

NR-W7-3 Ian Aston – Summary of Proof of Evidence

TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT 1992

TRANSPORT AND WORKS (INQUIRIES PROCEDURE) RULES 2004

THE NETWORK RAIL (TACKLEY LEVEL CROSSING) ORDER

**SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE – IAN ASTON of NETWORK RAIL
TACKLEY LEVEL CROSSING**

Date: 21 MAY 2024

1 Introduction

- 1.1 My name is Ian Aston and I am Route Level Crossing Manager of Western Route, and therefore Tackley level crossing, for Network Rail Infrastructure Limited (**Network Rail**).
- 1.2 My proof of evidence for this Public Inquiry includes consideration of the following matters:
 - i. An outline of the Scheme which includes the closure of Tackley Level Crossing
 - ii. A detailed description of Tackley level crossing (**the Crossing**)
 - iii. Explanation why the Crossing is not safe for use when assessed as a Station Passenger Crossing (**SPC**) and therefore why closure is the only option to reduce risks so far as is reasonably practicable.
 - iv. Responses to those objections where safety at the crossing, or matters close to, have been raised.

2 Detailed description of Tackley level crossing

- 2.1 The Average number of Daily Trains over the Crossing is 114, running at speeds up to and including 90mph.
- 2.2 The Crossing is located at the bottom of the platform ramps at Tackley Station, and provides the sole means of access between the platforms. Therefore any user wishing to use the platform furthest from them needs to cross the railway via the level crossing.
- 2.3 The Crossing is fitted with Stop, Look, Listen signs, telephones which equestrian users are instructed to use, and whistle boards on the rail approaches. They provide the only warning at the Crossing to the user that they are approaching a level crossing. They are fundamentally dependent upon users paying attention to these signs and heeding their warnings. The willingness or patience of people to wait for trains is a key risk

3 The risks of level crossings

- 3.1 Level crossings account for nearly half of the catastrophic train accident risk on Britain's railways. Network Rail has an important strategy for managing and reducing these risks: "Enhancing Level Crossing Safety", and risk assesses operational level crossings mandated by industry Standards.
- 3.2 My colleague Jerry Greenwood outlines the policy position on the risk management of them **[NR-W8-1]**.

4 Risks at Tackley level crossing

- 4.1 The main types of risk associated with the Crossing are as follows:
 - (a) Non-compliant warnings for vulnerable users
 - (b) Users demonstrating poor behaviours at the crossing (either mistakenly or deliberately);
 - (c) Being the sole means of transferring between the two platforms;
 - (d) Horse riders and associated risks;
 - (e) Intrinsic risks:

- (i) High volume of trains
 - (ii) Extreme variation in train speeds; and
 - (iii) 'Hidden trains';
- (f) Wider behavioural norms;
 - (i) Behavioural norms; and
 - (ii) Challenges for users to see approaching trains.
- 4.2 The warning time available varies considerably depending on the speed of the train approaching. The required sighting distance for a person with ability to traverse the Crossing is 318 metres, for a vulnerable user it is 477 metres.
- 4.3 In optimal sighting conditions, when stood on the western approach to the crossing looking at northbound trains, the sighting distance available was 453 metres.
- 4.4 The Whistle boards also did not provide sufficient warning to vulnerable users. The provided only approximately 9 seconds of warning against a required warning time of 11.86 seconds for vulnerable users.
- 4.5 The Crossing is therefore not safe for vulnerable users.
- 4.6 The Crossing has a history of misuse, categorised as any instance in which a user of a Crossing does not observe safety requirements at the Crossing.
- 4.7 There were 7 reported incidents of misuse at the Crossing in the 12 months prior to the near miss which caused Western Route's Managing Director to instruct an attendant be placed at the crossing until such time as it could be closed.
- 4.8 The Crossing's status as a SPC introduces significant risk, as users rushing for a train are known to not demonstrate proper care and attention when crossing the railway.
- 4.9 There are no suitable mitigations available which mitigate this risk sufficiently.
- 4.10 As Tackley is in the unique position of being the only SPC which also carries a public bridleway across it, the usage by horse riders introduces further risk.
- 4.11 The unpredictability of animals, the distraction they can cause to riders, and the misuse seen by equestrian use results in significant risk, as a horse has the potential to derail a train, which therefore puts the train driver, train staff, and passengers at risk.
- 4.12 The high volume of trains seen over the Crossing give rise to increased risk.
- 4.13 The high variance in train speeds over the Crossing, ranging from a crawl to 90mph, introduce unpredictability for both regular and irregular users
- 4.14 The Crossing's status as a SPC makes the 'hidden train' risk phenomenon a higher risk here than at other, non-station crossings. Users can rush to catch their train, or a fast approaching train can be hidden by another stationary train in the platform, thereby increasing the risk of users unwittingly placing themselves into the path of approaching trains.

- 4.15 Wider emerging behavioural norms give rise to increased risk including the use of smart technology, an ever-accelerating pace of life, and a reduction in the 'willingness to wait' of the public.

5 Requirements of current risk assessment

- 5.1 The quantitative assessment of risk is undertaken using the All Level Crossing Risk Model (ALCRM), developed in partnership between Network Rail and the RSSB. ALCRM provides a consistent method for assessing safety risks to crossing users, train passengers and train staff at level crossings.
- 5.2 The qualitative part of the assessment of risk is undertaken by a Narrative Risk Assessment (NRA). It uses the structured expert judgement is applied by the risk assessor throughout the risk assessment process; derived through the collation of evidence during site visits, applying local knowledge, using smart intelligent sources and analysis of previous assessments and accident/incident data.
- 5.3 Both the ALCRM and the NRA are used to ensure a full and balanced approach is adopted in the risk management of the level crossing.

6 Impact assessment report

- 6.1 The Narrative Risk Assessment and ALCRM processes are based on the live risk at the Crossing, which is currently nil as it is closed.
- 6.2 Therefore, Network Rail has undertaken an IAR for the Crossing looking the current risk should the crossing be open today, and the suitability of options to manage risk. The IAR, ultimately, supports the promotion of the closure of the crossing.
- 6.3 The IAR identifies the presence of Vulnerable users at the Crossing. Such users would not have time, should a train either sound the horn at the whistle board or become visible, shortly after they have made the decision to cross. 1.13. As this cannot be achieved here without additional mitigation, today, the Crossing is unacceptably high risk. The Whistle boards cannot be repositioned to mitigate vulnerable use at the Crossing because they are already positioned at the maximum guidance distance permitted.

7 Benefits of closure

- 7.1 The closure of a level crossing is one of the most consequential actions Network Rail can take in the pursuit of improving safety on the rail network. It remove a point at which the public and trains can physically interface, thus reducing risk significantly.
- 7.2 Wider benefits of closure are seen to apply to the public using the crossing, equestrian users no longer placing themselves and their horses onto the live railway, the population of Tackley, and the railway industry as a whole.

8 Objections and representations

- 8.1 I address and respond to those objections where safety is a primary focus of the objector. I conclude that the scheme, in my expert opinion, will see a significant net benefit to safety.

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 In my Proof of Evidence I conclude that the only suitable method to control the risks posed to the crossing at the Crossing is to confirm the closure.

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: 21/05/2024

Ian Aston
Route Level Crossing Manager