

14 August 2023p

(Sorry no email etc)

Transport Infrastructure Planning Unit,
Department for Transport,
Great Minster House, 33 Horseferry Road,
London SW1P 4DR.

Network Rail Proposals to close various footpath level crossings, Garforth, West Yorks.

During an overdue walk recently a number of Leeds City Council statutory notices came to my attention affixed to various posts, concerning proposals by Network Rail to close either permanently or temporarily (the latter in connection with upcoming and long promised electrification) several long established foot crossings on the East Leeds mainline between Crossgates and Micklefield. My concerns relate principally to two crossings, -at **Crawshaw Woods (footpath 124)** and **White House Farm (footpath 125)**, but also peripherally to those east of Garforth at Becks Farm (Meakins') and Peckfield Lane.

My first problem was the difficulty in deciphering a series of small scale extract plans, not all in the same orientation, and accompanying text which confusingly muddled temporary and permanent proposals together, affixed by Leeds C.C. in the open air to available posts beside country tracks. I did however notice that these plans would be available for inspection (like all planning applications) at the local library. So a few days later I visited the library, hoping to find a set of extract plans, ideally larger scale, and possibly more text explaining the proposals, especially ones which are temporary and which permanent, and if the latter for how long, with especial reference to rights of way. How naïve of me!

What I was presented with was a whole table covered in thick ring binders full of legal jargon (which even I as a long retired planning officer found totally indigestible, least of all in the limited time available), and no overriding summary for the layman or index to topics such as rights of way. Hidden among all this were indeed some larger, clearer plans, if one could find them, but still no clear separation of permanent vs. temporary, or indication of duration.

I persevered, and after an hour or so I *think* I managed to confirm that **neither of the two crossings west of Garforth are to be closed permanently**, but it seems the two further east towards Micklefield are so proposed. **If I am correct in that reading, then this need not be treated as a formal objection. If I am incorrect, then please do so treat it.**

Nevertheless there are some general points which need making. I have already alluded to one, namely **which works are temporary, and for what anticipated period?** Network Rail have form on "temporary" closures in this area and elsewhere, notably the footpath crossing just east of Barwick Road at Dale Croft, closed "temporarily" some years back, and subsequently retrospectively closed permanently (to the irritation no doubt of local allotment holders). We have also lost three other crossings in the same section recently, -halfway along Barrowby Lane / Nanny Goat Lane (long unusable), under the M1 bridge, and at Thorpe Park (planned station site), also swallowed up by a new road. The first two admittedly were little used.

But this record does suggest that these remaining two must be retained *and at least one kept open at all times*. I suggest the easiest way to do so would be to retain the existing, fully equipped crossing at White House Farm until works are completed on at least one of these.

As to **duration**, I presume we are talking about two years or more, but this needs clarifying. It should also be noted that the Crawshaw Woods bridge is part of the **Leeds Countryway** designated route, so a temporary rerouting over the White House Farm crossing will need to be arranged *and clearly waymarked* by the City Council. My impression is that both this bridge and that at Becks Farm were provided primarily to compensate the respective landowners for severance of their property by the railway, so there may be residual legal obligations although in the case of Becks Farm the bridge is apparently privately owned.

I note that these works are being proposed under the flag of electrification work. **This is dishonest**. Whilst it makes sense to do both at once, there is in reality no solid reason why electrification could not proceed with existing crossings remaining in situ. Indeed numerous such crossings are still in use on electrified lines, both AC and DC, notably in the Home Counties, and have been for a century or more in many cases. In reality Network Rail today is driven by the current safety culture (and nervous lawyers) to close as many crossings around the country as they can, regardless of alternatives, even in areas unlikely ever to be electrified. One only has to note the lists in the relevant technical journals. *Properly used*, these crossings are no more dangerous than crossing busy arterial roads. The bridges are of course a different matter, and both in this area clearly in need of replacement, especially at Crawshaw Woods.

The quality of **proposed replacement routes** often leave much to be desired and show little understanding of the needs of users. The standard model seems to be an overbridge high enough to clear overhead wires, usually with ramps and sometimes stairs but not lifts which are seemingly reserved for stations. White House Farm is a case in point. This popular crossing is apparently to get a standard ramped bridge resembling that at East Garforth station. I am getting to the sort of age where such ramps present quite an obstacle, and I wonder how equestrian users will cope! (The adjacent farm is of course a riding school.) At the other end of the age scale, local youngsters will no doubt resort to "legging it" over the line, as they already do at East Garforth.

The same is true of **alternative routes**, even temporary ones. HS2 set some particularly bad examples of this locally, such as paths diverted onto *road* bridges, or in one case failing even to connect the two ends of a route! (A path just east of Barwick Road.) Clearly the folk who come up with such ideas probably never use footpaths themselves and certainly have no understanding of *what people use paths for* -to keep off busy roads! So tedious detours round roads are *not* acceptable! These proposals avoid the worst of HS2's blunders, but already the example of the closed crossing at Dale Croft shows how *not* to do it! The replacement is via the adjacent Barwick Road underbridge, already a single track road with priority one way and a footpath just about wide enough for a single pedestrian, certainly not a wheelchair or child's buggy. What's more, for the allotment holders, it is several times the distance from Main St. [What this bridge needs is a separate pedestrian underpass (tunnel) alongside the road, high enough for mounted equestrians, plus a convex mirror mounted on the telegraph pole facing the end of Nanny Goat Lane so that everyone can see everything coming. Not rocket science!]

Network Rail should remember they are not the only sustainable transport mode, and should show more regard for other such modes including those above rail in the ranking!

A final point on **timing**. It may be just bad luck, but these notices appeared in mid July, shortly after the heat wave gave way to a period of wet weather which will have put off many walkers like me, from venturing off paved areas. Not only that but we are now in peak holiday period, which will run beyond the deadline for responses, and anyone trying to read a major part of the documentation will be busy past Christmas (if they live that long!) We have just had another example of this sort of timing, with the "consultation" (?) over ticket office closures. That had to be extended, and so should this be.

Years ago rail users and campaigners coined the term "closure by stealth" as applied to line or service closures. Thankfully most of these were blocked or withdrawn, and are now thriving (covid notwithstanding). Closure by stealth now seems to have returned not only in the form of ticket office closures, but also the prospects ramblers are facing in respect of usable paths across rail lines. It has to stop!

Sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of M.G. Crowhurst.

M.G. Crowhurst (Mr).
Retired Town Planner, Rail user-campaigner and Rambler.