

OBJ/036/W2/1 S31 MUTTON HALL CROSSING

THE PROPOSED NETWORK RAIL (SUFFOLK LEVEL CROSSING
REDUCTION) ORDER

PUBLIC INQUIRY, 13 FEBRUARY 2018

DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT REFERENCE: TWA/17/APP/04

OBJECTION BY **THE RAMBLERS** TO CLOSURE OF S31 MUTTON HALL
CROSSING

PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF **ROBERT BOARDMAN** of 8 Gardeners Walk,
Elmswell, IP30 9ET

Introduction

1. My name is Robert Boardman. I am the Ramblers Footpath Secretary for the Stowmarket Group. In this role my responsibilities cover 70 parishes in mid Suffolk. I have held the post, together with a colleague, now retired, for 7 years. I have led walks for the Group as well as for the Suffolk Walking Festival. I also helped in the setting up of the Mid Suffolk Railway Walk which is shown on Ordnance Survey maps.
2. The Ramblers organizes itself through constituent parts known as “Areas”, loosely based on traditional counties. The Suffolk Area carries out the Ramblers’ objects through seven territorial Groups, together covering the whole county. Each Group has a Footpaths Secretary (in the case of one Group, two Footpaths Secretaries). These are authorised to make representations to the appropriate authorities concerning proposed changes to the rights of way network. They make these representations following decisions made by themselves with other suitably experienced members of the Group, usually as a committee. For county-wide strategic issues or issues affecting the territories of two or more Groups, reference may be

made to the Suffolk Area Footpaths Committee which consists of an Area Footpaths Secretary, all of the Group Footpaths Secretaries, Access Officers and, *ex officio*, the Area Chair or even the Area Council consisting of the Area Officers and delegates from each the Groups.

3. Stowmarket Ramblers have a good working arrangement with Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC) who consult the Group at an early stage on any public footpath modifications. The Footpath Committee consult on these proposals and the conclusions are notified to MSDC's Rights of Way Communities Officer. The Group is a consultee with MSDC's planning department who notify the committee when a planning application may affect a right of way.

The present proposal

4. The Ramblers objects to the proposal to close S31 Mutton Hall crossing. This crossing is a vital link in the path network from north to south of the railway line and there is not another for some considerable distance to the west.
5. I have used this crossing many times, enjoying the open views to the north together with the pleasant wooded track to Wetherden to the south.
6. The proposed alterations by Network Rail would require people to walk along a new path to the south of the line and out on to the road, see photo A. Walking on or by a road—even if it is 'safe', like where there is a good footway—is unpleasant because of the noise and fumes from vehicles. It detracts from the enjoyment of a recreational walk and removes the incentive from walking generally, whether recreationally or for ordinary transport.

Photo A—



7. It would then entail walking over the road bridge which is barely wide enough for two vehicles to pass with a bend just to the north which obscures any sighting of oncoming traffic, see photos B, C and D.

Photo B—



Photo C: narrow road bridge, no footway and no refuge—



Photo D: bend in road to the north obscuring sighting of pedestrians by drivers—



8. There is no footway and no refuge on this bridge, and crossing it at a time when vehicles are passing may be off-putting and perceived as dangerous.
9. One is then guided along a permissive path, see photo E, as the public path goes through a riding establishment and has not been accessible for several years.

Photo E: Permissive footpath which has to be used, the public path being inaccessible here—



10. On returning to the crossing at the north side of the line, see photo F, and once over the stile, the walker has a very good view of the railway line to the east, see photo G, and nearly to Elmswell the other way, see photo H.

Photo F: returning to the north side of the railway line—



Photo G, good view along railway from crossing—



Photograph H, good view from crossing in other direction—



11. At the south side of this crossing several improvements have been carried out and it makes seeing any trains easier on this side of the line, see photo J.
12. I have noted that when a train's warning light is first seen it then takes approximately 30 seconds before the train reaches Mutton Hall crossing. This should give ample time for anyone to safely cross the double track.

Photo J: the point at which the proposed path would start from this crossing—



Closing

13. I understand that under the legislation, the alternative route has to be suitable and convenient. Where a path is used for leisure walking (or mainly for leisure walking), the alternative route needs to be enjoyable (or enjoyable for the most part) as a leisure path as well, for it to be 'suitable' as an alternative. It needs to be perceived to be *safe* in order to be suitable—recreational walkers as far as possible do not choose to use routes where they do not feel safe—and the alternative path needs to actually be safe (so that it is safe in road safety assessment terms) in order to be suitable and convenient.
14. The alternative route involves a disproportionate amount of road walking. Walking by a road is less pleasant than using a fieldpath, because of the noise and fumes and possible danger from vehicles. In this proposal there are too many elements of danger: the narrow road under the railway bridge with no

footway or refuge, the narrow overbridge with no footway or refuge, and the sections of road with little or no verge and no footway. For these reasons we ask that the proposal be rejected.

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

ROBERT BOARDMAN

10 JANUARY 2018

OS map (not to scale) showing location of photographs and direction of camera—

