

PUBLIC INQUIRY

APPLICATION BY NETWORK RAIL UNDER TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT 1992

PROPOSED NETWORK RAIL (CAMBRIDGESHIRE LEVEL CROSSING REDUCTION ORDER) 200X

OBJ/12-CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

MARK TUCK

C11 Furlong Drove

C26 Poplar Drove - C27 Willow Row Drove

Introduction

1. My name is Mark Tuck and I live at 24 Lynn Road, Littleport CB6 1QG.
2. I worked as head of policy and procurement at Forest District Council from 1990 until 2007. I looked after a lot of projects. Since then I have worked for 10 years in the offshore renewables business building windfarms, and am now a project manager. It's a stressful job because for every hour I'm late in delivering a job it costs my company €180,000. I look after 250 people on a €4 billion job.
3. I have 40 years of experience as a motorcyclist. I started in 1975 at the age of four. I started racing in 1982 and still race off-road. I've won several local championships. I also ride in stuntshows some weekends. I ride on and off-road, and have done some teaching for kids and schools. I've had a road bike since 1994, and this is when I started using byways and lanes. I got into this because it started getting difficult getting access to formal tracks as they were closing. Byways are free, and give you more options. It also brings up your skill levels as there are different challenges. It's a good social thing too.
4. I do both trail riding and Enduro, which is a type of race activity using Enduro bikes. Many trail riders use Enduro bikes as well. In order to do Enduro racing you have to be very fit.

5. I also do mountain biking which keeps you off the road when they're not too muddy. You can easily get in a ten-mile training programme on byways which keeps you fit.
6. I've been involved with the Trail Riders' Fellowship (TRF) on and off since the late 1990s. The TRF is a national organisation with regions; I focus on the Cambridgeshire/Norfolk region as it's where I live. I regularly contribute to the TRF's online Forum and Facebook page. Here you can chat about anything like fitness on your bike, sign up for outings, routes, safety protocols and road closures. The photographs at Appendix 1 to my statement show my bike on some of the byways in the Ely/Littleport area.
7. I live near Littleport station so I literally can pop out on my Endura bike and go down Ten Mile Bank and over the Willow Row Drove crossing which leads to a series of byways which go out to Ten Mile Bank and Welney on the Norfolk-Cambridgeshire border.
8. I am aware that some farmers have been killed along this stretch of the line. A friend's father was struck when his tractor got stuck on a crossing. When we go out with the TRF we follow a process to ensure that no-one gets injured on crossings. There is a spotter and someone holds the gate open so the rider is only doing one thing and isn't distracted. There is no time pressure for us unlike for farmers.
9. I did see the notices that Network Rail put up. They were spuriously stapled to a post and it was difficult to work out how the network would be affected. The issue that motorcyclists face is when a whole section is closed which cuts a lot of the network off. The TRF is organised and has mapped all the available routes. There are so few routes we can use. If there is a dead-end you have to turn round and go back. We try to pick a variety of routes so you can actually go somewhere. When you get closures like this it really limits us.
10. There are a lot of bridleways but the only legal thing that motorcyclists have is byways. The County Council is good with its seasonal closures of byways so motorcyclists can still use them, but lots of horses use byways but we can't use bridleways. It isn't always obvious when you can and can't use these tracks because they aren't always well-signed, so people may use them anyway if they find it's a dead-end. In the fens, signs are often deliberately removed.

11. If I ride illegally and am caught the police will seize your bike and crush it, even if it is a £20,000 bike. So you can see that motorcyclists want to keep the byways open. It's not simply because we want to ride, but because we have no other option. So having a bridleway as is proposed doesn't help us. People's tolerance of bikes has got less and we are aware of this and don't want to upset people, so we value routes like this which are remote. You travel at 15mph on a byway, and more on a road, so we might go 100 miles in a day.
12. Another reason we want to keep the byways open is cost. At the off-road track at Chippenham, you have to book two weeks in advance, pay £40, and you get two 20 minute sessions in a day. You also want to spread out use across the available network so the user groups aren't competing in congested spaces.
13. I understand why NR want to close the crossings because there have been accidents on the line and there is the cost of asset management, but for those of us who have stressful jobs they're invaluable. I like to jump on my bike, head out where there are no people, to enjoy the nature and the challenge of the ride. It keeps people fit, destresses a lot of people, and it keeps illegal use down. A lot of us police the rest of the use. Some motorcycle use is illegal, so when we see it we report it because it's one less bike thief. In addition the TRF does charity rides of up to 100 miles where we will raise money for the charities. So there is a whole social side to it.
14. There is also a livelihood element because we use the local shops. 20 off-road motorcyclists can turn up at a café regularly because we know and like it.
15. I mostly use Furlong Drove and Willow Row Road on different rides, but I might do them in one ride if it was a long one. It also depends on the condition of the routes. I use them more in the winter when I'm training and there is less event racing. I use them on alternate weeks, so one one week the other the next week. I go out by myself a lot for a couple of hours' training, and also in groups. There are about 20 off-road forums. I have groups of 5-6 friends who come over because they don't have so many other byways at that end of county. The map at Appendix 2 shows the sort of rides I do.

C11 FURLONG DROVE, LITTLE DOWNHAM

- 16. I've not had any problems using this crossing. You follow a process, and it's part of the off-road network as to what we expect. Where they are challenging it can be useful to teach people how to use them safely. It's never been a particular problem.**
- 17. This proposal is disappointing. I would prefer to keep the byway crossing open with its current restricted access as it retains access and restricts use by agricultural vehicles and 4x4s. If I had to compromise I would access the proposed upgrade of FP8 Little Downham as a byway but not as a bridleway. If it was a byway link it would mean we could legally use it. If not, if I used it I could get 6-9 penalty points on my licence and get my bike crushed. As I said before, it isn't always obvious when you can and can't use these tracks because they aren't always well-signed, so people may use them anyway if they find it's a dead-end.**
- 18. Motorcyclists don't have much protection. When you look at modern agricultural machinery, they are the width of the whole road. A motorcyclist travels faster than a cyclist, so any proposal that puts more motorcyclists out into the road is putting them in a road traffic collision situation. Most of the agricultural vehicles in the area are driven by eastern Europeans who don't necessarily know the roads well either. The motorcyclist would come off worst.**
- 19. I have off-road tyres and my bike is set up to work off-road and to grip grass and mud, so you ride slower on the road as it doesn't work so well with hard tarmac. It's better to keep that safe environment and keep off-road. If you fall on mud you're okay but if you fall off on the road you could be in a serious collision.**
- 20. I took a picture of the consultation I saw out onsite and made a response to the web address. I think other TRF members will have done it as well.**

C27 WILLOW ROW DROVE, LITTLEPORT

- 21. This proposal would take out a large section of the trail riders' network. If you remove Willow Row Road you would need to keep the Poplar Drove, so we've still got access to the network. It could be that this proposal is really aimed at farm vehicles. Closing the**

crossing reduces Network Rail's costs, but what do the users do now? It doesn't lend itself to being a nice ride out into the countryside. The more these routes get cut out, the more you find it's a dead-end; you have to stop then go back on yourself, and take roads. Users will take the path of least resistance and could still try and use it, or a private route in order to be able to continue their ride.

22. It would be my preference to keep the crossing with no 4x4 use. Injury has been more to farmers than to public users, so it seems unfair to stop their use. I see a lot of dog walkers and twitchers down there. I don't see 4x4s. If you can put a bridleway crossing in like the one in the proposal that's good enough for motorcyclists, you can treat both user groups in the same way. I don't see there is an issue with this. If you take away the big swing gates and 4x4s can't get through, there would be no reason for them to go down there. You could just have a bridleway-width gate which motorcyclists can use. As a motorcyclist I would prefer to keep the crossing, as my fellow motorcyclists and I are quite used to using such crossings. In creating a bridleway you are restricting use for others. It would be like creating a public footpath across a marina. It keeps all public users who are concerned about the proposal happy.

23. The TRF doesn't see the crossing as a risk because we always have a crossing plan and are responsible. Our preference is to keep both Furlong Drove and Willow Row Drove open because it maintains a network and stops the potential precedence of closure. It may only be a kilometre here and there, but it all adds up, and the dead-ends block many more kilometres of usable byway. It takes away the possibilities for good routes. I don't feel that it's right, particularly as it's mainly for financial reasons, because we motorcyclists haven't made the problem. We're not costing Network Rail any more by asking for the crossing to be kept open. It feels like a punishment of a crime, which it isn't.

24. I believe the facts stated in this proof of evidence are true.

Signed

Dated