

Fen Line Users Association

Objection to the proposed Network Rail (Cambridge Re-Signalling) Order 2022

Proof of evidence

The Fen Line Users Association represents users of the railway between Cambridge and King's Lynn and we strongly support renewal and modernisation of the signalling system.

However, we object to the conversion of the level crossing at Waterbeach station to full barriers without providing an alternative means for passengers to cross the line.

This crossing is used by passengers arriving from the village to catch trains to Cambridge and London, and by those who have parked in the car park wishing to catch trains towards Ely and King's Lynn. It will also be used by the shuttle bus, due to commence service in 2023, linking the station to the new town and the Research Park. The bus needs to cross the railway to reach a place where it can turn round.

We note that the Applicant assumes the station will be closed to passengers by the time the crossing is converted. Closure was originally proposed more than twenty years ago, and the date has slipped repeatedly since then. At one time the replacement station was expected to open in time to support the 8-car service to King's Lynn which began in 2020, but when it was clear that date would not be met the platforms at the current station were lengthened. The most recent proposal is for December 2025, so the current station will be open for at least two and a half years from the planned date for conversion of the crossing, probably longer. The effect on passengers, which is not addressed in the modelling, therefore needs to be taken into account.

With the current crossing, the barriers can go down for a train in one direction and then stay down for a train in the other direction. They always go up when the second train has passed through, because it is not possible for a third train to follow the first one closely enough to keep them down. This is because the maximum time the barriers can be down in this scenario is about two and a half minutes, whereas the minimum gap between two trains in the same direction is about four minutes.

We expect that with the proposed full-barrier crossing the down time would be enough that a third train could be approaching by the time the second has passed through, keeping the road closed and preventing passengers crossing. And they could then stay down for a fourth train, and a fifth, or more, as has been seen at other full-barrier crossings.

Although the proposed crossing is described as "Manually Controlled Barriers" we understand that it would be operated automatically, in which case it must be possible to provide more accurate timings than the estimates in the Applicant's reports on its modelling, which have a number of defects which we addressed at length in section 2 of our Statement of Case. At other crossings at similar locations the barriers can be down for 15 minutes or more, and in the absence of better information we have to assume the same will be the case here. Currently, many passengers arrive from the village two or three minutes before the train is expected.

We request that the Applicant modify the project so that passengers have the same certainty that they will be able to cross the line to catch trains that they have at present, for instance by retaining the AHB or by providing a footbridge or underpass, as suggested in section 3 of our Statement of Case.