From:
To: TRANSPORTINFRASTRUCTURE
Subject: Network Rail Tackley, Oxfordshire
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Northbrook Farm
OX53HZ

Re Network Rail Tackley, Oxfordshire Level Crossing
Diversion of Bridleway

I write concerning the closure of the Tackley level crossing and the proposed re-siting of the bridleway. In my opinion the proposed route is **dangerous**.

The bridleway at the level crossing at Tackley has been closed since 2020. It provided access to a safe, circular route linking Tackley and Kirtlington, in addition to the wider countryside. With the current volume of road traffic, a route involving little or no road work is of immense value. I am a local rider who rides that route on average once or twice a week, year round. Three generations of my family ride this route - one for well over sixty years. I have over 55 years experience owning horses and have bred, broken in (started from scratch) and produced many horses, some of which have gone on to national success. I have competed in dressage, show jumping and one day eventing at national level. I have instructed and examined nationally, am chairman of my local Riding Club, was DC (in effect chair) of the local Pony Club and was awarded a long service medal from the national Pony Club several years ago.

In the TWAO document under the title Key Benefits, the first is Safety Improvements. I am of the firm belief that the proposed route for the diverted bridleway will certainly not improve safety, but is potentially very dangerous, for the following reasons -

1. It is adjacent to the railway for approximately 800m, so trains will be passing at speed in very close proximity to horses. This will be fenced in, so no option to move further away from the trains. Calculations have been produced to show the likelihood of meeting a train whilst in this enclosed area is almost 100%. The proposed surface is apparently gravel, which will slow horses' progress, thus increasing the likelihood of meeting a train and is slippery, so more chance of horses falling, potentially hurting themselves, their riders and them getting loose. The railway line is on higher ground, so trains will be at horses' head height or higher. This is going to be disconcerting at the very least for experienced, 'traffic proof' horses. For those younger, more flighty, not experienced with trains (difficult to achieve), ridden by novices or children etc, this may well be an extremely frightening experience. Horses are flight animals - they run first, think later. If that danger is coming towards them, they will turn abruptly, then run; if coming from behind they will attempt to outrun it. In the event of a horse running away from a train, the train will continue to 'chase' them. They are prey animals and will perceive this as something attacking them and will often run in a blind panic. This could well result in a horse and/or rider fall, at which point there could be a loose horse and a potentially injured rider. Horses in this case will not be making sensible decisions about their own safety, that of their rider or any other obstacle in their path. The idea that this, either with or without the rider, could happen in an enclosed space, with other members of the public eg children, pushchairs, less mobile people, dogs on leads etc present just does not bear thinking about. The consequences could be catastrophic.

2. The Highway Code states horses should be passed at a maximum of 10mph and minimum distance of 2m. The trains will be approximately 5m away and travelling at speeds of up to 100mph (may be faster in the future). Drivers of road vehicles can react to a situation - eg stop, turn off engine etc. Train drivers will not be able to.

3. Health and Safety
As the current chair of a Riding Club and a past leader of the Pony Club, (who has taken numerous riders on many long distance mounted expeditions over 25 or more years), I now have to complete a Risk Assessment before doing so. If a risk assessment had to be produced before taking a group of riders along that route, it simply would be deemed too dangerous and not be possible. How can this therefore be an acceptable route?
When organising events involving horses and members of the public it is always best practice to separate the two as much as possible. For example, there are horse walkways, where the general public are not allowed. In the proposed route all users will be together.

4. The other Key Benefits state these will include increased frequency of both freight and passenger trains. This would make it increasingly likely, in some circumstances inevitable, that a train would be encountered whilst riding alongside the track.

Network Rail's Consultation Process
I believe the consultation process to be flawed for the following reasons:

1. There was **no** attempt to engage with the riding community – when a bridleway is being diverted. This could very easily have achieved done via local Riding Clubs, Pony Clubs and asking the BHS (British Horse Society) to inform their local members. The BHS was only brought in by local members.

2.The schematic diagram in the NR published leaflet is inaccurate. It indicates a simple mirror image of the existing and the proposed routes. In fact the existing path is a whole field away, whereas the proposed route is adjacent. This is misleading. If anyone has responded to the survey accepting the proposed changes based on the information given in the leaflet, without knowing the actual topography, then surely that invalidates the consultation process?

Reporting of the Consultation Process
This is inaccurate in various ways:
There is no mention of any other possible route for the bridleway. On 20/7/23 there was a meeting of Tackley Estate, Network Rail and Oxfordshire County Council (Public Rights of Way), discussing the 'Western In-Field Route'. This does not feature in the report, let alone any costings or more detail.
OCC PROW team are not mentioned anywhere in the report I believe. They have an essential part to play in the diversion of any bridleway.

Other options for the crossing are simply not mentioned, let alone in any detail. Why not?

Please, when making the final decision on the route of the bridlepath, take my opinion into account. The safety of future generations of horse riders depends on the correct decision being made now.

Sue Eeley

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