

What does the future of railway staffing mean for disabled and older passengers?



What is the future for railway staffing?

The government and rail industry's plans to find savings of up to £3.5bn will have a significant impact on the staffing of trains, stations and rail infrastructure. Rail campaigners fear Sir Roy McNulty's proposals, endorsed by the government and rail industry, will place up to 20,000 jobs at risk across the network.

Our research with disabled passengers below shows that there are significant concerns about these proposals and that further cutbacks to staff on trains and stations will have very significant impacts on disabled and older people's access to our railways.

If plans go ahead to implement recommendations made in Sir Roy McNulty's Rail Value for Money Study this could lead to private train operators and Network Rail cutting:

- up to 7,000 guards and other non-driver staff on trains
- over 5,000 station and platform staff
- over 2,000 ticket office staff
- over 6,000 signalling and maintenance workers

This could lead to the closure of over half the staffed ticket offices across the entire network and the loss of guards on all trains, 70 per cent of which currently carry guards and other staff on board.

This will have an impact on all rail passengers. But it will hit disabled and older passengers particularly hard.

The Department for Transport's *Accessibility Action Plan* (December 2012) aims to provide "an accessible and socially inclusive transport system, by removing the barriers to travel and ensuring that social impacts are addressed in policy development and service delivery". As part of this plan, all rail companies have to produce a Disabled Persons' Protection Plan (DPPP) which sets out how the company helps disabled passengers to use their stations and trains.

However, beyond a commitment to greater disability awareness training, there is little in the plan that commits to providing the visible staff presence that all passengers, but especially those with mobility and access issues, want on their trains and stations.

We believe that there is a major contradiction between the government's aim to remove barriers that prevent disabled and older people accessing our railways and the proposals to drive through significant staff cuts as part of wider cost-cutting measures.

Rather than penalising rail passengers, we believe that the government should find alternative ways of addressing the increasing costs incurred by rail privatisation, including bringing services back in-house. Research by Transport for Quality of Life shows that over £1bn a year is lost as a result of the fragmentation and privatisation of our rail industry; this would be a good place to start when searching for efficiency rather than cutting the staff that passengers rely on.



What do disabled passengers think about staffing on trains and stations?

In a survey of 1,031 disabled people conducted by Survation, we found that:

1. Disabled people use the railways.

- Of the 1,031 disabled people surveyed, just under 80 per cent used the railways, half of them on at least a monthly or weekly basis.

2. Significant numbers of disabled passengers require staff assistance when travelling by train.

- 71 per cent said that they always, or sometimes, require assistance from staff, or find it helpful.

3. Disabled passengers are very happy with the assistance and service they receive from rail staff.

- 83 per cent found that rail staff were always or mostly well trained, helpful and polite

4. The main benefits that staff provide for disabled passengers were in the areas of safety and security, travel information, ticket purchasing and accessing facilities.

On stations, the four most popular benefits (percentages ranking a service in respondents' top three) were:

- enhancing personal security and safety: 61 per cent
- providing travel information: 60 per cent
- help buying tickets: 54 per cent
- help with accessing ticket gates and platforms: 45 per cent.

On trains, the four most popular benefits (percentages ranking a service in respondents' top three) were:

- enhancing personal security and safety: 93 per cent
- help with getting on and off the train: 73 per cent
- providing travel information: 76 per cent
- help with using the train's facilities: 58 per cent

5. There were very significant concerns about the impact of the loss of staff on trains and stations.

- 81 per cent said that the loss of staff at stations would make train travel difficult. 34 per cent said that this would either deter them making some journeys or make train travel impossible.
- 75 per cent said that the loss of staff on trains would make train travel difficult. 36 per cent said that this would either deter them making some journeys or make train travel impossible.

6. Concerns about loss of staff varied between passengers with different types of disabilities.

- 63 per cent of wheelchair users said that the loss of staff at stations would deter them making some journeys or make train travel impossible. 51 per cent said the same about staff on trains.

7. Disabled passengers mainly feel safe and unthreatened on trains and stations but significant numbers feel unsafe and many have suffered hate crimes.

- 23 per cent sometimes or often feel unsafe and threatened on trains.
- 29 per cent sometimes or often feel unsafe and threatened at stations.
- 27 per cent have suffered a hate crime and/or abuse on a train or at a station. This figure jumps to 43 per cent for wheelchair users.



What disabled passengers say

These are comments that were submitted to us through People First, Transport for All, Disabled People Against Cuts and Survation survey respondents.

“Staff are essential late at night”

“Not having staff would have negative consequences for all passengers especially women and young people, in addition to disabled.”

“I would be horrified if staff on trains and at stations were cut or completely taken away.”

“I am always fearful that we won't be quick enough to board the train. If the train driver doesn't see us, no extra time is allowed. On one occasion so far this has led to my being hit by the train doors – not a pleasant experience, I can assure you.”

“When I attempt to get a train back, sometimes the helpful staff at the station in London look at me with a concerned face and tell me that Elmers End is unmanned. Clearly they understand that I will have difficulty getting off the train, but what can I do?”

“Unmanned stations are an absolute barrier to travel. You cannot always guarantee you can plan a day or a journey one hundred percent in advance especially if you are juggling work and family pressures. I don't have a car and am completely reliant on public transport to get me to where I need to be.”

“If you cut rail staff it will mean rail travel won't be a difficult option for disabled people, it won't be an option at all.”

“My local station is manned by only one person who is in the station office on one side of the rail track. The two platforms are connected by a footbridge that is obviously inaccessible to me as a wheelchair user and my connection comes in on the opposite platform. Sometimes I cannot find the member of staff because he has to staff the office and dispatch trains and do everything for the station. After a full day at work this is all really tiring and difficult but there would be no way I could travel to and from work at all if the one staff member was cut.”

“As a person with a learning difficulty when I travel on my own I sometimes get anxious and have panic attacks. I get confused sometimes so I need staff around to ask because members of the public aren't always friendly to ask. I would be very worried travelling without staff around.”

“Not long after I was newly blind I was travelling to Loughborough by train. There was no guard or staff on the train to assist me so when I couldn't get off at my stop I stayed on and got off at the next one. The next stop was a commuter station that was unstaffed in the evening so I ended up left on a platform at a station completely alone and unable to find my way around or onto the platform to take me back.”

“Fewer staff will make it even harder for disabled people to get to where they want if there is no one to receive them at the other end. Fewer staff on trains will make it harder for disabled people to enforce their right to a seat if passengers refuse.”