

From Councillor: Mac McGuire
Your ref:

Date: 7 July 2016

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Mr Richard Schofield
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Dear Mr Schofield,

Cambridgeshire County Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on Network Rail's proposals to close or downgrade level crossings across the county. The County Council recognises Network Rail's strategic reasons for the proposals, and supports in principle the ambition of increasing public safety and improving journey times.

The County Council has similar duties and responsibilities regarding the safety and accessibility of the highway network. We note that the changes proposed are to the highway network for which the County Council is the Highway Authority. Whilst the County Council understands Network Rail's desire to minimise its asset liability by closing crossings, it needs to understand that by doing so it will, in many cases, increase liability for the Highway Authority.

The County Council's position is that Network Rail must have sound justification for any diminution of the highway network on grounds of safety and efficiency. It may be willing to accept the loss of some routes, where the case is proved on these grounds and where it is acceptable to communities. However, in most circumstances good alternative routes will need to be provided that are reasonably convenient, enjoyable, do not add unreasonable liability to the Highway Authority and do not put users more at risk on the road network. There needs to be a balanced approach if the two organisations are to work in partnership towards improving both transport systems for the benefit of the public.

The County Council has welcomed engagement with Network Rail at earlier stages, but is disappointed with the lack of response to its representations in early workshops, and with recent poor communication with stakeholders experienced in the run up to the current public consultation. It is aware that similar proposals are being taken forward separately in neighbouring Suffolk and Essex. However, this is an Anglia-wide scheme, and so the County Council is also keen to ensure a co-ordinated approach across county boundaries. The County Council would welcome a consistent approach to stakeholder engagement for the remainder of the process.

Whilst the County Council in principle supports some of the proposals, it considers that there is a significant number that it cannot at present support, including two in particular as detailed below. These proposals significantly affect users of the highway and rights of way network who have had little, if any, opportunity to see them prior to the commencement of this consultation.

The County Council is also aware that a traffic census is being undertaken on the crossings, the results of which need to be understood, together with the implications of the methodology employed.

There are two proposals that the County Council in particular is currently unable to support:

1. C06 - Barrington Road, Foxton – Non-Motorised User Crossing

- The County Council has a grant-funded Cycle City Ambition project to improve the cycle route using this crossing, which has been approved by Network Rail. Under Network Rail's proposal, the cycle route would be severed. Users of the shared use cycletrack adjacent to the road would be forced to cross the heavily trafficked A10 twice, which could dissuade sustainable travel and potentially encourage misuse of the road crossing, putting lives at greater risk. Although the County Council has yet to see the engineering solution proposed by Network Rail for the consultation in question, it considers its cycle scheme to be the safer option.
- The County Council understands that Cemex has planning permission for 200 homes in the old Barrington Quarry, a condition for which is a new shared use pedestrian and cycle route alongside the private railway, exiting at the bridleway crossing. Closure would mean a lengthy and extremely unattractive diversion to users of what is expected to be a well-used community asset.
- The closure of this crossing would significantly increase liability for the road crossing for the Highway Authority.
- Resources would be wasted were the project to be implemented and then the crossing closed.
- A Prohibition of Driving Order dated 1973 effectively renders the crossing equivalent to a bridleway. The automatic locking gate currently on the crossing is not compliant with British Standards for a bridleway and has not been approved by the County Council. Equestrians cannot use it, which is unacceptable. It should be replaced with a compliant gate.

2. Poplar Drove, Littleport

This road has been cited in Network Rail's plans as a private road. This is incorrect. It is recorded as a public road, and so discussions need to take place with regard to any potential downgrading of status with statutory consultees.

The County Council would welcome further engagement with Network Rail to review the outcome of the consultations and the opportunity to work together to derive mutually acceptable solutions that achieve our common aims of enhancing the safety and efficiency of the transport network, whilst maintaining connectivity wherever possible.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Mac McGuire
Chair, Highways and Community Infrastructure Committee