



Est. 1966

THE WIVENHOE SOCIETY

Inquiry into the Proposed Network Rail (Essex and Others Level Crossing Reduction) Order

PROOF OF EVIDENCE of The Wivenhoe Society concerning the Paget Road railway crossing [E41] presented on their behalf by PETER HILL [OBJ 046]

1. My name is Peter Hill. I have been a member of The Wivenhoe Society for a considerable time and on its Executive Committee for several years. The Wivenhoe Society is a local civic society founded in 1966 to protect the interests of all the residents of Wivenhoe. The Society has about 400 members.
2. I am representing the interests of our members as well as those of the wider community of Wivenhoe with its approximately 7,500 residents (10,000 people including those at the University of Essex).
3. I served as a Councillor on Wivenhoe Town Council for 25 years (1983 – 2008) and was elected Town Mayor on three separate occasions.
4. We were pleased to see that Network Rail has withdrawn the proposal to close the crossing known as Sandpit Crossing [E42] on the grounds of public safety as they could not provide an alternative route that was safe for pedestrians. We believe the same situation applies at the Paget Road Crossing [E41].
5. **Regarding usage of E41.** Using Network Rail's own figures collected in July 2016, over a 9 day period, 1,184 people used this crossing, with a minimum of 84 people a day using this crossing point going in either direction during this covert surveillance.
6. **Reason for using this Crossing.** Our information is that many of these people use this crossing to visit the Brook Street Business Centre located adjacent to Paget Road (south) for employment or other reasons, or to get to the nearest supermarket store located to the north of the crossing. This is the East of England Co-operative store in The Avenue. There are obviously other reasons why people use this crossing.

We conclude that closing it would lead to considerable inconvenience and hardship to many people. We therefore believe that keeping this crossing point open is essential.

7. **History.** Paget Road was planned in April 1857 when building plots in Paget Road (initially called Paget Street) were offered for sale as Wivenhoe began its expansion of employment both in shipbuilding on the river as well as in fishing. The railway came in 1864 bringing greater prosperity to Wivenhoe. There have been no reported accidents or near misses at this crossing point which bisects Paget Road in the 153 years since it was conceived. It has been a much-used thoroughfare for people to get to either side of the railway line for a variety of reasons.
8. **Regarding alternative routes proposed by Network Rail.** We feel that officials at Network Rail do not appreciate the difficulty for people negotiating the valley in which this crossing sits. Queens Road to the north of the line has a steep incline in both directions to the west and the east with a gradient of between 1 in 7 and 1 in 9. It might be different if the land on either side of it was flat, but it's not. Anglesea Road to the east of the crossing is a private road and is unmade over its length. In any case Network Rail seems to have abandoned its idea of providing an asphalt surface on this road for pedestrians and a balustrade on Queens Road as both costly and impractical. They have instead

proposed a footpath from the Paget Road crossing point to Phillip Road. This will probably help those people wanting to walk to the new Heath Centre which opens in Phillip Road in November 2017 if coming from roads to the north of Queens Road. We cannot see what anyone else would gain from using it, certainly no-one wanting to come from south of the railway line wanting to go to the supermarket. For these people, they are faced with walking along Brook Street and East Street to Anchor Hill, or walking along part of Brook Street and then Hamilton Road and Alma Street, neither of which have footpaths. Hamilton Road is also another un-made road. Given the 100 or so houses which have now been built on Cook's Shipyard, there has been a substantial increase in the number of people living south of the railway line on the east side of Wivenhoe. These roads are well-used by motor vehicles going to the Business Centre in Brook Street and residents living or visiting the houses in this area. Brook Street, the main access road to this area has two blind corners, is narrow with not enough room for two cars to easily pass except at certain points and no proper footway. In consequence, it is particularly hazardous for pedestrians.

We note proposals by Network Rail to make the railway bridge in the High Street safer for pedestrians by narrowing the highway to create a wider footway, particularly on the east side of it. This has been tried previously using temporary barriers which created havoc at that time for both buses and other large vehicles that use this busy and awkward junction. Some vehicles use the entire width of the existing road and also, particularly in the case of buses sometimes over-hang the narrow pavement on the east side of the bridge when coming from the railway station, up Station Road, and turning left into the High Street. Given that there is frequent bus service of 12 buses per hour throughout the day until 7pm, this risk is more than trivial.

Whilst welcoming any proposal to make Wivenhoe roads safer for pedestrians, we cannot see Network Rail's proposals being a practicable proposition given the need for buses to get around the corner of Station Road and the High Street. It seems to us that an adequate turning area must be maintained and so any plans to widen the footpath on the eastern side of the bridge would be opposed by bus operators, at least to restrict the highway on the southern end of the bridge. This seems to us to be a proposal that has not been well thought through. We wait to hear though the views of the Highways officers at Essex County Council.

And if the footpath is not widened, it becomes necessary for people, especially those with shopping or in charge of a child, to cross the road to use the slightly wider footpath on the western side, and of course to cross back again further along the road.

Therefore we believe that not only are Network Rail's alternative proposals extremely unattractive to people wanting to go from the bottom of Wivenhoe to the northern side of the railway line, or to people going to the south from the north, they put these people at greater risk of injury from accidents than from crossing the railway line at Paget Road. This cannot be justified.

9. **Speed of trains at the Paget Road crossing.** According to letters which Network Rail has written, it wants to increase the speed of trains on its railway lines. This is clearly a laudable objective but we contest whether this is a practicable one at this point in the line given the proximity of Wivenhoe railway station to the east and curvatures in the track on either side of the Paget Road crossing. It might be different if trains rattled through this point at 70 mph but we feel it would not be operationally safe for them to do so.
10. **Sound of approaching trains.** Network Rail has instructed drivers of trains to sound their horn for three seconds when approaching the crossing. We cannot understand why it is necessary for these horns to be so loud for they can be heard by most people living in Wivenhoe as well as by people living in Rowhedge on the other side of the river. This noise is anti-social. In addition to the train horns, Network Rail has installed automated noise emitting devices at the point of the crossing. We feel they should use the considerable amount of money they are proposing to spend on alternative routes for pedestrians in devising better technology to warn people standing at the crossing of approaching trains instead of also warning a considerable number local residents at the

same time. This warning should also be visual to help people crossing the track at night as well those people with hearing difficulties.

11. **Conclusion.** We believe that keeping the Paget Road crossing open is essential based on the number of people who use it, which on an average day is around 100 people, according to Network Rail's own figures. There is no record of any accidents or near misses at this crossing. Apart from the considerable inconvenience that closing this crossing would have to a significant number of people, closing the crossing will put these people at greater risk of injury than using the crossing. The alternative routes proposed by Network Rail are inadequate from a safety aspect. For this reason alone, the crossing must be kept open. It cannot be right or justifiable for Network Rail to compromise the safety of pedestrians by these alternative solutions.

Peter Hill

The Wivenhoe Society

16th September 2017