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**Public Inquiry on the Network Rail (London to Corby) (Land
Acquisition, Level Crossing and Bridge Works) Order**

Opening Statement

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Cycling Campaign for North Bedfordshire

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CCNB Opening Statement

- 1 My name is Peter Blakeman. I am a retired Chartered Chemist, a Member of the Royal Society of Chemistry and a Member of the Chartered Quality Institute. For the last 15 years I have been Chair of the Planning Committee of Brickhill Parish Council, an urban parish council in the north of Bedford.
- 2 I have also been Chair of the Cycling Campaign for North Bedfordshire (CCNB) for the last four years and Vice-Chair for the previous 14 years.
- 3 CCNB has been promoting cycling and campaigning for cycle infrastructure in the Bedford area since 1992.
- 4 CCNB does not object to Network Rail's proposed rebuild of the Bromham Road railway bridge to allow the Midland Main Line to be electrified as far as Corby, only to the plans absence of a dual use footway/cycleway across the bridge.
- 5 Bedford has always been a 'Town of Cyclists'.
 - 5.1 Way back in 1935 a Ministry of Transport census showed that cycles accounted for 80% of vehicular traffic in Bedford, similar to levels found in the Netherlands.
 - 5.2 In 1945 a traffic census found that 'for 10 minutes in one midday period cyclists passed the census takers at the rate of three thousand per hour'.
 - 5.3 Today, although not in the same league as Cambridge or Oxford, the latest Department for Transport' Walking and Cycling Statistics for 2016-2017 show that the town is still in the top quartile of cities and towns in the UK.

- 5.4 Calculations from the above data show that more than 30,000 residents made in excess of 5,500,000 cycling trips helping to reduce the town's traffic congestion and pollution.
- 5.5 CCNB has been carrying out cycle counts at Bedford railway station for more than 12 years and has seen an increase of 89% between summer 2006 and summer 2018. Cyclists represent around 10% of all commuters to the station.
- 6 Bedford's cycle network was first started in the 1950s and since then has been progressively increased to give an extensive network of 27 strategic radial routes focused on the town centre and two orbital routes all based on safe off-road dual use paths, cycle tracks and quiet road/on-road cycle lane routes enabling cyclists to get from one part of the town to the other including many neighbouring villages.
- 7 The current lack of safe cycle infrastructure across the Bromham Road railway bridge is one of the major gaps still remaining in the cycle network preventing higher cycling counts and acts as a divide for cyclists between the rapidly growing west areas of Bedford and the railway station and town centre on the east side.
- 8 The bridge is on Bedford Cycle Network (BCN) No 4 from Stagsden to Bedford town centre via Bromham and Biddenham.
- 9 It is used by several hundred cyclists every day, including school pupils to/from Biddenham Upper School and commuters to/from the railway station. Due to its narrowness and incline on each side, crossing the bridge using the carriageway is very dangerous for young and inexperienced cyclists with HGVs and buses trying to squeeze them against the kerb. As a result more than half of the cyclists ride across illegally on the narrow pavement.
- 10 The dangerous nature of the bridge has been brought out in a number of questionnaires carried out over the years as well as by a petition from students of the nearby upper school listing it as one of the top safety concerns of young cyclists.

- 11 The old Bedfordshire County Council had been waiting for such an '**once in a lifetime**' opportunity to arise since the 1990s to allow the creation of a safe off-road route to Bedford railway station.
- 12 Two previous proposals in 1999 and 2010 to build a separate cycle bridge together with another as part of a development on the west side of the railway line between Bromham Road and Ford End Road in 2002 all came to nothing due to lack of funds available and in the case of the latter, dismissal at a planning inquiry.
- 13 To summarise, the cycle infrastructure proposals to be discussed during the Public Inquiry, if provided, will unlock a huge pent-up demand from residents who would like to cycle safely to the railway station, school or work.
- 13.1 An analysis of the 2011 census returns showed that 29% of commuters to Bedford town centre travel less than 5km, 71% of them by car.
- 14 Cycling not only makes residents more healthier but at the same time helps to ease the chronic congestion and pollution currently experienced in the town as well the more wider global warming.
- 15 The bridge rebuild with the addition of a dual use cycle/pedestrian path will make it 'fit for purpose' for ALL users and help the future economic growth of the town.
- 16 The opportunity to do this is not likely to present itself again.