the truth is that there is no guarantee,



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once the ticket offices are closed, that the staff will be there. In fact, Mr Mellors let the cat out of the bag, because a third of the staff in Glasgow have already had redundancy notices. We heard from the first panel that about a quarter of the staff nationally—about 2,300—are to be made redundant. They can't be redeployed in front of the glass because they won't be there.

Simon Moorhead: That is a formal process that had to happen—to give them a notice of redundancy—

Q248 **Grahame Morris:** I understand, but we are being sold a pup, to use a colloquialism. The Minister has come in front of us and said, "The service is going to be better. These staff who are behind glass are going to be out interacting with the customers and the public." That is not quite the case, is it? A quarter of them are going to be made redundant. There are no guarantees for how much longer the ones who remain will be on the platform because there are no statutory guarantees or protections for them. Isn't that true?

Simon Moorhead: Two things—

Q249 **Grahame Morris:** Yes or no—is that true?

Simon Moorhead: There are two things that I would—

Q250 **Grahame Morris:** No. I just want to you tell me whether what the previous panellists have told us is true, that the only statutory protection in law is this particular schedule 17, and that will not exist after this goes through.

Simon Moorhead: It is not.

Q251 **Grahame Morris:** It is not true.

Simon Moorhead: The operators need to satisfy many requirements and regulations. Schedule 17 is about selling tickets. It is really about retailing tickets. It is not really about staff at all. There is a whole set of commitments—

Q252 **Grahame Morris:** If there is no ticket office, it does not really apply, does it?

Simon Moorhead: That is partly because customers are changing their behaviour to tap in and tap out and don't need a ticket office in many of the locations. Over this period of consultation, 170 million tickets have been issued so far. More than half of those have been people tapping in and tapping out. They do not need to go anywhere near a ticket office.

Q253 **Grahame Morris:** That may or may not be true, because there are huge variations in where that happens.

Simon Moorhead: Yes.

Q254 **Grahame Morris:** I happen to know from discussions that I have had, not just with the previous panels but outside this Committee, how



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important it is for disabled people and people who are blind and partially sighted. The stations in my constituency are unstaffed. I don't think that that is safe, to be candid with you, particularly for women travelling by themselves or for families who need assistance with pushchairs and so on. I am concerned that this is a fait accompli and that we will have a diminution in the service. Many people want to have a point of contact. Even if they do not want to buy a ticket, they want to seek advice, reassurance or further information. They may not be frequent travellers. The ticket office currently provides that.

David Horne: Can I come in on this? It is not a fait accompli. It is a meaningful consultation. Clearly, Anthony Smith has received a lot of feedback. We are going to listen to that as well.

There are other regulations that protect disabled and other users in relation to accessibility. You have heard from ORR in relation to the accessible travel policies, which we are obliged to follow under our licence agreements. If we do not follow them, we get letters from ORR and will be asked to up our game through remedial plans and so on. There is also the Equality Act, which gives a legal underpinning to all of these things. There are other things that protect accessibility.

Is this going to be a worse deal for people with accessibility needs? I will give you the example from LNER. At LNER, we will increase the number of people out on platforms who are able to provide assistance to customers by somewhere between 80 and 95 across our station estate. That is an increase of roughly 20% to 25% in the number of staff available to deliver assistance.

Q255 **Grahame Morris:** I am slightly perplexed by what you are saying. You are closing six of the 13 ticket offices. You are making a proportion—maybe about a quarter—of the staff redundant, yet you are saying that there is going to be more help available for longer. You must have the ability to square the circle.

David Horne: This is about multi-skilling a station team so that they are not just sitting in a ticket office selling tickets. They will be upskilled and trained to deliver customer assistance when that is needed. This is about introducing a flexible, multi-skilled model on our stations. If we do that, we will be able to improve the assistance that we give to customers who need it.

Grahame Morris: If you were here for the earlier panels, you will know that there is not much confidence, I am afraid, among the people representing those with disabilities in your ability to deliver that. I am conscious of time, Chair. I am sorry—

Chair: Thank you, Grahame. I am conscious of time, too. Colleagues will want to move on. There are a number of questions that I wanted to ask about the way the consultation was made available to people in accessible formats and the like. We have heard some very concerning



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evidence that it was not consistent and in a format that was accessible for many people. I hope that there is a bit of a learning exercise from that. If I may, I will write to you individually with some specific questions and I would be grateful if you could follow up on that.

For now, I thank you all for your time. It has been a long session and we have covered a lot of ground. Again, I am grateful for your time.