

PUBLIC INQUIRY**APPLICATION BY NEWTWORK RAIL UNDER TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT 1992
PROPOSED NETWORK RAIL SUFFOLK LEVEL CROSSING REDUCTION ORDER**

OBJ/27-FOREST HEATH DISTRICT COUNCIL**PROOF OF EVIDENCE – S22 Weatherby****SARA NOONAN****PRINCIPAL GROWTH OFFICER**

INTRODUCTION

1. My name is Sara Noonan. I am employed by West Suffolk Councils (Forest Heath District and St Edmundsbury Borough) as Principal Growth Officer. I have been in my current position since December 2015. I have 15 years' experience working in economic development and cultural services in a range of roles covering policy, strategy, and project management.
2. I have a dual degree - BSc in Environmental Science and BA in Liberal Arts.

POLICY

3. The West Suffolk Strategic Plan (Appendix 1) sets out what both councils aim to achieve together, with our partners, local businesses, communities and residents. Our priorities are:

Priority 1: Increased opportunities for economic growth	Priority 2: Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active	Priority 3: Homes for our communities
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STRATEGIC CONTEXT

4. West Suffolk (WS) councils have been working with Network Rail and other partners for a number of years on a variety of projects and through a number of groups, recent examples include:

- Ely Area Taskforce
- Newmarket Rail Group
- Suffolk Chamber of Commerce Transport and Infrastructure Board
- Suffolk Rail Conference
- East West Rail Consortium

5. I represent West Suffolk on these groups and projects, which all aim to help support and make the case for investment in railway enhancements to increase rail services for both freight and passenger services. I am the West Suffolk representative on these groups.

S22 – Weatherby (Newmarket)

6. As set out in Forest Heath District Council's (FHDC) Statement of Case, FHDC is objecting to the closure of S22 Weatherby as regards:
- a. the justification for this closure at this time given both the aims and needs of Network Rail's TWAO and the long timescales for service enhancements;
 - b. the likely impact on the community and associated national, regional and local policy conflicts; and,
 - c. the proposed alternative being neither suitable nor convenient.

AIMS OF TWAO

7. In Network Rail's Statement of Case (NR 26), it is noted that: *..the justifications for closure relate not only to the safety test as set out in those sections of the Highways Act, but more widely to enable improved efficiency, network reliability, and the potential for capacity or linespeed enhancements'.ⁱ*
8. In their reasoning for using a TWAO instead of the Highways Act 1980, NR note that Sections 118A and 119B of the Act, *...apply only where it appears to the relevant council to be expedient in the interests of the safety of members of the public using or likely to use such crossings, and not for wider railway purposes.ⁱⁱ* At the public consultations to support the TWAO the focus was on alternative routes and safety, there was no consultation on the other aspects of closure, justification or explanation of 'wider railway purposes'. It could be argued that this lack of detail, would limit communities' ability to oppose closure on all relevant factors being considered in the decision to close crossings. In NR 26 it is noted that: *Along with*

the considered consultation responses other factors including engineering constraints, costs, environmental impact, user safety, landowner impacts and constructability were all considered in an internal workshop.ⁱⁱⁱ

9. Returning to these, 'wider railway purposes', in terms of improved efficiency Network Rail have not itemised their costs on a per crossing basis in either document NR26 or in their consultation materials. The closure of Weatherby has therefore not been justified on efficiency grounds in terms of existing and future maintenance costs and associated savings. At this time the public is not aware of how much the closure of Weatherby level crossing would save Network Rail and how/if these savings are linked to future service enhancements on the Ipswich to Cambridge rail line, particularly the single track line between Chippenham junction and Coldham Lane junction.
10. Network Rail argues that a TWAO allows for multiple closures and is more efficient than, *...multiple individual applications under sections 118A and 119A of that Act [which] would completely overburden a local highway authority and take considerable time to determine.^{iv}* When contrasted against the amount of time and cost needed to prepare for the public inquiry, this may not prove to be the case within Suffolk.
11. As regards network reliability, NR have provided an ALCRM risk score, but the methodology and calculation of the risk score is not clear. NR have not provided crossing specific details of the impact on rail network reliability at this level crossing beyond the risk score and number of incidents at the crossing.

Regarding the level of risk at this crossing and the associated implications for network reliability it is noted that:

- a. the crossing is over one, not two lines of rails;
- b. the line speed is up to 40 mph only;
- c. the crossing is located approximately 400 metres from Newmarket Railway Station meaning trains will be slowing on the approach and will not have gained full speed on departure;
- d. there is no rail freight timetabled on this section of the Cambridge to Ipswich line between Coldham Lane junction and Chippenham junction; and,

- e. There are no significant housing or employment sites located south of the railway line in the FHDC Local Plan (Appendix 2). Therefore, there are no expected population increases related to new housing or new employment development sites coming forward between now and 2031.

12. Network Rail have referenced, *the general impact of level crossings on proposed enhancements to services*,^v but they have not demonstrated how closing Weatherby will increase performance and efficiency on a single track line with an hourly service and line speeds restricted by the proximity to the station. No details or timescales were included in the community consultation on these proposed enhancements as regards each crossing.

13. Indicative timescales for relevant enhancement schemes to the line through S22 Weatherby include:

- a. East West Rail (Central Section – Bedford to Cambridge) with trains estimated to operate on the new railway by the early 2030s. (Appendix 3)
- b. East West Rail (Eastern Section – Cambridge to Ipswich) no timescale has been identified, but the Conditional Output Study (Appendix 4) commissioned to support the Eastern Section has identified the need for double tracking and signaling upgrades between Cambridge and Chippenham Junction in order to increase services.
- c. The *Anglia Route Study* (NR24) has identified the aspiration to increase passenger service frequency between Ipswich to Cambridge to 2tph under WACO7, but this is an option for funders in Control Period 6 (2019-2024), Control Period 7 (2024-2029) or beyond (post 2029).^{vi}
- d. In meetings^{vii} between West Suffolk Council and Network Rail regarding S22 Weatherby, discussions were had which aimed to defer the closure of this level crossing, until such time as a committed enhancement scheme is identified (ie increased rail services, specifically the introduction of twice per hour Ipswich to Cambridge services).

14. Whilst Network Rail has aspirations for the schemes listed above, FHDC are not aware of any funded commitments to enhancements linked to the Cambridge to Ipswich line, therefore closing this crossing is premature due to the immediate and significant impact that this will have on the community without guarantees that the benefits of increased or faster services will be deliverable in the near future.

Community Impact

15. Twenty-three of the 62 objections made to the Secretary of State regarding the Suffolk order concerned S22 Weatherby.^{viii} Unlike the other crossings in the Suffolk Order which are in rural locations, Newmarket is defined as a market town and is Forest Heath's largest settlement. The town has a population of approximately 17,240^{ix} and is located south of the A14, some 11 miles west of Bury St Edmunds and 10 miles east of Cambridge. (Appendix 2)
16. Newmarket's High Street runs for one mile from the Jubilee Clock Tower to the Cooper Memorial Fountain. The High Street and its surrounding streets contain Newmarket's historic core, the main shopping area (including a twice weekly outdoor market and the Guineas Shopping Centre), training stables and visitor attractions including the National Heritage Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art. (Appendix 2).
17. A large number of Newmarket's residents use the crossing including 3,597 pedestrians and 442 cyclists during Network Rail's traffic census in June 2016 (NR 25). Closure of this crossing would be extraordinarily disruptive for residents including primary school children and allotment holders. Residents fear that its closure would "split the town in half" and this has been reflected in numerous press articles (Appendix 5) regarding closure of S22 Weatherby including community protests (see photo Pg 6) and a petition against closure signed by 410 people (Appendix 6). Four out of the five primary schools (Appendix 2), the upper school, all three GP surgeries and community facilities including the Memorial Hall, Library, King's Theatre, Studlands Community Centre and the town's main retail offers are all north of the railway line (Appendix 2) and therefore the crossing is an important means of access for pedestrians from the south. (see map Appendix 7)



Weatherby Crossing, Newmarket rail protest,
Cambridge News, Thursday 30 March 2017

18. On the south side of the railway line the Newmarket Football Club is a draw for pedestrians from the town heading south across the rail line for matches, training days and other social events estimated to generate between 150-200 people using the crossing per week.^x In addition Ditton Lodge Primary School, Ditton Lodge Community Nursey, the New Cheveley Road Allotments and the Willow Crescent Play Area are all on the south side of the railway line. (see map Appendix 7)
19. While there has been a high level of response and objection to the closure of S22 Weatherby, FHDC notes that the level of response would likely have been even higher had Network Rail's consultation sessions been held in Newmarket rather than Bury St Edmunds, which is 14.3 miles away.^{xi} At the Pre-Inquiry meeting access to the Bury St Edmunds inquiry venue was raised as an issue requiring further consideration by Network Rail. FHDC also notes that there was no public inquiry document library located in Newmarket until after this issue was raised at the Pre-Inquiry meeting. The nearest document deposit location was Barrow Post office 9.1 miles away.
20. In summarizing the community impact, FHDC notes the following comments from the online petition (Appendix 6).

Change.org petition comments

**Lisa Lavery**

3 wks ago

This crossing will make everybody that use its life so much harder i use the crossing most days especially on a wednesday when i am rushing to the other side of town to open Scallywags toddler group. This group is for the whole community i have to drop my daughter at school than rush to get set up so we can open the group. please dont close as my 2 year old son loves the train drivers waving and sometimes the passengers. i have been using this crossing for 32 years.

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[Report](#)**katheen curtis**

9 Aug 2017

I have lived in newmarket for a very long time and this is so ridiculous,when my son and daughter-in-law moved to newmarket with my grandson i walked him in to the town centre over this crossing many many times and enjoyed actually speaking to people on our way,stop this crossing and another part of Newmarket becomes isolated,walking children to school will not happen, more cars,more pollution.

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[Report](#)**Jon Moore**

1 yr ago

My children use this daily when walking home from the school bus. Closing it will add a significant distance to their walk.

We also use this weekly as a family to get into town. Closing it will almost certainly result in us (and many others) driving and adding to the already problematic congestion in the town.

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[Report](#)**Roy Starling**

1 yr ago

It would be grossly unkind and unfair to close this crossing, many people, including myself bought our homes in New Cheveley Road and Willow Crescent etc; in the belief that we would always be able to get into town quickly, the alternative is much longer and many people simply cannot walk that far without pain and difficulty, I feel that the Railway authorities have no right to close this much used and valued facility.

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[Report](#)**Grahame Peacock**

9 Aug 2017

I believe that it's ludicrous to close this crossing and make people walk upto a mile further to access the town. Now it Network Rail want to replace the crossing with a wheelchair accessible bridge; then I am all for closing the crossing.

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[Report](#)

Acceptability of Proposed Diversion (suitability and convenience?)

21. The proposed diversion using existing roads is considered neither suitable nor convenient due to the length and steepness^{xii} of the route, which disadvantages those with disabilities, the elderly and parents of small children. It is worth noting that one of the neighbourhoods located in the Severals ward of Newmarket (Appendix 7) is in the bottom third nationally for health deprivation and disability^{xiii}. If residents cannot cross the railway line then the journey will be longer and walking will become significantly less attractive leading to more trips by car and adding to congestion within Newmarket.
22. Network Rail emphasizes that all diversions must be completed to the reasonable satisfaction of the highway authority, the proof of evidence of Andrew Woodin from Suffolk County Council speaks to this and the suitability of the route.
23. As regards the convenience of the route, at the June 2016 public consultation undertaken by Network Rail, 97% of responses disagreed with the proposals and 67% of responses preferred another route.^{xiv} If the route is not deemed convenient by users then many will turn to their cars for short trips. Even a small increase of 5-10 minutes, can, particularly when added to a longer commute, put a walker off. This is particularly so when a route is being used to get to local amenities and as part of daily life, as it is for the Weatherby crossing. This creates a policy conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework and public health strategies which encourage people to make short trips via walking, cycling or public transport. The argument about keeping people out of their car for short trips, is particularly important in the Newmarket area which has previously had an Air Quality Monitoring Area (AQMA) on the High Street in place since 6 April 2009. The order (Appendix 8) was amended on 18 April 2017 removing the High Street, but remains in place on Old Station Road (see map Appendix 7). Increased car use for short trips on this road, will likely lead to increased traffic queues, increased engine idling and short trips with cold engines are more polluting. It is not known if the potential for increased car use/impact on the AQMA was considered in the proposal to close S22 Weatherby.
24. FHDC would also raise issues regarding the loss of amenity to residents as they are diverted from a direct path to a more circuitous route, which is up to 870m longer

and steeper with a 5% gradient at points which is just within the NR limit of acceptability for diversions. Given the high usage and diversity of users noted in NR's survey, it is not clear what evidence Network Rail have gathered beyond their diversity impact assessment scoping report and if this has been externally validated. FHDC would expect the DIA scoping report, and any relevant diversity impact assessments for individual crossings to be disclosed to the Inquiry and all objectors. It is also unclear as to which access and user groups were contacted with a questionnaire to gain feedback in regards to the strategy approach informing the TWAO.

Summary

25. As stated above FHDC would argue that there is not significant justification for the closure of Weatherby level crossing given the likely impact on the community of Newmarket, the proposed diversion being both unsuitable and inconvenient as identified in Network Rail's own consultation, the efficiency savings being unknown, and that closure would place an undue burden and impact on the community, decades in advance of any future railway enhancement schemes. There are no definitive enhancements planned on this line in the short to medium term. In addition there does not appear to be any public support for this closure.

Documents Referenced

- ⁱ NR26, pg 31, Section 112
- ⁱⁱ NR26, pg 31, section 112
- ⁱⁱⁱ NR26, pg 38, section 145
- ^{iv} NR26, pg 31, section 114
- ^v NR26, pg 8, section 10
- ^{vi} NR24, pg 69, Figure 5.5,
- ^{vii} 25 April 2017 meeting between Richard Schofield (Route Managing Director) and West Suffolk Council.
- ^{viii} NR26 pg 7, pg 83
- ^{ix} Office of National Statistics, mid-year estimates for 2016, published 26/10/17, including St Marys, All Saints and Severals wards.
- ^x Estimate provided by Newmarket Football Club
- ^{xi} All distances calculated using Google maps
- ^{xii} Using online mapping tools the gradient from the level crossing end of Cricket Field Road to the junction with New Cheveley Road is estimated as a 5 metre ascent, in the opposite direction from the junction of New Cheveley Road and Green Road to the junction of New Cheveley Road and Cricket Field Road is estimated as an 8 metre ascent.
- ^{xiii} Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015
- ^{xiv} *ALCRS, Summary Sheet, – September 2016, Network Rail*