



Merton Centre for Independent Living
Vestry Hall
336 London Road
Mitcham
CR4 3UD

25th October 2024

Southern Railway
Govia Thameslink Railway
PO Box 8644
Derby
DE1 9RQ

Dear Southern Railway,

Invitation to Discuss Access Issues on Southern Trains with Merton Centre for Independent Living's Access Champions

Merton Centre for Independent Living (Merton CIL) is a Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation (DDPO) based in the London Borough of Merton. Our members are Deaf and Disabled people who support our work to push for a more equitable society, and one vehicle for the membership to use their lived experience as a tool for social change is our group of Access Champions, who are united by the aim to make Merton more accessible.

The Access Champions meet quarterly and are in regular communication with each other between meetings. They have a broad range of concerns, from access to green spaces, to accessible toilets – networking with organisations and individuals who can help to bring about positive changes. Their work is making a difference. They have improved access on Wimbledon Common and successfully campaigned for the installation of a Changing Places Toilet in Wimbledon town centre. When they reached out to South Western Railway about proposed ticket office closures, it soon resulted in a fruitful meeting with their Senior Accessibility and Inclusion Manager, opening up communication in a way which is of mutual benefit. They have attended an Inclusion London-led event to lobby the government to build more accessible housing. They recently fed into a report about the state of the Dial-a-Ride scheme. They are currently working with the Mitcham Town Centre Manager on the issue of ramps needed to access certain businesses. And following their contributions to an

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Independent Councillor's report on public toilet provision in Merton and their creation of an accessible toilets survey which is being piloted in Raynes Park, they will soon start liaising with the borough's new Community Toilet Scheme Project Officer, working with other members of the 'More Loos for Merton' campaign accordingly.

On 1st September last year, our Joint CEO, Charlet Wilson, and I wrote to you about proposed ticket office closures (please see attached), but did not hear from you. As you are aware, the proposal was then shelved by the government. However, a recurring topic of discussion at the Access Champions' meetings is the difficulties that some people have when trying to use Southern trains.

In particular, some Access Champions who are wheelchair and/or mobility scooter users have found it impossible to board and disembark where they need to because your mobile staff have not been able to get to where they need to be to help. This contrasts with the Access Champions' experience of South Western Railway, who have a guard on every train, and whilst your staff have generally been apologetic, the impact upon those simply trying to get from A to B has been huge. Family events have been missed. Planned outings have ended up having to be postponed or cancelled. Taxis have had to be used, sometimes involving long waits in inclement weather. And as I am sure you can appreciate, the anxiety, frustration, sadness, and sense of disenfranchisement that these experiences have generated has been significant.

In light of this, the Access Champions would like to understand better your approach to accessibility, and to use their insights to serve as a critical friend to you. Hence, they invite you to meet to hear about your practices, discuss their experiences, and share the improvements that they would like to see and the ideas that they have to bring about these improvements. You would be more than welcome to come to the building in which Merton Centre for Independent Living is based (please see overleaf), but an online or hybrid meeting is possible too.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Pippa Maslin
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