TWA/17/APP/04/OBJ/036/W9/3 SUMMARY

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**

SUMMARY of PROOF OF EVIDENCE of **Mr Derek de Moor** of 84 Knoyle Street, London SE14 6JY

Paragraphs 1–4

I am Des de Moor, advocate for walking and walkers' rights and consultant. 2000–2015, I worked full-time for the Ramblers, mainly on promoting walking for health, recreation and everyday transport. With colleagues at the Ramblers and Macmillan Cancer Support, in 2013 I wrote document *Walking Works*, appended.[1] Since leaving the Ramblers, I have worked as independent consultant and walking expert for variety of organisations, e.g Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland and Living Streets,[2] which runs the Walk to School programme. I am a Ramblers volunteer, leading shorter walks, training walks leaders. My evidence is as a witness of opinion, describing multiple benefits of walking and barriers to promoting walking, relevant to assessing potential impacts of NR's proposals.

Paragraphs 5–10

As set out in *Walking Works*, walking is the easiest and most accessible form of physical activity for the vast majority of the population, widely recognised as an important form of everyday physical activity by public health experts and recommended as a way of improving both physical and mental health by Public Health England and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

[1] See OBJ/036/W9/2-1.
[2] The national charity for everyday walking.

Government is committed to enabling more people from every background to take part regularly and meaningfully in sport and physical activity, including walking.

Regular moderate physical activity has been shown significantly to reduce the risk of all-cause mortality and health conditions. 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 overweightness and obesity in the UK.

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.

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.

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. 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.

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), appended.[3]

[3] See OBJ/036/W9/2-2.

Paragraphs 11–15

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.

It takes more time to walk between the same two points via a less direct route. Trips for utility purposes are time-sensitive and highly likely to be reduced by increased distance as people switch to other transport modes. Walking is already the slowest mode of transport: small 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: a less direct route can sometimes be preferred – but only if more attractive in other ways than the less direct alternative.

The importance of attractiveness is recognised in 'hard' urban design guidance such as the official *Manual for Streets*, appended.[4] 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, appended[5] as evidence, people seek green and quiet environments to "feel calm/relaxed", "refreshed/revitalised" or to appreciate their surroundings.

Perceptions of safety are as important as objective risk in shaping behaviour. The DfT's own road safety research, appended,[6] 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

[4] See OBJ/036/W9/2-3.
[5] See OBJ/036/W9/2-4.
[6] See OBJ/036/W9/2-5, *Understanding public attitudes to road safety*, DfT, 2010.

distance compared to a road diversion, and is therefore likely to be perceived as less significant by walkers.

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". Current best practice on designing environments that encourage walking, such as the *Manual for Streets* (6.3), recommends walking routes and networks are direct and follow natural desire lines. Surroundings should 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 that those with numerous convoluted turnings.

Paragraph 16

I understand NR are calculating walking times using a figure found on the Ramblers' website of 4 km (2.5 miles) per hour. This is a very approximate average figure for adults of reasonable fitness in ideal conditions; 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' website[7] 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."

Paragraph 17–20, Conclusion

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

[7] See appendix at OBJ/036/W9/2-6.

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.

In its statement of case (paras 63–72), NR 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.

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 supressed 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 summary of my proof of evidence are true.

DEREK DE MOOR

10 JANUARY 2018