

# ScotRail Ticket Office Consultation

## Introduction

The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Scotland is the country’s leading charity working with blind and partially sighted people. We support children and adults with sight loss and help them to live full and independent lives, campaigning for their rights.

People with a visual impairment rely on public transport to access employment, education and leisure activities and we welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

We have identified concerns relating to the following:

* Ticket Offices
* Help Points
* Station Information Boards
* React Boards
* Digital Technology
* Ticket Vending Machines
* ScotRail App
* Staff Distribution

### Consultation response from RNIB Scotland

### Ticket Offices

The ScotRail ticket office consultation proposes to reduce ticket office opening hours at 117 of its 143 managed station and close three office (Cartsdyke, Clydebank and Woodhall).

RNIB Scotland believe that presence of staff at ticket offices serves several purposes, beyond simply ticket sales. Primarily, the ticket office is a central location where passengers can seek advice and passenger assistance.

At present, essential safety and timetable information is available only in visual formats which are not accessible to blind or partially sighted people meaning that assistance from staff is essential. Without station staff, passengers with a visual impairment may not be able to safely travel independently or may rely on strangers to provide essential information.

The consultation document advises that:

 "This proposal will improve staff visibility, helpfulness, and increase passenger assistance beyond our larger stations."

We would welcome clarity regarding plans to ensure staff will be more visible and able to assist passengers in the absence of a dedicated ticket office as a central point of access. Without staffing at ticket offices during opening hours it is unclear how passengers will know how or where to locate staff.

Further within the current staffing levels, RNIB Scotland are aware of people with visual impairments choosing to travel from stations further from their homes, or preferred destinations, due to accessibility issues such as lack of tactile paving or access to accessible lifts. Station closures and reduced staffing hours are likely to further limit the availability of accessible travel options and have a detrimental impact of blind and partly sighted passengers.

### Help Points

The ticket office consultation cites that there:

 "Help points positioned at every station which are also linked to the customer service centres so customers can speak to a member of staff any time of the day".

We are concerned however that the "[ScotRail Station Accessibility Information October 2021](https://www.scotrail.co.uk/sites/default/files/assets/download_ct/20211111/kp1wbvNecngWtK0xIHIJ4iLhwq0hYkrpjsKtUuN4SkM/in429_atp_station-accessibility_info_oct_2021.v3.pdf)" indicates that there is no help point at either Prestwick Airport and Dunrobin Castle stations. In addition, feedback from blind and partially sighted passengers has been that the help points can be difficult to locate. At some stations, the help points are positioned on the platforms and therefore are not immediately accessible to passengers arriving at the station wishing to obtain ticket or timetable information prior to travel. Navigating an unfamiliar environment to locate a help point, particularly when 145 stations in Scotland do not have tactile paving can be dangerous for blind or partially sighted passengers.

The reduction in ticket office opening hours and closures will increase the need for help points as a key safety feature within stations. The consultation does not give reference to whether additional help points will be installed. In addition, the document does not indicate whether wayfinding will be improved to allow all passengers, including those with a visual impairment, to safely locate the help points. We would welcome minimum standards on the number and availability of help points as a matter of urgency.

### Station Information Boards

We appreciate that in most stations:

 "Station information boards provide real-time updates on train times, including the stations at which they stop and highlight delays where applicable."

While these real-time updates provide valuable information, they are not accessible to passengers with a visual impairment. At present, 72 stations do not have a public address system and therefore without easy access to a help point or a staffed ticket office, passengers have no way of receiving audio updates. We would argue that all stations should have an alternative source of information to ensure travel is accessible to all passengers. The consultation document does not state whether further upgrades will be made to ensure audio announcements will be in place at all stations affected by the proposal.

### React Boards

RNIB Scotland acknowledge that React Boards are currently available at eight stations in Scotland ([Accessible travel | ScotRail](https://www.scotrail.co.uk/plan-your-journey/accessible-travel)). We would welcome installation of additional React Boards as a means of sharing key information about stations ([Kate’s Story – React Accessibility (react-access.com)](https://react-access.com/jos-story-2/).

### Digital Technology

For individuals who can utilise digital technology, [Navilens](https://www.navilens.com/en/) can also offer greater opportunities to independently navigate the station environment. It is important though that these provisions are in addition to, rather than in place of, in person support as not everyone will be able to access digital information.

### Ticket Vending Machines

The consultation notes the increase in the availability of ticket vending machines and the number of tickets purchased via them:

 "Ticket vending machines now located at 61 per cent of stations across the network".

We would stress that ticket vending machines (TVM) need to be accessible to customers with a visual impairment and therefore should all have an audio option. We also understand that it can be difficult to determine the best value for money form the ticket options available without the assistance of trained staff.

We are concerned that the reduction in ticket open hours will place the onus on individuals to understand and select from all available ticket options on TVM or online options. For many blind and partially sighted people these options are not accessible.

### ScotRail App

The consultation states that:

 "Customers have benefitted from the ScotRail app, which provides service updates and is a source of much information".

RNIB Scotland have recently provided feedback to ScotRail on the challenges reported by some blind and partially sighted passengers using the app. For individuals who are partially sighted, the colour contrast is not sufficient and there is no option to increase the text size within the app which therefore limits accessibility.

In addition, individuals who utilise screen reading technology, such as JAWS, report that it is challenging to move between the boxes and select the destination station. There is no option to narrow down the stations listed to those near your location or stations frequently travel from, meaning it can be time consuming to listen to all options before selecting the desired station. Further, the option to select between "single/ return/ open return/ flexi/ seasons" reads as "change icon" and does not explain what the icons are.

Blind and partially sighted people are more likely to be digitally excluded and therefore unable to access online purchasing options for tickets. While we recognise that tickets can continue to be booked over the telephone, this is only viable for those planning journeys in advance. We believe that all passengers should have the same freedom to access any train service without the need for advance planning.

We understand that further updates are expected to the app however passengers cannot currently book passenger assistance within the app. Instead, the app redirects passengers to the ScotRail website. We therefore do not consider the ScotRail app to be an appropriate solution to in person services.

### Staff Distribution

RNIB Scotland appreciates the potential benefits of distributing staff to busy stations during peaks time to support customers:

 "ScotRail is very aware of the value of having ticket offices open and staff positioned at key locations, particularly during times of disruption, but it is important the right balance is achieved by having staff deployed in the right place at the right time."

We would add however that blind and partially sighted people are unable to drive and therefore often rely on public transport to access a wide range of activities of daily life. For many, this does not involve travel between "key locations" and instead involved travel between smaller stations which are most likely to be affected by the changes proposed.

We believe these concerns are also shared by other members of the community and have been reflected within serval media reports such as:

[Clydebank rail station: Emergency council meeting to condemn plans to shut ticket office | Clydebank Post](https://www.clydebankpost.co.uk/news/19875567.clydebank-rail-station-emergency-council-meeting-condemn-plans-shut-ticket-office/)

[MSP slams First Minister for failing to halt plans to close rail station ticket offices | Greenock Telegraph](https://www.greenocktelegraph.co.uk/news/19881407.msp-slams-first-minister-failing-halt-plans-close-rail-station-ticket-offices/)

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