

I am supportive of the reopening of the passenger railway and the inward investment in Ashington Central but disappointed that an underpass is planned in this location especially when hearing all the concerns of the residents on both sides of the proposed crossing.

During a lacklustre public consultation residents were asked for opinions and they are all now been ignored.

A briefing paper on safer design by BRE [www.bre.co.uk](http://www.bre.co.uk) states if an underpass is considered necessary it should be straight, short and as wide as possible. It should be well lit, with clear lines of sight so that pedestrians can see what is ahead. Ambiguous spaces, such as gaps and corners should be avoided as they can provide hiding places for potential offenders and can increase fear of crime. They should be free of rubbish and any graffiti removed as soon as possible. The proposed plans go against all these recommendations.

Anyone who has visited the location knows until recently a block of garages had 20+ year old graffiti on, and the railway line is backed up with years of rubbish and not maintained. This rubbish has acted as fuel to the many fires set during 2021 so this evidence alone does not give anyone confidence that the promised maintenance of the site will be of a standard that will address the concerns of residents.

The main issues in this area currently are anti-social behaviour, motorbike disorder and motorbikes using the current paths as a shortcut. Many residents mention stones getting thrown from the rail lines and damaging greenhouses and parents with a fear of letting children play in gardens as missiles thrown in. This is not how anyone should have to live. A home should be a safe space and you cannot design out this crime with a few lights. CCTV will not be monitored 24/7 so it is just giving lip service to planners and will not make the underpass safe.

Pressures on the police mean 101 services are over stretched and as much as residents support the Police they do not have faith that calling 101 will catch the people causing the problems and it can take days for a phone call back so many do not even report the many problems in this area as I hear "what is the point they are busy enough" and "the person is long gone".

The proposed location for this underpass is tucked out of the way from natural surveillance and as such people feel it will be unsafe and without a clear getaway if they do feel threatened. Many residents are stating they would not feel safe so would use the alternative routes of Station Road or Green Lane as more people around both day and night.

In the online meeting I requested to help address fears and answer questions it was stated over 400 people per day use the current crossing. Looking into this more I would like to see this evidence as requested in the online meeting.

A crossing survey in October 2020 states 110 pedestrians or cyclists per day. (Why such a variance?) <https://abcrailwayguide.uk/hospital-crossing-public-level-crossing-northumberland#.YW88qPnMI2w> the majority of these 110 will be from Ashington Academy between the hours of 8am-9am and 3pm-4pm so 55 people twice a day once on way to school and once on way home. These young people walk a substantial distance to reach this crossing from the school and if the right of way was closed the short diversion to either green lane (the Street the Academy is based on) or up to Wansbeck Square would not cause a time delay and many parents in the area deem the new proposals unsafe and would not want their child using the underpass. Why are the applicants so keen to maintain this right of way at this location? and I would invite them

to visit the location on a dark cold November night or wet January morning and see if they feel safe using the crossing and if they would want their children and loved ones using an underpass in this area and if they truly believe an underpass in this location will not become a problem in the future and increase crime?

In the media we are hearing of more and more of crimes against women and girls and the need for safer street design how does an underpass in this location achieve this? I would advise the closing of the right of way, removing the current issues and stopping future problems.

If another crossing is deemed necessary, it should be closer to the station an area with more footfall, and natural surveillance.

If this location is a must. Why can a control barrier not be used? Level Crossing Barriers at Kingston park are deemed safe with more trains? Or the traffic lights maintaining a safe crossing for pedestrians on the very busy A19 near Moorfarm roundabout. Or even the current system a location no incidents have been recorded on the tracks? Trains will not be reaching top speed anywhere near this location as they are just coming out of the station, so the underpass and expense are simply not justified.

Many residents in the area are older and vulnerable and are already in fear and trapped in their homes after dark. This underpass will add to the problems in the area, and I cannot see how the designs submitted will help to alleviate any fears the residents have. Close the right of way, save the money and listen to the residents. The consultation showed an underpass was not wanted then, (61% preferred a footbridge to 39% underpass) and it is not wanted now.

We all want the train line to open, we all want people to be safe and we know that even without this underpass the line will opened as planned so do the right thing and listen to people who will need to live here.

My other concerns I would like to highlight across the whole process is not just about the area I represent Ashington Central but the whole line.

- Firstly, Consultation from the very start and communication with the wider public. Information sharing and the way notification are posted – what consideration was given to the digitally excluded and residents with accessible needs of all forms. Notices attached to the bottom of lamp posts or very high on lampposts with masses of information I am 5 foot 2 with no mobility issues struggled to read the posted document. Most notices did not last a day. This is really not good enough for a project of this size.

- Stating over 700 replies for each part of the project when it goes to planning is a misrepresentation as those 700 replies were from the whole project consultation document. I am sure if each element was broken down into areas / individual stations you would have received more public interactions as most people only care about will be on their doorsteps so a better way to interact with the wider public needs to be found for projects of this size and scale as 700 replies from a project from Ashington to Northumberland Park with stations at Northumberland Park, Seaton Delaval, Newsham, Blyth Bebside, Bedlington, Ashington and details of bridges and underpasses and parking. When you consider all these elements the responses per area is measly in comparison to the scale of the project and area covered.

- Some people who objected to the works act also thought they were objecting for the planning application. This should have been made clearer and, also felt they were not kept up to date? Why did some receive updates and other did not?
- It would appear the line is designed in the cheapest and easiest fashion rather than what is suitable for 2023 and the project looks as if designed by someone who has not visited or understands the lay of the land or usage of roads around all stations and proposed car parking. This is across all the proposed station but would appear Bedlington Station, Seaton Delaval and Bebside will be worst effected, as they are already issues in the areas and stating that it will be an enforcement issue will not stem the woes of local residents.
- In Ashington and Bebside why are we seeing the issues around the land acquisition especially when it appears it has always been the plan to bring the old stations back in to use? I have expected the station to reopen for many years, before plans were put to paper should the land not have been acquired as its easier to sell or develop land that is not needed than go through the process of compulsory purchase of land that now has a second planning application in for a "care village" I am no business mastermind or town planner but it seems we are playing in to the hands of developers who will speculate and hold on to pockets of land for situations like this to occur and why has the Land that currently houses the Horse Sanctuary not been discussed and a suitable solution for all parties discussed before now? This would always be an issue and it seems neglectful that it is all coming out now when it would have been better to have these discussions before planning discussions rather than after the horse has bolted so to speak.
- The argument that a bridge was needed in Bebside was stated it was needed for future usage and a safe crossing for residents, but this did not include residents with mobility issues as it was only based on current numbers of users for a road to waste land as described in the planning meeting. If in this situation a bridge is required for future user numbers should this not include disabled access, and access for parents with pushchairs etc? It seems you can't say we don't need to consider the mobility access because of current numbers but then say we need a bridge because of what happens in the future. (a new estate build on waste land for example as this would have more parents and residents with mobility needs)
- Car parking charges. – Can we have guarantees that the town centre locations car parks and car parking near residents homes will remain free of charge and what plans are there to mitigate parking in side streets as some train users will park on side streets if parking charges are introduced adding to issues in already congested areas. Residents only parking schemes do not work already in many locations and residents have issues that they are paying for a service that is not enforced and can not be due to low numbers of enforcement officers across the County who cannot be in every town every day. The police are already over stretched and can not be expected to pick up the issue so who do the residents turn to?

- My final point I would like to express is my disappointment in the lack of design features especially for the new station in Ashington as this should have a WOW factor. The welcome and the catalyst for the town centre changes and development and again it seems a lack of vision and joined up thinking for the longer term strategy for the town centre. And this is not an exclusive issue for Ashington but also in the other stations where retail opportunities and business start up units could be part of the plans.

Thank you for your time and listening to my concerns. I am supportive of the reopening of the line but must add I am disappointed with the lack of joined up thinking and overall delivery of consultation, public interactions and ambition of the project. I would like it noted many have felt excluded from the process including the enquiry as many were not invited to have a say as part of the process or put off when told they must submit evidence like a legal document submitted in advance to a team of faceless people. If this is not your every day, it is an intimidating process, and we must be mindful of this if we expect buy in from the wider public. We must make the whole process user friendly, from consultation to planning.

I would like to thank the residents of Ashington Central who have worked together to ensure they had a collective voice and ensured concerns were heard.

From turning up at both online and in person meetings on mass, keeping each other informed of upcoming deadlines and ensuring residents without technology could access platforms and have objections noted, all while being respectful and supporting the reopening of the line and the long term impacts and I hope we can find solutions for the issues raised for not just this project but others nationally.