

TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT.PROPOSED SUFFOLK LEVEL CROSSINGS CLOSURES.

STATEMENT OF CASE OBJECTING TO THE CLOSURE OF S 22 WEATHERBY CROSSING NEWMARKET WARWICK HIRST A NEWMARKET TOWN COUNCILLOR

THE PROPOSAL

Network Rail have proposed to close this Pedestrian Crossing. The Statement of Matters issued by the Department of Transport confirms that the Secretary of State has to take a decision for each of the 23 crossing .

HISTORY OF THIS CROSSING

This has been a Pedestrian crossing for over a 100 years in unopposed public use . When British Rail stopped it being used by vehicles in the 1960s , it continued to be used by pedestrians . . Network Rail state that it is a permissive path , but there are no disclaimer notices stating this fact .

CONSULTATIONS

A Public consultation was held in 2016 by Network Rail in Bury St Edmunds on the proposed changes to this level crossing .

Results 3% agreed with these plans ,and 97% disagreed with them . Respondents were concerned over the length and the steepness of the proposed diversion route , and the lack of safety from walking on or near busy public roads

WEATHERBY LEVEL CROSSING IS DIFFERENT TO THE OTHER SUFFOLK CROSSINGS AND MUST BE CONSIDERED SEPARATELY .

<1> It is a very busy crossing with 400/500 pedestrians using it daily . Many of the other level crossings are rarely used

<2> Network rail want to increase the capacity and speed of the East Coast -especially Felixstowe – to Ely and the Midlands route for Container trains . This line splits after Kentford and does not go through Newmarket and the Weatherby crossing . There is a 40 mph speed restriction before Newmarket Station and the Weatherby crossing ,caused by a bend in the track .

<3> After the line turns towards Ely , there is a single line and narrow tunnel which cannot take container trains

PEDESTRIAN USAGE OF THE WEATHERBY LEVEL CROSSING

Network Rail has published the usage by Pedestrians in a nine day period in June\July 2016 .

The full results are attached . Conclusions and interpretations.

This is a busy crossing and is used on all days as the communication between the two parts of the Town . The average crossing was 397 people per day , with high of 484 and a low of 324 .

Recorded Adults were 338 per day , with 31 having children ,including 13 with push chairs . In addition between Tuesday and Friday there were 26 unaccompanied children each day .

CYCLE usage was high with an average of 49 per day .

So clearly this crossing is used by people going to work every day , plus adults with children taking children to school/doctors/ and children travelling on their own ,.

The survey is incomplete .It states that 6 pedestrians were elderly . .

So Network rail want to stop several hundred people a day from using this crossing .Clearly the usage figures show that it has a vital role in the lives of residents and in the functioning of the whole Town of Newmarket .

SAFETY OF THE WEATHERBY CROSSING

These are the "safety " figures provided by Network Rail .

Between March 2006 and June 2017 there were 8 near misses and 2 instances of misuse recorded at this crossing .These included 2 deaths attributed to suicide . So less than 1 incident per year . This line is single track here , trains travel very slowly due to the curved track , the tunnel and the need to stop at the station . The line is not busy There is one train per hour in each direction , and half this frequency on a Sunday .

So the disruption and social isolation caused by this planned closure is based on what is an excellent safety record .?

Network rail have published their rating of this crossing based on their own risk model . This is known as ALCRM .This examines a range of measurements such as usage and reported incidents . On this system Network Rail gave a figure of D2 .This is a high risk rating . However we need to see the exact workings and the surprise is to find such a fine safety record producing such a poor result .?

THE ALTERNATIVE ROUTE FOR PEDESTRIANS PROPOSED BY NETWORK RAIL SHOULD THIS CROSSING BE CLOSED

The alternative route is along new cheveley road , under the railway crossing bridge ,and along to green road . This involves travelling an additional 850 metres .

So a return trip is 1700 metres and is 3400 metres for anyone making 4 trips in a day . The former is over a mile and the later is over 2 miles . There is a gradient travelling this way .Network Rail state that it is under 5% . It covers 400 metres in total and is a serious obstacle . This gradient has to be climbed on the return journey from the town . these journeys would affect types of users in different ways .

PEOPLE GOING TO WORK IN THE TOWN .

They will have a longer day and have to leave their home earlier .This raises child care and financial issues for them . Workers who come home at their lunch break have additional problems . One lady has two dogs which need letting out of the house as well as feeding every lunchtime ..Given the extra time which is needed for this diversion , she could not get home at lunchtime .So she would be faced with disposing of her dogs , hopefully to a new home and not having to put them down .

PARENTS WITH SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

Whilst Network Rail give an extra time for this diversion , this takes little account of realities . Pushing a pram or a buggy and also having children walking alongside takes much more time than some fit researcher who has no such encumbrances . This will mean families leaving home earlier and getting home later .There is also a physical impact on the parents .They do the full 3400 metres journey as they have to take and then later to collect their children to/from the School .

RESIDENTS GOING SHOPPING IN THE TOWN

The chart of the survey produced by network rail has 6 people listed as elderly . How was this classification done ? We have received 50 plus letters opposing this proposal .Many state that they are elderly and have a physical condition which means they cannot cope with the proposed diversion and its gradient . This means that this imposed diversion would socially isolate them and leaves the issue of how they even buy food for their survival . There are no buses for this journey and taxis are far too expensive .

CHILDREN GOING TO SCHOOL UNACCOMPANIED

The current route takes them through quiet residential streets .The proposed route exposes them to a busy Public road .Children would be vulnerable to people who harm children as it is an easy route to the A 11/14 Trunk Roads .

CYCLISTS . 442 WERE COUNTED IN THE Network rail survey

Using the Weatherbys Crossing at present takes cyclists through quiet residential streets . If this diversion was in place , cyclists then have to travel on busy roads which are far less safe . Two cyclists were killed in Newmarket in 2016 which demonstrates the dangers of cycling in Newmarket .

This diversion exposes all users to extra dangers , and especially those children who travel unaccompanied with or without bikes .

ALLOTMENTS

The Cheveley Road Allotments are between new cheveley road and the railway line . Many holders use the weatherby crossing and face an extra journey if this goes ahead .

FOOTBALL GROUND

The survey was taken when no football was being played .In the full Season this crossing is the way spectators reach the ground .The diversion would lead to loss of revenues

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

1 NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

This document has to be the basis for all Planning decisions .

This proposal would increase the use of cars , lead to the social isolation of hundreds of residents ,and cause more dangers to school children .All these results clash with this government policy.

2 HUMAN RIGHTS LEGISLATION

The negative social effects of this proposal on both adults and children have wider implications for human rights .

3 ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

Walkways have been installed at stations for pedestrian access across railway lines . Has this been evaluated for this Weatherby Crossing .

CONCLUSIONS

This proposal has severe and completely unacceptable results for thousands of residents of Newmarket .The current safety record is very good .Inflicting all these horrendous effects on our Residents is completely unnecessary . The Network Rail summary of what it sees as the effects is so inadequate as to question if they have been even remotely assessed .

Warwick Hirst Newmarket Town councillor

7 the January 2018