

Letter to Transport Focus

Consultation Closure of Barnstaple Railway Station Ticket Office

Barnstaple Town Council objects in the strongest terms to the proposed loss of ticket office facilities at Barnstaple station. Our objections are based on the grounds of equality of service, environmental justice and the impact on the economic prosperity of Barnstaple and northern Devon.

Equality of service

Not all residents are able to use station ticket machines, or have the means to book a ticket in advance. People with common disabilities such as dyslexia or colour blindness can find ticket machines almost impossible to use.

People with a visual impairment or other disability often need assistance in booking and planning journeys across the network. A staffed ticket office is a recognisable place to get that help and support, disabled travellers know that they can trust that face to face contact. It's next to useless for a visually impaired traveller to know that a member of staff may be floating around the station if they can't find them. As one visually impaired regular traveller has told us "It feels like the safety net is being removed".

In recent decades, so much has been done to create a more inclusive society. Closure of the ticket office will impact on the independence of a huge number of disabled people. It feels like a step backwards.

Environmental justice

Inevitably, cuts of this kind affect those least able to adjust to the changes and least likely to have their voices heard. Here in Barnstaple, we have three of the four most deprived wards in Devon. More than a quarter of our households have no access to a car. So many of our residents rely on public transport in order to be able to access jobs, education and health services in Exeter.

Currently nearly half of the tickets bought for train journeys from Barnstaple are bought at the ticket office, a far higher proportion than from any other station in the south west. Just over a fifth of journeys are paid for by cash. Closure of the ticket office will penalise people who operate in the cash economy, predominantly older people, young people and people who are unable to access traditional bank accounts. People with poor literacy or IT skills will feel even more left behind in an increasingly IT dependant society.

Closure of the service will disproportionately affect those who are the poorest and the most marginalised. They are the most unlikely to be able to find another means of accessing education, work or services outside of North Devon if they feel the railway is not open to them.

Impact on economic prosperity

Barnstaple is the sub regional centre for northern Devon. The station is at the terminal of the line to Exeter and connects the wider northern Devon subregion to the rest of the UK rail network. Government has just invested in a feasibility study to extend the line on to Bideford. Both Torrington, North Devon Council and the Government are investing millions of pounds in our town centres and facilities for visitors to encourage sustainable tourism in our districts.

Within this context, closure of the only ticket office north of Crediton would go against the trend of improving access and services and seems like a retrograde step. It will be especially keenly felt by our community who have fought so hard to retain services and to rebuild our town centre after the ravages of COVID and the cost of living crisis.

In conclusion, the council believes that closure of the ticket offices will disadvantage many elderly and disabled people. It will disproportionately affect those who are the poorest and most marginalised in our society and will feel like a retrograde step in efforts to create economic prosperity in northern Devon. For those reasons, we urge you to retain a full range of ticket office services in Barnstaple.