

TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT 1992

TRANSPORT AND WORKS (INQUIRIES PROCEDURE) RULES 2004

THE NETWORK RAIL (TACKLEY LEVEL CROSSING) ORDER

**SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE – ANDY WILLSON of NETWORK RAIL
SCHEME OVERVIEW, NEED, ENGINEERING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Date: 21 MAY 2024

1. Introduction

- 1.1. My name is Andy Willson and I am a Project Delivery Engineering Manager at Network Rail Infrastructure Limited (**Network Rail**).
- 1.2. I am a Chartered Engineer, a Fellow of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers plus a Fellow of the Institution of Engineering and Technology. I have long experience in optioneering, designing and delivering complex multi-disciplinary enhancement schemes including many proposals to close or enhance level crossings, to reduce safety risk.

2. Secretary of State's Statement of Matters

- 2.1. I consider matters of engineering relevant to the following items in the Statement of Matters:
 - a) **Item 2**: The main alternative options considered by NR and the reasons for choosing the preferred option set out in the Order;
 - b) **Item 4(a)**: The impact of the scheme as a whole on the use of agricultural vehicles by local landowners; and
 - c) **Item 6(d)**: Whether all the land and rights over land which NR has applied for is necessary to implement the scheme.

2. Scheme and need for the Scheme

- 2.1 My Proof focusses on the engineering and constructability aspects of the scheme, which is necessary to allow the closure of the current level crossing at Tackley (due to significant safety risk), but with suitable alternative bridleway arrangements provided in its place. It summarises the engineering elements the Scheme will involve.

3. Design and development of the Scheme

- 3.1 The development of the Scheme arose from the previous misuse of Tackley level crossing, a number of near miss incidents and a fatality which led to its current temporary closure. Attempts to close the level crossing/divert the bridleway have been made multiple times since 2000, and the current scheme has learnt from those previous proposals.
- 3.2 The current proposal includes the provision of a footbridge (with stairs and lifts) at the station (which has been progressed under permitted development powers and so is not part of my Proof) and the routing a new bridleway along the western side of the railway. My Proof sets out the design parameters of the new bridleway, including width, surfacing and fencing, all of which have been consulted on and chosen following stakeholder feedback.
- 3.3 A number of alternative options to the New Bridleway have been appropriately scoped by Network Rail with a view to properly considering the appropriateness of their (alternative) inclusion in the Scheme. However, these were either not considered suitable

for the Scheme, would adversely affect landowners or would adversely affect the local community.

3.4 A number of alternative options to the current proposal were set out in paragraph 6 of Network Rail's Statement of Case. These were discounted due to factors such as cost to taxpayers, disruption to operation of the railway and environmental and engineering difficulties. The alternative options considered were:

3.4.1 Level crossing retention – discounted due to the level of risk associated with the level crossing and the alternative MSL footpath/bridleway level crossing style not being possible at this location;

3.4.2 Southern equestrian footbridge – deemed unviable due to its position in the landscape and effect on views as well as due to engineering challenges arising from the creation of a horse 'channel' separated from a pedestrian/cycle channel;

3.4.3 Equestrian subway – considered an unjustifiable high cost to taxpayers and would cause considerable disruption to the operation of the railway during construction as well as presenting environmental challenges due to the material to be excavated and the amount of permanent land take required;

3.4.4 In-field route – support from the landowner was withdrawn for this option due to the impact of splitting the agricultural field and their requirement to stop up the Existing Bridleway to facilitate this option;

3.4.5 Western In-field route – deemed inappropriate due to engineering constraints relating mainly to waterlogging;

3.4.6 Barwood bridge – considered inappropriate due to the distance the proposed location would be from Tackley station which would necessitate the construction of two bridges, significantly increasing costs to the taxpayer; and

3.4.7 Northern Route – considered inappropriate due to the length of the alternative bridleway route and the potential need to utilise compulsory purchase powers with two separate landowners to obtain the necessary rights in land, the case for which may not have been made.

3.5 In terms of construction compounds, a small compound is proposed to the south of the field for welfare huts, parking and storage associated with the bridleway construction. A larger compound is proposed to the north for the footbridge construction. Construction of this route would be expected to have minimal impact on Tackley Estate's normal business, with just occasional construction vehicles using the Old Whitehill byway to access the compound/worksites. Any such impact would be managed by close liaison with Tackley Estates.

3.6 Network Rail has attempted to minimise the temporary land take for construction (both in terms of footprint and duration) and to minimise the effect on other users, particularly Tackley Estates. The exact durations of access and the full range of plant/vehicles to use the accesses will be determined once the construction contracts have been tendered/awarded, but will comply with the terms of the Order plus the license agreement.

3.7 The powers we are seeking for temporary worksites, construction compounds and access are no more than is necessary for the construction of the Scheme.

4. Objections

- 4.1 None of the objections dispute the need for the closure of the Tackley level crossing but do raise concerns with regards to the impact on the Existing Bridleway, efficacy of consultation, alternative options to the New Bridleway, fencing and the movement of an existing signal control box.
- 4.2 The alternative options have been consulted on extensively to conclude that the current proposal is the most appropriate. There is no intention of providing fencing styles such as palisade type, due to the rural nature of the locality and the lack of trespass/vandalism concerns, so post & wire type fencing is proposed, which should be in keeping with the area.
- 4.3 With regards to the electrical cabinet movement, this cannot be facilitated due to the significant expenditure and disruption it would cause to the railway. The cabinet/compound are not an impediment to the proposed bridleway route.
- 4.4 With regards to concerns as to the surface of Old Whitehill underbridge, Network Rail will reinstate the surface to a compacted level stone surface, removing the potholes under the bridge. Going forward maintenance will then revert to the existing obligations for the byway/bridleway owner.
- 4.5 Additional and specific grounds of objection have been raised by objectors who also submitted statements of case. In response, the consultation exercise was extensive and a significant number of alternative options were considered which counters the objections in relation to the efficacy and extent of those exercises.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The powers in the Order are necessary to allow for the closure of the Tackley level crossing and the construction of the new bridleway; that other alternatives have been properly considered and then discounted; and that the powers we are seeking for temporary worksites, construction compounds and access are necessary.

Witness Declaration

I have declared as follows:

- i. This Summary Proof includes all facts which I regard as being relevant to the opinions that I have expressed in my full Proof of Evidence and that the Inquiry's attention has been drawn to any matter which would affect the validity of that opinion.
- ii. I believe the facts that I have stated in this Summary Proof are true and that the opinions expressed are correct.
- iii. I understand my duty to the Inquiry to help it with matters within my expertise and I have complied with that duty.

Signed: 

Dated: 21st May 2024

Andy Willson
Project Delivery Engineering Manager