

TWA/17/APP/04/OBJ/036/W9/1

THE PROPOSED NETWORK RAIL (SUFFOLK LEVEL CROSSING
REDUCTION) ORDER

PUBLIC INQUIRY, 13 FEBRUARY 2018

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

WITNESS OF OPINION EVIDENCE ON BEHALF OF **THE RAMBLERS**

PROOF OF EVIDENCE of **Mr Derek de Moor** of 84 Knoyle Street,
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1. My name is Derek (Des) de Moor. I'm an advocate for walking and walkers' rights and a consultant. Between 2000 and 2015 I worked for the Ramblers on a full-time basis, mainly on promoting walking for health, recreation and everyday transport. Of high relevance to this inquiry, in collaboration with colleagues at the Ramblers and Macmillan Cancer Support, in 2013 I wrote the document *Walking Works*, which has been appended¹ in evidence.
2. Since leaving the Ramblers' payroll I have worked as an independent consultant and walking expert for a variety of organisations, including the Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland and the national charity for everyday walking, Living Streets, which runs the Walk to School programme.
3. As well as continuing to work for Ramblers on a consultancy basis, I am a Ramblers volunteer, leading shorter walks aimed for less able walkers, training walk leaders, and sitting on various local Ramblers committees.
4. I give evidence to this inquiry, on behalf of the Ramblers, as a witness of opinion, describing the multiple benefits of walking and the barriers to

¹ See OBJ/036/W9/2-1.

promoting walking, which should be considered in assessing the potential impacts of Network Rail's proposed Crossing Reduction Order.

THE BENEFITS OF WALKING

5. As set out in *Walking Works*, walking is the easiest and most accessible form of physical activity for the vast majority of the population. It is widely recognised as an important form of everyday physical activity by public health experts and is recommended as a way of improving both physical and mental health by Public Health England and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. The government is committed to enabling more people from every background to take part regularly and meaningfully in sport and physical activity, including walking.
6. Regular moderate physical activity has been shown significantly to reduce the risk of all-cause mortality and health conditions such as coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, colon and breast cancer, hip fracture, Alzheimer's disease and depression. It can improve or prevent the decline of physical function in cancer patients, and reduce the risk of recurrence. Keeping active reduces blood pressure, helps control blood sugar in type 2 diabetes patients, and can be as effective as antidepressants or psychotherapy in treating mild and moderate depression. In conjunction with healthy eating, increasing physical activity would help reduce the very high levels of overweight and obesity in the UK.
7. The Chief Medical Officers recommend that adults should be active daily, with at least 150 minutes of moderate activity over a week. Currently 39% of adults don't meet these recommendations, of whom 26% are active for less than 30 minutes a week.
8. Low physical activity is one of the top 10 causes of death and disability in the UK. Lack of physical activity is costing the UK an estimated £7.4 billion a year,

including £0.9 billion to the NHS alone.

9. Walking has been called the most sustainable means of transport. It doesn't require vehicles or machinery, nor does it produce excess carbon dioxide, noxious fumes or noise pollution. Currently around a third of car trips are under two miles, contributing significantly to local congestion and pollution. Studies have found at least half of shorter car trips could reasonably be walked instead.
10. The government's current ambition is to make walking one of the natural choices for shorter journeys, or as part of a longer journey, with more people gaining access to safe, attractive walking routes by 2040, and a wider green network of paths, routes and open spaces, as set out in the Department for Transport's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (pp7-8), appended² as evidence.

BARRIERS TO WALKING

11. The most frequently reported reasons for not walking are:
 - Lack of time
 - The weather
 - Unattractive walking environments
 - Fears for safety and personal security
 - Lack of knowledge of the walking environment and/or of the benefits and ease of walking
 - Lack of motivation

Several of these are of direct relevance to evaluating the impact of replacing walking routes across level crossings with indirect detours.

12. Obviously, it will take more time to walk between the same two points via a less direct route. Trips for utility purposes are particularly time-sensitive and are highly likely to be reduced by increased distance as people switch to other transport modes. Walking is already the slowest mode of transport and small

² See OBJ/036/W9/2-2.

increases in distance can result in significant increases in time. An additional kilometre adds only a couple of minutes to a typical local car journey but equates to 15 minutes of walking time. With leisure walking the relationship is more complex as a less direct route can sometimes be preferred – but only if it is more attractive in other ways than the less direct alternative.

13. The importance of attractiveness is recognised in ‘hard’ urban design guidance such as the official *Manual for Streets*, appended³ in evidence. This states (s6.3): “The propensity to walk is influenced not only by distance, but also by the quality of the walking experience. A 20-minute walk alongside a busy highway can seem endless, yet in a rich and stimulating street, such as in a town centre, it can pass without noticing.” The same holds for the countryside and green spaces, where, according to Natural England’s Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment, appended⁴ as evidence, people seek green and quiet environments to “feel calm/relaxed”, “refreshed/revitalised” or to appreciate their surroundings.
14. Perceptions of safety are as important as objective risk in shaping behaviour. The Department for Transport’s own road safety research, appended⁵ in evidence, has found a public perception that walking is less safe than driving, particularly on rural roads, and that car drivers do not understand and respect pedestrians. Even roads with footways can feel unsafe where traffic speeds are high, busy roads without footways even more so. In contrast the danger associated with level crossings applies to a relatively short distance compared to a road diversion, and is therefore likely to be perceived as less significant by walkers.
15. Relatively direct and well-connected routes are more likely to be preferred by walkers, who are often resistant to being forced “out of their way”. Our preference for direct routes in line of sight is observable in such phenomena as the ‘desire lines’ that rapidly appear across areas of open ground as short

³ See OBJ/036/W9/2-3.

⁴ See OBJ/036/W9/2-4.

⁵ See OBJ/036/W9/2-5, *Understanding public attitudes to road safety*, DfT, 2010.

cuts between hard-surfaced paths and access points, and in the risks taken by some people in crossing poorly-designed road junctions where the approved pedestrian route is slightly off the desire line. Current best practice on designing environments that encourage walking, such as the *Manual for Streets* (6.3), recommends that walking routes and networks are direct and follow natural desire lines. Surroundings should also be as permeable as possible to walkers, and severance in walking networks by barriers such as railways and busy roads should be avoided or overcome. Direct routes are also easier to navigate than those with numerous convoluted turnings, which may give walkers more confidence to use them.

WALKING SPEEDS

16. I understand that NR are calculating walking times using a figure found on the Ramblers' website of 4 km (2.5 miles) per hour. It is important to remember that this is a very approximate average figure for adults of reasonable fitness in ideal conditions, and actual walking time can vary tremendously based on the fitness and ability of the walker, how easy it is to follow a route, and the terrain. As the Ramblers' website⁶ states, speed "will depend on a number of factors from your fitness level and the length of your stride to the number of stops you take ... and any weight you're carrying on you in a rucksack or backpack.... Everyone walks at a different pace, but as a guide most adults *can* [my italics] walk at around 2.5 miles (4km) an hour without accounting for stops...Uneven ground and more difficult surfaces such as mud or boggy areas, gravel and sand will slow you down...You'll need to factor in more time for a walk that includes ascents."

CONCLUSION

17. Bearing the above in mind, in my opinion the replacement of level crossings on off-road walking routes with longer and less attractive diversions, particularly along roads, is likely further to reduce walking and physical activity levels and

⁶ See appendix at OBJ/036/W9/2-6.

to increase car journeys, working against several of the stated objectives of government in both transport and public health.

18. Given the need to increase walking significantly above its current levels, it is important to consider not only current but future use of the walking network. Once a crossing is closed, its potential to contribute to raising future walking levels is lost, as there is very little likelihood it will ever be restored.
19. In its statement of case (paras 63-72), Network Rail argues that some level crossings have poor standards of accessibility, and their potential danger can also deter some walkers, particularly vulnerable people. While this may be true in some cases, the best way to address it is surely to improve their accessibility and safety or to replace them with accessible grade-separated crossings such as footbridges along the same line of route. For most walkers, a lengthy and less attractive detour is a far worse alternative and is likely to deter them from walking the route at all, for the reasons outlined under Barriers above.
20. The minimal or negligible reductions in risk associated with the closure of many crossings should be considered alongside not only the potentially greater risk of road accidents on diversions but also the very real negative consequences of suppressed walking and physical activity levels, the consequent increased risk of numerous diseases and health conditions, and a less sustainable and less attractive environment for everyone.

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

DEREK DE MOOR

10 JANUARY 2018