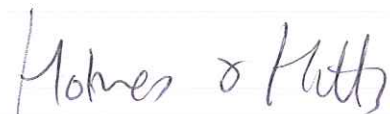


OPENING STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL

1. Members and officers of Colchester Borough Council have given very careful consideration to the proposals by Network Rail to either permanently remove or extinguish some crossings or to alter the status of others. The Council's case is limited to those crossings within the Borough itself.
2. The Council is supportive of travel by train. It recognises and does not dispute that Network Rail should endeavour to ensure train operators can, and do, run an efficient and safe service.
3. However, the Council considers that some of the proposals are unnecessary or undesirable for reasons which I will mention briefly and which are set out in more detail in the Council's Witness Statements.
4. The Council notes that Network Rail largely rely upon their strategic case for the various closures or alterations. This strategic case is threefold, namely the operational efficiency of the network, safety of both rail users and those interacting with it and the efficient use of public funds. These points are recognised by the Council.
5. At the same time, the Borough Council firmly believes that the interests of the rail network should not be considered in isolation. A holistic approach is required.
6. The Council will urge that there is a need to take account of all factors before agreeing to any closure or change. Indeed, it notes that Network Rail within their evidence, do talk of reducing risk "where reasonably practicable" and seeking to close crossing "where possible". This hints at the need for a balanced approach.
7. The main railway line between London Liverpool Street and Norwich passes through the Borough. The Borough Council recognises that this is an important line where there are frequent trains travelling at speed. It therefore acknowledges that the balance is in favour of closing any crossings on the main line.
8. However, it takes a different view on the Marks Tey to Sudbury line and, again, on the Colchester to Clacton line.

9. On the Marks Tey to Sudbury line, the Borough Council objects to the closures of crossings E51 (Thornfield Wood) and E52 (Golden Square).
10. It says in short in respect of these crossings, that:
 - 10.1 they are pedestrian only crossings;
 - 10.2 the footpaths are part of the wider footpath network;
 - 10.3 visibility at the crossings is very good;
 - 10.4 train speeds are low and infrequent;
 - 10.5 there is no history of operational problems;
 - 10.6 there is no record of incidents or fatalities at these crossings;
 - 10.7 the proposed diversions are undesirable;
 - 10.8 the proposed diversions result in more people walking on the Highway which is a hazard in itself;
 - 10.9 the proposed diversions have a detrimental impact on access to, and amenity of, the countryside; and
 - 10.10 the proposal will have an adverse impact on hedgerows/habitats.
11. The Council will in due course expand upon these points and will contend that the balance is in favour of keeping these crossings open.
12. In simple terms, the benefits of closing the crossings (i.e. negating a minimal risk) do not outweigh the detriment to the local footpath network and potential for introducing greater risk elsewhere. This is notwithstanding the cost of closing the various crossings.
13. A holistic approach to the transport network as a whole is required and it is the Council's case that any marginal gains that may be had by closing crossings should not be put at the expense/detriment of other networks.

14. The Council also presently objects to the closure of the footpath known as E41 Paget Crossing, Wivenhoe. The Council accepts that visibility at this crossing may not be entirely satisfactory, but the crossing itself is well used and does not have a history of accidents etc. Moreover, if it is to be closed, then it is absolutely essential that appropriate accommodation works are undertaken to the high street where it crosses over the rail line. The footpaths here at present are wholly inadequate. Whilst it is acknowledged that Network Rail are looking at ways of providing adequate pavements, there is no guarantee that these can be delivered as yet. The crossing should not be closed until appropriate accommodation works have been undertaken.
15. I add that the Council had issues in respect of closing crossing E57 Wivenhoe Park to vehicles and granting alternative access rights. However, it is understood that E57 has now been withdrawn and so the Council will not comment on E57 unless asked.
16. In overall terms, therefore, it will be contended that the Borough Council has properly considered all the relevant issues and that the balance is in favour of keeping the crossings at E51 Thornfield Wood and E52 Golden Square on a permanent basis and maintaining, for the time being at least, the crossing at E41 Paget Crossing.



David Whipps/Michael Harman

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For Colchester Borough Council