

17th June, 2020

Dear Mr Lewis,

My objection to Network Rail's proposal of closure the Somerton Crossing via diversion. (Master Plan 18/00825/Hybrid SPC)

I have recently read Network Rail's document of the 21st May 2020, recommending "closure by diversion" of the "User Worked Crossing/Footpath Bridleway Crossing" and object to their recommendation for the following reasons:

1. The assumption of a dramatic increase of the usage of the crossing caused by the Heyford Park development is based on a series of flawed assumptions. There will doubtless be an increase, but the likelihood is that there will a modest increase of walkers/dog walkers/Ramblers / equestrian users. The crossing only connects Somerton to North Aston. It will not be a major thoroughfare for the Heyford Park residents and therefore the risks associated with unsupervised crossings mentioned in the Network Rail report are too pessimistic. Heyford Park is planning its own attractions and improvements to footpaths and bridleways in the Heyford / Fritwell and Ardley areas, none are planned to the west of the Park over this crossing.
2. In the Network Rail document, in all but the most extreme case of usage the risk score remains at B3. This is the same as the current score in the Network Rail report dated 15 March 2018. If the risk score is the same, surely the current method of operation is deemed appropriate for all but the most extreme increase in usage by Pedestrians and vehicles.
3. The only viable diversion of the existing bridle path for pedestrian, residential, farm and equestrian users would be an over bridge (an under-pass would flood in winter and stormy weather). This would be disruptive in the build phase, an ugly spectacle and totally out of keeping with the beauty of the Cherwell Valley. It would also be extremely expensive (The Network Rail report estimates a cost of £4,000,000).
4. Use of the Fatality Weighted Index (FWI) is at best arbitrary for pedestrian usage at a crossing. According to the Rail Standards and Safety Board (RSSB) project T440 (The weighting of non-fatal injuries), the following injury definitions and weightings apply to FWI:
 - 10 Major injuries to 1 fatality
 - 200 RIDDOR reportable minor injuries to 1 fatality
 - 200 Class 1 shock/trauma injuries to 1 fatality
 - 1000 Non-RIDDOR reportable minor injuries to 1 fatality
 - 1000 Class 2 shock/trauma injuries to 1 fatality.

Such weightings and associated variances are appropriate for Network Rail staff, its contractors, train operators operating the complex machinery of a modern railway, but are questionable when applied to the pedestrian usage of crossings. The important rating is the individual "B" rating and the collective "3" which has remained constant in all but the most extreme usage scenario.

5. The Network Rail report dated 15 March 2018 Para 7.2 states: ***"Network Rail is subject to the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act etc. 1974 to reduce risk 'so far as is reasonably practicable'. In simple terms this means that the cost, time and effort required in providing a specific risk reduction measure needs to be commensurate with the safety***

benefit that will be obtained as a result of its implementation. Following the completion of the risk assessment and having reviewed all relevant information and options, the assessor has identified that closure of this crossing via the above methods is not viable as either the cost associated with each solution outweighs the safety benefit or they are just not viable given the local layout of the area and environment. Unless there is a significant change or increase in crossing usage, train frequencies, speed or electrification which alters the FWI score all options remain exponential to the cost benefit. Having installed low level lighting to the pedestrian/bridleway element of the crossing with a 0% risk reduction (LCG14 states that MSL crossings do not qualify for a risk reduction, although it being the sensible thing to do) there are no other outstanding risk reduction methods available at this time. Therefore the risk at this crossing can be considered to be as low as is reasonably practicable and no further action, other than routine inspection and monitoring is required until the next risk review, or changes in the risk profile are identified."

6. In respect of Point 5, and in summary, if Network Rail is so concerned over a change of risk profile at the Somerton Crossing, then the company should commission a full new risk assessment. A short document based on a set of generic statements, arbitrary weightings on usage and finally a survey by the Pet food manufacturers is totally unsatisfactory for the change in the safety risk assessment of a crossing on the UK's operational railway.

Yours sincerely

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