

Richard George
Chair
DfT OLR Holdings Ltd
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Waterloo Station
London
SE1 8SW

14th December 2023

cc. Mark Harper, Secretary of State for Transport

Dear Richard George,

I write to you in your capacity as Chair of DfT OLR Holdings, the Government operator running services on Northern network.

I am dismayed and disappointed that DfT OLR Holdings Ltd, a public operator, has allowed the banning of motorcycles from the car park at Whitby Station. This discriminatory ban applies to commuters and tourists wishing to access Northern rail services arriving at Whitby station by motorcycle only. Furthermore, it appears to be a deliberate attempt to disrupt a favourite meeting point for local riders, The Whistle Stop Café.

Signage of the exclusion appears to have been erected without prior consultation or notice on, or before, 1st December 2023. The appearance of the signage has led to many attempts to contact Northern Rail to understand the logic and justification for this action. All attempts have been met with nothing more than a template response.

The template response states:

“The decision was made due to motorcycles often occupying individual parking spaces, thus hindering access for cars that require these facilities. Additionally, there's a lack of evidence that all motorcycle users are paying the appropriate tariff, which is a requirement for all station customers. Moreover, motorcycles are frequently parked in pedestrian walkways, pavements, and areas designated for other vehicles.

Regarding the Thursday Night Motorbike meeting, Northern Trains has not granted permission for this gathering. Therefore, controlling the car park's usage becomes necessary to prevent further disruptions to its operation and revenue.”

There are no dedicated motorcycle bays at the car park, tariffs do not state a rate for motorcycles and, until the introduction of the Ringo payment system, did not apply outside the hours 6am – 6pm. It is hard to see any genuine justification for this heavy-handed action other than discrimination due to intolerance and disinterest in the needs of certain customers.

In 2020, a Department for Transport news story published on 1st March, announced that the Government has taken over the running of services across the Northern network. In that release you stated:

“The panel announced today will play a crucial strategic role as we look to transform services across Northern’s network, putting the needs of passengers first.

By collaborating with local leaders, we’re taking a step towards reconnecting the railways with the people of the North. We need to improve performance and also provide passengers and their elected representatives with the confidence that their concerns are being addressed.”

You appear to have failed in delivering anything other than discrimination towards motorcyclists who are passengers. I would refer you to a publication by the Association of Train Operating Companies entitled “Motorcycle Parking at Rail Stations Guide” published in 2014 as a good starting point to educate your operatives on best practice for motorcycle parking. (<https://www.raildeliverygroup.com/about-us/publications/archive/337-2014-04-motorcycle-parking-at-stations/file.html>)

We have made repeated attempts to open meaningful dialogue but Northern staff have been unwilling to engage. Please can you act urgently to ensure that the decision to ban motorcycles from parking at Whitby station is reversed immediately, and commit to working with the Motorcycle Action Group to establish how the facilities at, not just Whitby but all, Northern operated stations can be improved for the benefit of those choosing to travel to those stations by motorcycle.

I look forward to your prompt reply.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil Liversidge', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Neil Liversidge
Chair
The Motorcycle Action Group