

Transport and Works Act 1992
{Application by Network Rail Infrastructure Limited)
The Network Rail {Tackley Level Crossing Order) 202[] Order
Opening Submission behalf of the British Horse Society

1. The British Horse Society is a registered charity and works to change lives through the power of horses. It seeks to protect and promote the interests of all horses and those who care about them, including the 3.5 million people in the UK who ride or who drive a horse-drawn carriage.
2. England's extensive network of public rights of way is a unique, valuable and historic resource, which enjoys the protection of centuries of carefully considered law and practice. It provides the opportunity to experience the immense variety of English landscape and the settlements within it. Rights of way are both a significant part of our heritage and a major recreational and transport resource. They enable people to get away from roads used mainly by motor vehicles and enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of large parts of the countryside to which they would not otherwise have access.
3. In many areas, rights of way help to boost tourism and contribute to rural economies. In that respect alone there are in the region of 1,350 horses registered in the immediate area, whose riders are conceivably affected by the closure of this bridleway. Using figures from the British Equestrian Trade Association survey of 2023, that number of horses equates to over £9.25 million per annum spent into the local economy. Local equestrians should not therefore be treated as second class citizens, but as an essential part of the local economy and as such be provided with quality facilities and infrastructure when opportunities such as this arise. It is an investment in the future.
4. The Society is not, in principle, against closure of the crossing for the purposes of increasing capacity, reducing misuse and increasing overall safety. However, it can only support these proposals if a suitable high quality alternative link is provided for riders and other users. The crossing closure should be viewed as an opportunity to have a positive impact on the local bridleway network.
- s. For this reason, the apparent *"it's good enough"* style of approach that has been adopted by Network Rail in this matter is not accepted. They need to recognise and accept that the public rights of way network is unique in its character to only England and Wales. Such networks simply do not exist, in the same form, in other parts of the

world. It is an historic asset which certainly existed before the railways, and it must not be lightly disregarded.

6. The Society does however recognise the need for progress in an increasingly busy world and the need to bring the rail network up to a standard that is fit for a First World Country in the Twenty-First Century. However, the rail network does not exist in isolation, and where it is developed and improved it must be recognised that this also cannot happen in isolation. It is not acceptable to destroy any part of the historic public asset of the public rights of way network to the benefit of the rail operator however good their intentions may be.
7. If our historic public assets are to be lost, or detrimentally affected, then the public as a whole must be suitably compensated for this loss. Such compensation can only be by way of the provision of a high-quality alternative route. In this case, there is such a route {Route Option D):
 - a route supported by the Society and local riders,
 - a route supported by the owners of the land crossed by it (albeit conditionally, and a condition that is acceptable to the Society),
 - a route which would be more cost effective and
 - by the admission of Networks Rails own expert, a route which *"would be a preferable route to the New Bridleway as it will be more pleasant to ride at this greater distance from the rail line"*.
8. There is a very real opportunity for a "win-win" outcome to these proceedings, namely the closure of the crossing and the provisions of a high-quality alternative bridleway route (not the route suggested by Network Rail). The Society commends such an outcome to the inspector in terms of her report and the Secretary of State in making his or her decision.