Caroline O'Neill OBJ/27

From: Noonan, Sara <sara.noonan@westsuffolk.gov.uk>
Sent: 04 May 2017 10:13
To: TRANSPORTANDWORKSACT
Subject: Network Rail Suffolk Level Crossing Reduction Order
Attachments: FHDC Suffolk Level Crossing Order Response 4 May 2017.pdf; ATT00001.txt; ATT00002.htm

Sent on behalf of Councillor Lance Stanbury, Cabinet Member for Planning & Growth, Forest Heath District Council

The attached letter outlines Forest Heath District Council's representation regarding the Network Rail Suffolk Level Crossing Reduction Order.

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Forest Heath
District Council

Email: Lance.Stanbury@forest-heath.gov.uk

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP
Secretary of State for Transport c/o
Transport and Works Act Orders Unit
General Counsel's Office
Department for Transport - Zone 1/18
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Date: 4 May 2017

Dear Sir

The Proposed Network Rail (Suffolk Level Crossing Reduction) Order
Transport and Works Act 1992
The Transport and Works (Applications and Objections Procedure) (England and Wales) Rules 2006

I am writing on behalf of Forest Heath District Council in response to Network Rail's proposed Suffolk Level Crossing Reduction Order. Forest Heath District Council remains broadly supportive of improved services, faster line speeds, better connectivity and Network Rail's ambitions behind the level crossing closure programme. However, we object to the closure of level crossing S22 Weatherby on the following grounds:

1. **Community impact**
   Unlike many closures in the Suffolk order which are in the countryside, this crossing is located near the centre of Newmarket with a population of 20,300 (2011 census). A large number of Newmarket residents use the crossing (up to 506 pedestrians at the weekend and an average of 408 a day according to Network Rail's recent census). The crossing is used heavily by pedestrians from the south. Therefore, closure would be extraordinarily disruptive for residents, local schools, the GP surgery, public services and the town's main retail offers, which are all to the north of the railway line.

   Likewise the football club located just south of the railway line is a big draw for pedestrians from the town heading south across the rail line for matches, training days and other social events.

Residents have already lobbied local councilors to keep the crossing open or find an alternative solution. Talks have already begun with Network Rail to achieve this, but have not reached a firm conclusion.

In addition the crossing, as mentioned above, links some of the main leisure facilities. The Council is concerned that the more barriers put in place to prevent people accessing such facilities the less chance of people using them and therefore harming national and local aims of improving physical and mental health.

2. Acceptability of proposed diversion

The proposed diversion using existing roads is considered unacceptable due to the length and steepness of the route, which disadvantages those with disabilities, the elderly and parents of small children. 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. Equally this may put some people off altogether from accessing vital services or facilities that are crucial for continued wellbeing. We are unclear as to how Network Rail has taken into consideration the feedback from both phases of public consultation regarding the proposed diversion.

3. Level of risk

Regarding the level of risk associated with this crossing it is noted that:

a. the crossing is over a single track line.
b. an hourly rail service serves this line
c. the crossing is located approximately 400 metres from Newmarket Railway Station meaning trains are slowing on the approach
d. there are no plans presently for increased or faster services on this line within Network Rail's control period 6 (2019-2024)
e. there is no rail freight in operation on this section of the line due to the constraints at Warren Hill tunnel
f. when comparing recorded incidents against usage figures, there has been 1 incident in over 100,000 uses of this level crossing

4. Public right of way

Whilst this crossing is not a public right of way, it has been in longstanding and frequent use (an average of 408 people per day according to Network Rail's recent census). It is significant that Network Rail has maintained it as such for many years and is now including it within the necessary process for closing a public right of way.

5. Mitigation instead of closure

The proposal to address the risk – closure – is not the only option available to Network Rail. Alternative measures could include:

a. extending the braking zone by a few hundred metres
b. including warning sounds and lights at the pedestrian crossing

c. introducing automatic locking gates for the crossing
d. a better diversion route (a new path along the southern edge of the track bed westwards toward the railway bridge has been previously discussed with Network Rail). This option would be considerably less expensive than a footbridge and more convenient than the proposed diversion route.

Prior to submission of the Order, discussions with Network Rail were progressing. These talks aimed to defer the closure of the crossing, while developing a medium to long term closure plan linked to and triggered by heavier usage of the railway line. This was specifically linked to the introduction of twice hourly Ipswich to Cambridge services as noted in Network Rail's, *Anglia Route Strategy* WACO7.

We would like to work with Network Rail to review this level crossing taking into consideration short term maintenance, safety upgrade options, the development of alternative diversion routes and the aspiration of a twice hourly Ipswich to Cambridge service.

Given the considerations above, we re-iterate our objection to the closure of Weatherby level crossing.

Regarding the other proposed closures within Forest Heath District Council we have no representations to make at this time.

Yours faithfully

Cllr Lance Stanbury
Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth

Cc:
Hilary A Gurner, Acting Town Clerk, Newmarket Town Council
Cllr Robin Millar, ward member (All Saints), Forest Heath District Council
Cllr Stephen Edwards, ward member (All Saints), Forest Heath District Council
Cllr James Palmer, Leader, East Cambridgeshire District Council
Cllr James Finch, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, Suffolk County Council
Cllr Ian Bates, Chairman, Environment & Economy Committee, Cambridgeshire County Council
Matt Hancock, MP