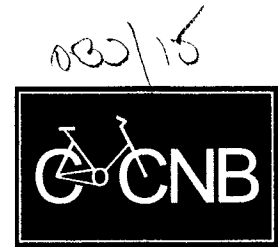
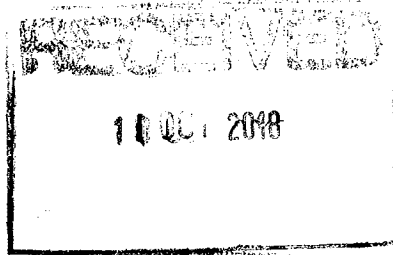


CYCLING CAMPAIGN FOR NORTH BEDFORDSHIRE



Vision: To see Bedford as a 'Town of Cyclists' and 'Cycle Friendly Communities'



15 Dove Road
Bedford
MK41 7AA

email:ccnb@ccnb.org.uk

08/10/18

Secretary of State for Transport
c/o Transport and Works Act Orders Unit
Department for Transport
Zone 1/18
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

Dear Sir,

**Re: Statement of Case for Public Enquiry on Network Rail (London to Corby)
(Land Acquisition, Level Crossing and Bridge Works) Order**

Introduction

This Statement of Case has been compiled by Peter Blakeman, Chair of Cycling Campaign for North Bedfordshire (CCNB).

CCNB has been promoting cycling and campaigning for cycle infrastructure in the Bedford area since 1992.

CCNB does not object to Network Rail's proposed rebuild of the Bromham Road railway bridge to allow the Midland Mainline to be electrified as far as Corby, only to the plans absence of a dual use footway/cycleway across the bridge. A width of at least 3.25 metre wide (or 3.5 metre if there are two vertical features) is required on the north side path.

We believe that the case for a cycle route across the bridge is not an issue (see Appendix for reasons and history) but only how it should be achieved and who should pay for it.

Bedford Borough Council as a result of Network Rail's actions in September 2018 has added the delivery of a separate footway/cycleway bridge to their capital programme at an estimated cost of £3 million. There is no guarantee as to when or if funds will be available or when it would be constructed assuming it will be given planning approval.

Network Rail's Proposed Bridge Design

The need to raise the Bromham Road railway bridge was first mentioned when the Department for Transport made a commitment to electrify the Midland Mainline from Bedford to Sheffield in their High Level Output document of 2012. There was a short pause in the project between July and November 2015 when it was scaled down to provide electrification only as far as Corby with an opening date put back one year to 2020.

Network Rail have been aware (via Bedford Borough Council) from the start that a wider path on the north side was required to allow a dual use footpath/cycle path to be created. However no plans were seen by CCNB until at short notice a public consultation was called in Bedford on 20 April 2018.

The plans produced showed no provision for a dual use path.

Network Rail gave a briefing at a Bedford Stations Travel Plan Steering Group meeting, of which CCNB is a member, on 21 May and a further public consultation was held in Bedford on 24 May. A total of 145 written responses were made calling for a cycleway on the bridge. Responses were given at all the events and official comments placed on the Network Rail Website and in a letter to CCNB of 20 September 2018. A number of reasons were put forward as to why it was not possible to widen the bridge any more than the 600mm shown in their plans, the extra width having been obtained by using slimmer parapets. It was stated that 300mm would be added to each side to widen the path and not the carriageway.

CCNB response - The current bridge has a 7.2 metre wide carriageway with an approximate 1.5 metre wide footpath on the south side and an approximate 2.0 metre wide footpath on the north side.

The proposed bridge as designed has the extra width added mainly to the south side path to give a 2.0 metre path on each side, that is, no change has been made on the north side path where a dual use pedestrian/cycle path is required.

For a two way dual use footway/cycleway on the north side, Department for Transport Cycle Infrastructure Design (LTN 2/08) under 8.5.3 recommends a width of 3.0 metre plus 0.25 metre for each vertical feature, that is the north side has to have a minimum width of 3.25 metre.

The reasons put forward by Network Rail for not being able to increase the width further are:

- (1) The budget for the bridge rebuild is extremely tight and the brief is to build only like for like.
- (2) It is planned to demolish the existing piers only halfway. A wider bridge would require full demolition and rebuild from the ground upwards with a significant increase in costs to the tax payer (an approximate figure of £14 million has been quoted).

CCNB response - It should not be necessary to completely demolish the bridge piers to achieve the extra width of 1.0 to 1.5 metre. This could be obtained by either (or a combination of):

- (i) building a cantilever from the north side of each pier to the width required or the building of a new pier tied in to the existing pier or
 - (ii) re-assignment of the proposed road bed from 2.0/7.2/2.0 metre to 1.5/6.5/3.3 metre.
- (3) Amendments would have to be made to the existing approach road alignment to cater for a wider road profile.

CCNB response - The extra width is only required on the north side and would not affect the existing approach road alignment.

- (4) A wider road would require the acquisition of additional land which would impact on nearby residential properties. It has also been stated that some houses close to the bridge would have to be compulsory purchased.

CCNB response - The extra width required on the north side would be less than that required for a separate cycle bridge and would not impact on nearby properties.

- (5) There was a priority to minimise disruption to Bedford residents. A new bridge would take much longer to build and increase disruption to road and rail users.

CCNB response - An extra week or so on top of the expected construction time of 13 months (including 6 months bridge closure) is insignificant when building a bridge which is expected to last at least 100 years.

- (6) The provision of a new dedicated cycleway and segregated pedestrian footway would be an enhancement and sits outside the current scope and funding for this scheme, particularly as this structure is not in Network Rail's ownership. No feasibility studies have been undertaken to determine whether this option is workable.

CCNB response - There have been two previous attempts over last 19 years to build a separate cycle bridge but funding has not been available. Will it be any different this time? This is why the proposed rebuild of the bridge is a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity to have a cycle path included for the reasons cited in this document.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Blakeman – CCNB Chair

cc: Network Rail c/o Winckworth Sherwood LLP, Minerva House, 5 Montague Close,
London SE1 9BB

APPENDIX

Background

Cycle Use

Bedford has always been a 'Town of Cyclists' with cycling levels in the late 1940s approaching Dutch levels of use.

Recent government figures from the 2016 Active Life Survey show that 22% of residents over 16 years old cycle, making the borough in the upper quartile of UK local authorities. More than 30,000 residents made in excess of 5,500,000 cycling trips helping to reduce the town's traffic congestion and pollution.

Over a 13 hour period on 21 September 2010 some 1600 pedestrians and 700 cyclists were recorded crossing the bridge.

The number of residents currently cycling to the station has increased by 88% over the last 12 years and represents around 10% of station users and has the potential to significantly increase.

Safe cycle infrastructure across the bridge would unlock a huge pent-up demand from residents living in the west side of the town who would like to cycle safely to the railway station, school or work.

In April 2017 the government published its Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS) which outlined the government's ambition to make cycling and walking a natural choice for shorter journeys, or part of a longer journey (for example by train). Without the provision of safe cycling infrastructure across the bridge this will be harder to achieve.

Cycling minister, Jesse Norman, has reiterated many times over the last year the statement - "I want us to become a nation of cyclists, and to make cycling a natural choice for people of all ages and backgrounds."

Benefits

It is well known that cycling has many health and environmental benefits and the more people that are able to safely cross Bromham Road railway bridge on a bicycle will help ease the town's congestion and air pollution problems as well as climate change.

Cycle Network

Bedford's cycle network was first started in the 1950s with the construction of four cycle tracks to improve cross town access.

Following local government reorganisation in 1974 the old Bedfordshire County Council carried out a transportation study in 1976. This showed that as many people used a bicycle as public transport and that there were more bikes in the town than in any place of comparable size in the country.

In 1977 they therefore put forward a plan to provide radial routes for cyclists throughout Bedford into the town centre. The decision was very radical for the time and was believed to be the only transportation study in the country which included cycling as a quantified mode of travel.

Since this time the old Bedfordshire County Council followed by Bedford Borough Council have progressively created an extensive cycle network of safe off-road/quiet road routes so that today there is an extensive network of more than 122 km of off-road paths, on-road quiet roads and cycle lanes along busy roads giving 27 strategic radial routes focused on the town centre and two (inner and outer) orbital routes.

Bromham Road railway bridge is on Bedford Cycle Network (BCN) No 4 from Stagsden to Bedford town centre via Bromham and Biddenham.

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 east (railway station and town centre) and the rapidly growing west areas of Bedford borough.

The bridge is used by 'several hundred' cyclists every day, half of them school children to Biddenham Upper School and commuters to 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 illegally across on the narrow pavement. The dangerous nature of the bridge has been brought out in a number of questionnaires carried out over the last few 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.

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.

Two previous proposals in 1999 and 2010 to build a separate cycle bridge together with one between Bromham Road and Ford End Road in 2001 all came to nothing due to lack of funds available.