

Speaking notes S. Ayles

18.10.18

+ N. Hargreaves Councils.

Network Rail - Level Crossing Reductions

Newport is a growing village: 2011 – 974 x houses / since then the building of an additional 444 x houses has been approved (a 45% increase) / to date approximately 100 of these houses have been completed.

There are 3 x level crossings in Newport: Windmills (E11) / Dixies (E10) / Elephant (E09) – NR wish to close all of them.

The Parish Council accepts the closure of Windmills, we would far rather Dixies remain open (many of the new houses are close to this crossing and to keep it open would be of great benefit to the many new householders) but we most strongly object to the closure of Elephant.

Newport Parish Council's objections were laid out in a letter to Network Rail on 11th May 2017 and were responded to by Bridgit Choo-Bennett from NR on 29th August 2017.

Elephant begins / terminates in the centre of the village turning directly from the High St. Of the Newport footpaths under closure consideration it is by far and away the most popular. It is attractive – having along its length leafy glades, overhanging trees, small open meadows, a shaded crossing over the river Cam and an impressive variety of plant and animal life.

NR now suggests (after rejecting its 'go via Newport Station footbridge' idea) an alternative route up the Debden Rd., over its road bridge, then beyond the bridge for some 100mtrs before turning north across fields to meet up with the existing footpath to the East of the railway tracks. This will involve compulsory purchase and the whole arrangement will be costly. Debden Rd. has no footpath, either on the road or on the bridge.

The existing initial 200mtrs. length of the footpath from the High St. to the tracks (a particularly attractive stretch that includes the river crossing) is thus completely ignored.

Traffic Lights suggested at the Debden Rd. bridge will cost NR and Essex County Council a considerable sum of money...with ECC likely picking up future maintenance costs.

The Debden Rd. Bridge is humpbacked and single lane only and the road to the West of the bridge leading to the High St., also goes downhill, thus exaggerating the hump. The bridge is narrow, there is insufficient room for both a road and a footpath.

The present arrangement means that drivers and pedestrians approach the bridge with caution. Currently, walking across the bridge is a matter of eye to eye contact with drivers. Basically the person on foot or in a vehicle already on the bridge, or about to cross, takes precedence. With a light system, pedestrians will not wait if there is no vehicle in sight, particularly if going to the station, and will go onto the bridge. A driver then seeing a green light will assume full right of way and will presume no-one is on the bridge and will not slow down...potential disaster! There have been no reported accidents on this bridge with the present arrangement and traffic lights, on what is a country lane, will unpleasantly urbanise the setting. This current arrangement may not be perfect but we believe traffic lights will create a greater risk.

Neil's comments...

Installing a 'Public Footpath with Miniature Stop Lights' as in operation at Cannon's Mill Lane Level Crossing further South down the line would seem to be the logical solution.

Surely there is some way to make it work at Elephant?

The NR letter of 29th August 2017 stated that 'it is not possible to have automatic locking gates in the absence of supervision' and 'stopping & non-stopping services affect warning times'.

Yet Cannon's Mill Lane happily copes with both these issues -

- Both it and Elephant are rated for a line speed of 70mph.
- There is no supervision
- Trains travel at different speeds...and CML copes with a greater of trains per day – 251 compared to 149!

NR's point regarding varying train speeds seems particularly desperate – obviously for safety's sake the crossing would be calibrated for fast trains and for slower trains, walkers will just wait a little longer.

The installation of a 'Miniature Stop Lights with Audible Warning' crossing would also address any sight-line issues – approaching trains would be announced by the audible warning.

The cost of installing a 'Public Footpath with Miniature Stop Lights' would be far less than unwanted traffic lights at Debden Rd bridge quite apart from the costs of compulsory land purchase and the creation of a considerable length of new footpath to meet up with existing footpath.

Please re-open this attractive and once very popular crossing and allow us to access it via the centre of the village...as we have done for generations!

18.10.18

THE PROPOSED NETWORK RAIL (ESSEX AND OTHERS LEVEL CROSSING REDUCTION) ORDER

PUBLIC INQUIRY, 18 OCTOBER 2017

DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT REFERENCE: TWA/17/APP/O5

OBJECTION BY DISTRICT COUNCILLOR NEIL HARGREAVES TO CLOSURE OF E09 ELEPHANT CROSSING, PARISH OF NEWPORT AND TO THE NETWORK RAIL ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL AND FAILURE TO CONSIDER OTHER ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS

My original objection is Objection 180. The proposal has been changed

I am dismayed that without consultation with local residents and stakeholders or discussion with the Essex Highways officer responsible for projects in this area, or the County Councillor, that a most unsuitable highways project has been added to the proposal. (I have twice asked Ms Choo-Bennett of Network Rail who in Essex Highways has 'agreed in principle' but have received neither acknowledgement nor response.) It is a concern if matters are being decided outside of normal processes

I have strong objections to the new traffic light proposal on grounds of safety, traffic congestion and long term cost to the local tax payer.

Currently walking across the single track bridge is a matter of eye to eye contact with drivers. Typically the person on foot or in a vehicle already on the bridge, or about to cross, takes precedence, although often drivers just carry on even if a pedestrian is on the bridge. With a light system, pedestrians will not wait for the lights to work if there is no vehicle in sight, particularly if going to the station, and will go onto the bridge. A driver then seeing a green light will assume full right of way and will presume no-one will be on the bridge. If a pedestrian is caught on the bridge with a vehicle coming at speed there is no place of escape. Also there is no lighting on the East of the bridge or on the bridge itself.

The current arrangement is unsafe, but I think traffic lights would create a greater risk

Traffic lights would also create traffic delays at the bridge, often to no purpose. Pedestrians will push the button even if nothing is coming and then go across. My observation from the other light controlled crossing in Newport is that much of the time vehicles are stopped awaiting nothing as the pedestrian is long gone, often even before the lights have reacted. Apart from the annoyance to drivers, pedestrians do not want to be squeezing alongside rows of vehicles, there being no footway and the road is narrow, to get to the bridge, and to the button

Removal of traffic calming effect of narrow bridge

It was claimed that the proposed lights would provide traffic calming. A letter from Ms Choo-Bennett of NR said it was observed that vehicles are not slowing until they are on the bridge. I drive and walk across many days a week and my observation is that this is completely incorrect. No machine recorded or any other speed evidence to support this observation have been presented

A vehicle coming down Debden Rd and finding the light on green, maybe triggered by a previous vehicle, will no longer be constrained to slow down and will likely go over at greater speed than if they had to sort out priority for themselves, and generally be aware of other bridge users. The

current arrangement, while bad for pedestrians, does provide traffic calming right down to the T junction, which would be negated by traffic lights found on green

Long term cost

Although NR would no doubt pay for installation and some fee for the first few years of maintenance, I assume the long term cost of maintenance, renewal and damage repair in perpetuity would fall on ECC not NR. ECC are on a tight budget and local councillors, and they, have to work very hard to get both projects and regular maintenance done. The concern is that NR are not just creating a road safety issue but creating long term cost for another body

Failure to consider other options

Foot crossing warning systems exist and are catered for in the ORR December 2011 'Level crossings: a guide for managers, designers and operators'

Para 2.150 Users are expected to use reasonable vigilance to satisfy themselves that no trains are approaching before they start to cross the line. They should cross quickly and remain alert whilst crossing. Users should have sufficient time from first seeing, or being warned of, an approaching train to cross safely.

Miniature stop lights (MSL)

General description Miniature stop lights (previously known as miniature warning lights) consist of red and green lights. 2.263 They can be used at user worked crossings, footpath crossings and bridleway crossings. In some instances it may be appropriate for the warning system to be activated by the user on arrival before using the crossing. The green light normally shows, but an approaching train automatically changes the lights to red. Signs to Diagram 107 in the 1996 Regulations (see Figure 8) instructing users to cross only when the green light shows should be provided

Another section of the document says these are considered suitable on line speeds up to 100 mph. The limit here is 70 mph and in a location with S bends over viaducts and in cuttings I suggest there is no possibility of significant line speed increase and certainly not above 100 mph. On a stopping train commuter line there would be no point in the significant expenditure, engineering and resignalling, that this would entail

My request to know what alternative solutions, including MSL, have been considered has not been responded to so it appears nothing else has been seriously considered

An alternative solution, which would be of great benefit to all users. not just those on the Elephant crossing, would be to install a footbridge attached to the outside of the road bridge on the south side. There is room. Cost would be an issue, but looking at other Highways projects for which I know the costs, a road traffic light system would also be expensive, and it is possible that street lighting may also be required. A bridge would be totally safe and have little continuing costs.

To conclude, my preference is for NR to retain the existing crossing with an enhanced warning system. If a footbridge could be done I would be delighted to support that instead, and I think it would have general support. The traffic lights I would strongly oppose

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