

## Dear Huw Merriman – MP Bexhill and Battle

We are writing to you as members of the executive of Bexhill and Battle Labour Party in your role as our representative at Westminster and as a Minister responsible for the railways at the Department of Transport.

As a Constituency Labour Party we strongly object to the proposed closure of Railway Station Ticket Offices on the basis that we can see no justification in doing so other than to cut the overhead costs to the railway companies. We cannot see how the proposal improves customer service and moreover we agree with organisations who represent passengers who need additional support that closure of ticket offices will have a negative impact.

With regard to access issues, we have read and agree with the letter sent from the 10 charities representing blind and partially sighted travellers. In that letter they state "Without ticket offices, rail passengers would be forced to purchase tickets online or using Ticket Vending Machines at the station and, for many blind and partially sighted people, neither of these options is accessible. Only 3 per cent of blind and partially sighted people in RNIB research said they could use a ticket machine without difficulty. 58 per cent said it is impossible". We believe that removing ticket offices from stations like Bexhill and at Battle will be detrimental to blind and partially sighted travellers which in our opinion breaks the spirit and intention of the 2010 Equality Act.

We have read and heard other stories about the potential restrictions around access to public transport – for travellers with learning disabilities. In an article published in the Daily Telegraph on the 11 August we read about Ella a resident who uses services from Etchingham and who relies on the support of the local ticket officer manager Maggie Capps to support her use of rail travel to and from Etchingham Station to Tunbridge Wells. Ella's mother Melanie Crouch's is quoted in the article - "I drop her off and she goes and buys a ticket off Maggie, which is great for her independence," and "It is great we have a ticket office and it is great we have that support."

Janet Watts from Bexhill wrote to us with a separate story about the excellent customer service offered to a disabled traveller at Bexhill Station. She wrote that when queuing to purchase a ticket a couple of weeks ago.... a woman in the queue told the man in the ticket office "I have learning difficulties & can't use the machine ". He printed her tickets & also printed off a piece of paper with her destination on to show people where she wanted to go. A machine wouldn't have done that".

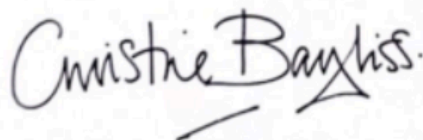
We note that part of the rationale for removing ticket offices is that only one in 9 tickets are purchased from the ticket office. This is a significant number and likely to be a massive proportion of those discretionary and occasional journeys made by users who are not regular commuters. However, we would argue that in a Town like Bexhill on Sea, the percentage is much higher because of high numbers of elderly residents. We noted a recent report from Bexhill Rail Action Group on Facebook where they said that during a 50 minute mid-morning period they observed 37 people using the ticket office to make enquiries or purchase tickets with an illustration photo showing 4 persons in a queue at the ticket office including a person using an invalid buggy. If the ticket office were to close and the staff member was to be stationed by the ticket machine – there would be the potential for a 'traffic jam' of people wanting to purchase tickets and ask questions. That does not seem to us to be an improvement to customer service.

On behalf of the local Labour Party Mark Legg led four public awareness sessions last week at Bexhill and Battle stations. The overwhelming response from the travelling public was one of support for retention of a ticket office function at those stations. We were able to give 637 leaflets to rail users in those four sessions and we expect the majority of those to express their opinion to the consultation. 58 people also made time to sign our statement that this government's policy would increase the significant disadvantages experienced by those in lower socio-economic circumstances and will have a detrimental effect on the environment. A number of people also mentioned the fact that there are tickets available at the ticket office that it would be impossible to find on a machine without prior expert knowledge, including those to St Pancras CIV and to Ireland via ferry.


On behalf of the constituency Labour Party and local residents – we ask that you use your position and influence to halt this backward step. Rail ticket offices and the rail workers who staff them are a vital service to elderly and disabled travellers. They are able to proactively advise the public on the best value fares services – which as you know as a commuter yourself can be extremely complex.

Can you acknowledge receipt of this letter.

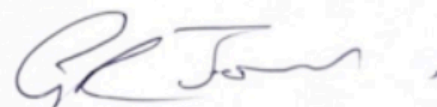
Yours sincerely,



**Christine Bayliss**  
CLP Chair



**Mark Legg**  
Trade Union Liaison Officer



**Glynn Jones**  
Disabilities officer