

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

LYNDA WARTH

BRITISH HORSE SOCIETY - COUNTY ACCESS & BRIDLEWAY OFFICER, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

INTRODUCTION

1. I have a background in administration and currently am a Director of an Architects' Practice. I have been a horse rider for over 50 years and during the last 20 years, have been an active member of Huntingdon & District Riding Club competing in various equestrian disciplines but in particular, in Endurance. I was a founder member of Shelford & District Bridleways Group in 2007 and remain their Access Officer.
2. I have been an Access and Bridleways Officer with the British Horse Society (BHS) since 2014 and the Cambridgeshire County Access & Bridleways Officer since 2015. My role with the BHS is as a trained volunteer. I also sit on the Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum, an independent advisory body working with Cambridgeshire County Council to improve enjoyment of the Cambridgeshire countryside whilst safeguarding its future, where I represent the interests of horse riders.
3. Part of my role with the BHS is to respond to Planning Applications regarding public access where it affects, or could affect, equestrian access. It is in this role that I became involved with the PROPOSED NETWORK RAIL CAMBRIDGESHIRE LEVEL CROSSING REDUCTION ORDER 200X.
4. The BHS is the body which represents the interests of horse riders and is a Statutory Consultee where equestrian access is involved. The BHS has been consulted on this Order.
5. The BHS produces free leaflets and advice notes giving guidance on a range of subjects including recommendations for standards and specifications of structures and surfaces including Dimensions of Width, Area and Height of equestrian paths. This information can be found at <http://www.bhs.org.uk/access-and-bridleways/free-leaflets-and-advice>.

6. The principles of widths for new bridleways are stated as:

‘The intention of the widths recommended here is to provide a **useable** width of minimum three metres at all seasons, irrespective of whether a path is bounded by a hedge or fences, or may become bounded by such in future. A useable width is likely to require at least an additional half a metre to each side to avoid a rider catching a foot in a fence or being snagged by barbed wire, giving an overall width of four metres. More than half a metre may be required where hedge growth must be accommodated, particularly for fast-growing hedge species or where the hedge is not cut each year.’

Where an existing width is 60 feet the Society would not accept less than 5 metres as an absolute minimum and ideally 10 metres to preserve the same open nature of the route.

7. **BHS POLICY IN RELATION TO DIVERSION ORDERS**

‘The Society encourages Order Making Authorities to adopt a recommended standard of five metres width for diverted bridleways. The Society will usually object to bridleway diversion proposals where the width of the replacement bridleway is less than four metres unless exceptional circumstances apply.’

8. **AREA AVAILABLE FOR MANOEUVRING**

‘Where it is necessary to turn a horse (in order to close a gate, for example), the area of manoeuvring space should ideally be no less than four metres by four metres; large horses may require more than four metres to turn easily. The absolute minimum space required is a diameter of three metres on clear, flat ground with no protrusions or overhanging vegetation. This will be too restrictive for some horses and could result in injury should a horse panic at being so constrained. It allows no leeway at all for a horse being startled by a sudden movement or sound, perhaps from wildlife in a hedge, or for coping with temporary conditions such as standing water. A greater area is preferred to avoid potential of injury on fencing, gates or other structures and if ground is uneven or there is overhanging vegetation. The more that area is restricted, the more important it is that the surface is firm, level and even and kept clear of overgrowth.’

9. **HEIGHT AVAILABLE FOR USERS ON HORSEBACK**

‘Overgrowth: The average height of a mounted rider is 2.55 metres above ground level, tall riders on large horses will be close to three metres. Overhanging branches, overgrowth from the sides and any other obstructions should be cleared to a height of 3.4 metres on all routes.

Underpasses: Where underpasses are constructed to enable riders to cross below a road or railway, the ideal height is at least 3.7 metres (minimum 3.4 metres) preferably higher and width five metres (minimum three metres). While the Society seeks the desirable height for underpasses, in exceptional circumstances a lower height may be tolerated to retain a crossing of a road or railway which would be unsafe to cross at grade and where there is no option to increase the height, such as where the water table is high. The absolute minimum

in these circumstances only would be two metres. When a lower height for an underpass is locally agreed as acceptable, riders would be expected to dismount although those on smaller horses may choose not to do so if they are comfortable with the clearance. When the lower height is provided, a mounting block should be provided at either end (see BHS Advice on Mounting Blocks).'

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL CROSSINGS

10. C10 - Coffue Drove

This underpass is currently in use by some horse riders. Closure of the crossing will force all riders to use the underpass. The limited height is restrictive for larger horses and riders. The underpass would only be acceptable if mounting blocks are provided at either end, the existing path surface made safe and the flooding issue rectified. The improvements detailed in the exchange of correspondence between the BHS and Mott MacDonald in January 2017 would be a requirement of acceptance (see appendix 1). The BHS is aware of the potential of parked trains above the underpass which might prevent some riders being able to use the underpass or having to wait until the train has left because their horse is frightened of the train. Use of the underpass at such a time would be at the riders' discretion but it is acknowledged as a restriction.

As previously advised, the inclusion of a warning system to alert riders to approaching trains would enhance safety.

11. C11 – Furlong Drove

The roadside verges proposed are not suitable for horses and not fit for purpose. They are of inconsistent width, in some places very narrow and in others, narrow alongside a deep, water filled ditch. The verges are made up of unsupported, peaty fen soil, easy for a horse's hoof to penetrate resulting in a trip, pitching both horse and rider into a ditch or the road which is busy with heavy agricultural and transport vehicles. Unlike the existing bridleway, the path narrowness would prevent the rider seeking the best route on soft ground. The use of the verge route would require construction of a new verge path of at least 3 metres in width.

The proposed footpath upgrade to a new bridleway link from the northern section of Byway No. 33 Downham to a suitable path created on the verge would be acceptable. The new section of bridleway would need to be at least 3 metres wide.

The creation of a new bridleway link to Byway No. 34 Downham of at least 5 metres width but preferably 10 metres would be acceptable. This would leave the southern section of Byway No. 33 as a cul-de-sac 'orphan' route. A further link from the extension to Byway No. 34 to Byway No. 33 would be advantageous.

12. Bridleway No. 25 Ely as an alternative to Crossing C09 Second Drove

I have inspected this bridleway crossing. It is far from ideal as it currently stands. The procedure required to use this crossing is a massive inconvenience for horse riders. Moreover, crossings such as this are going to become even less practical as rail traffic

increases and time between trains reduces; users could be waiting ages for clearance to cross.

The crossing is difficult for users in its current state. It is noted that self closing bridleway gates are proposed although these are not recommended on railway crossings by the British Horse Society.

Following the closure of C09 Second Drove Footpath No. 49 Ely and C24 Cross Keys Footpath No.50 Ely, Bridleway No. 25 Ely will be the only remaining option for pedestrians to make a 'loop' route from Ely and traffic will increase on this crossing. Further pressure on Bridleway No. 25 will result from the nearby proposed new housing developments.

Signed *L. J. Warth*

Dated *31 October 2017*