

Proposal:	East Coast Main Line (ECML) Level Crossing Closure Programme
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Recommendation:	Committee note the contents of the report and offer any additional comments it would like to make to Network Rail at this stage

1 Background and Description of the Proposal

Network Rail (NR) proposes to close a number of level crossings on the East Coast Main Line (ECML) between London and Doncaster as part of a programme to make the line more efficient and reliable. The works will help facilitate the introduction of faster trains (125mph) thereby reducing journey times. The programme will also improve rail safety as a consequence of the removal of the crossings.

Within Peterborough, the closure of the following level crossings is proposed;

- Woodcroft (Woodcroft Road to the southeast of Helpston) – shown on plan 1
- Helpston (Glinton Road, Helpston) – shown on plan 1
- Maxey (Maxey Road, Helpston) – shown on plan 2
- Lolham Bridges and Helpston Footpath (north of B1443 and NE of Bainton – shown on plan 3

The attached drawings, which are for illustrative purposes only at this stage, set out alternative access arrangements. These are considered in more detail in section 2 of this report.

The level crossing at Tallington (outside Peterborough City Council's (PCC) administrative area) is also proposed to be closed. Network Rail are, however, including Tallington Crossing as part of this group of proposed crossings closures because of the cross boundary traffic/transport implications.

The drawings referred to have been produced by Network Rail (and their consultants) and have recently formed part of a recent public consultation event that included exhibitions at local villages. Parish Councils and residents now have the opportunity to make comments on the proposals to Network Rail

Later this year, Network Rail intends to submit applications under the Transport and Works Act 1992 to the Secretary of State for Transport to obtain permission to carry out the level crossing closures. These applications will be accompanied by supporting technical information including an Environmental Impact Assessment(s) which will cover aspects such as the landscape and visual impacts of the proposals and mitigation, heritage impacts, noise and vibration and ecological impacts (the scope of this assessment will be decided by the Secretary of State) and a Transport Assessment.

Planning permission will not be required from PCC and as such PCC will not be the determining authority. PCC will be a consultee as will other organisations such as English Heritage and the Environment Agency. Network Rail is obliged to undertake pre-application consultation before submitting the applications which is why it is undertaking the current consultation. There will be further consultation as the project moves forward, prior to the submission of the applications to the Secretary of State.

Impacts of the closures on the highway network will be a key (if not the key) issue. Network Rail is using the Peterborough Transport Model. This is the Council's transport model which can be used to predict the traffic impacts of development on the road network in the context of the proposed growth of the city. This model is being used to assist with producing a baseline of traffic data together with current traffic surveys. The methodology for producing the anticipated impacts on traffic volumes and flows is being agreed with both PCC Highways and Lincolnshire Highways as the adjacent Highway Authority. Road closures to enable the closure of some crossings will likely impact traffic movements across a wide area and will not respect nominal boundaries. This work is on-going and therefore the purpose of this report is not to provide detailed comments on highways and traffic implications of the proposals at this stage. These will be reported to members of the Planning and Environmental Protection Committee at the time when the impacts have been identified along with the mitigation measures being proposed.

The purpose of this report is to seek Members' views on the comments we are able to make thus far in relation to each proposal and to see if Members wish to add any further comments at this stage. These comments will be forwarded to Network Rail. As already indicated there will be further opportunities for PCC to comment later in the process. Once the applications are submitted to the Secretary of State it is likely that the proposals will go before a Public Inquiry where PCC and other interested persons or parties can take part.

The following comments are limited to planning matters. It is not the role of PCC as Local Planning Authority (LPA) to comment on individual property rights (issues such as land values, loss of property value, compensation etc.) However, the Environmental Assessment will need to assess impact on residential amenity and the property mentioned below represents only the very nearest to the proposals.

2 Comments on the proposed level crossing closures (information to date)

General Comments:

- The above comments are solely based on the illustrative plans and may be subject to change once detailed design and the transport work is completed.
- The LPA cannot expect or request Network Rail to carry out mitigation or works that go beyond what is needed to make the development acceptable but does expect negative impacts as a result of the development to be appropriately mitigated.
- It is not the role of PCC as Local Planning Authority to comment on individual property rights (issues such as land values, compensation etc.). Any compulsory purchase necessary would be dealt with through the Transport and Works Act process but unless PCC is a landowner, it will not be the role of PCC to represent third party property interests.
- Once the proposals are more refined, the LPA will re-assess against adopted development plan policies and report again to Committee.

Woodcroft Level Crossing (Plan 1)

Network Rail proposes to remove the level crossing at Woodcroft Road by stopping up the road at each side of the railway line. A turning head will be provided at the end of each stopped up road. Woodcroft Road presently forms part of the Peterborough Green Wheel Cycle route. A new Public Right of Way (PROW) in the form of a bridleway with cyclepath is proposed to be created from a point just to the south of the current level crossing and adjacent to Ram Dike. The new PROW will follow the course of the dike to the northwest up to a point where the main settlement of Helpston begins. It would then turn north to run along the track which runs to the rear of the properties in Mill Field Close and Arborfield Close, Helpston. The PROW would join the B1443 Glington Road in Helpston at the point where the proposed Helpston level crossing road diversion would begin.

There are several “smallholdings” many of which contain stable buildings to the north of Woodcroft level crossing and there is property at the crossing including Railway Cottages to the north of the crossing and The Bungalow to the south of the crossing.

Comments:

- No objections in principle to the closure of this level crossing or the proposed bridleway route.
- The highway appears to be lightly trafficked and the closure will affect a small number of motorists, horse riders and perhaps some local farmers although we reserve final comments until the transport work is completed
- The physical impact of the works on the landscape will be minimal
- The physical impact of the works on residents will be minimal
- The new bridleway/cycleway link is welcome in principle

Helpston Level Crossing (Plan 1)

Network Rail proposes to close Helpston level crossing by stopping up the highway to either side of the tracks. A new road would be provided to the south of the existing road which would bridge over the railway line thus removing the need for a level crossing. The position of the proposed new road is shown on illustrative Plan 1. It would commence immediately to the west of the tracks on the on the B1443 Glington Road and adjacent to properties; Former Station Master’s House (97), 97A and Nurseryman’s Cottage, Glington Road, Helpston. It would sweep southwards and would begin to rise before turning east/northeast and over the railway line, turning northwards and sweeping down to re-join the B1443 near to properties; The Elms (north side of Helpston Road), Glenderry, Helpston Road and 1 Helpston Road, Etton. The rise of the new road would be mounded on either side of the railway line. Access would be provided to existing properties. At the eastern end of the new road a turning spur would be provided for access to properties fronting the B1443 as stopped up. A footpath cycleway will be provide alongside the new road.

Comments:

- In principle, the closure would be supported subject to traffic and other issues being adequately dealt with because the level crossing causes lengthy delays.
- The new road will be highly visible in the flat landscape, however, any raised road in this location will be highly visible. There are other bridge structures in the general area.
- The indicative route appears to be a reasonable compromise between unnecessary incursion of a highly visible road into the open countryside and minimising impact on nearby listed buildings namely 86 Glington Road (adjacent the level crossing) and the Grain store (café accessed off a track adjacent the level crossing), and impact on residential amenity
- We expect the environmental statement to accompany the application (to the Secretary of State) to include a detailed noise and visual amenity report into the impact of the development upon the nearest properties and appropriate mitigation to be provided where necessary (taking into account heritage assets).

Maxey Level Crossing (Maxey Road, Helpston) Plan 2

The proposal is to close the Maxey level crossing at Maxey Road on the edge of Helpston. The road would be stopped up at either side of the tracks. It is proposed to put a new bridleway bridge to the west of the level crossing that will bridge over the tracks. The bridge would be landscape banded to the north and south of the tracks. It will not be open to through traffic but would be gated to allow access only to farmers/landowners who own land in the immediate vicinity and emergency services/network rail operatives. The new bridge will allow access to Crossing Cottages located to the north of the tracks. There is residential property to the south and east of the point where the bridge would turn west off Maxey Road, including a site currently being developed for housing.

The site of the new bridge would partially lie within Flood Zone 2 and the outer buffer of a gas pipeline. The bridge over the south drain (just to the south of the level crossing) is grade II listed.

Comments:

- Maxey Road is moderately trafficked during the week, less so at weekends. The transport assessment will need to demonstrate that the closure of Maxey Road to through traffic will not lead to unacceptable increases in traffic in other villages and on minor roads and that impacts are properly mitigated (further comment can only be made once the transport proposals are clearer). Subject to this (and other details being acceptable), the principle of closing this level crossing and closing Maxey Road to through traffic is supported.
- The bridge will be highly visible locally but its position is logical given the constraints.
- We expect the environmental statement to accompany the application (to the Secretary of State) to include a detailed noise and visual amenity report into the impact of the development upon the nearest properties and appropriate mitigation to be provided where necessary (taking into account heritage assets).
- There will be some impact upon the amenity of existing properties, especially a new development of 5 houses but this impact is considered to be within acceptable limits given the limited amount of traffic which will use the bridge.
- The submission must set out how flood prevention and surface water matters will be adequately dealt with
- The setting of the listed bridge will need to be properly considered in the environmental statement

Lolham Bridges level crossing and Helpston Footpath Crossing (plan 3)

The proposal is to close the level crossing at Lolham Bridges by stopping up the road to the north and south of the tracks thus closing this route to through traffic (see Helpston Footpath below for footpath links). A turning area would be provided to the north of the tracks and a car park will be created to the south of the tracks (adjacent to the new Helpston Footpath bridge). There are several constraints at this site; Lolham Bridges are both a scheduled monument and grade II* listed, which makes them of national significance; Maxey Cut lies just to the north of the level crossing (running east-west) and South drain runs east-west to the south of the level crossing. The former Bainton Quarry pit lagoons are to the west of the level crossing. The area is within flood zones 2 and 3.

The highway passing over Lolham Bridges links the A1175 in the north (at West Deeping) with the B1443 to the south. For the status of this highway it is heavily trafficked and it seems apparent that the route is used as a “rat run.”

Currently the Helpston Footpath 1 crosses over the tracks just to the southeast of Lolham Bridges adjacent to the point where South Drain passes underneath the tracks. Helpston Footpath 1 continues to the east through fields towards Helpston and also southerly, along the road. For practical purposes it joins with Bainton Footpath 5 which runs to the northwest alongside Maxey Cut. It is proposed to replace this footpath crossing with a new ramped and stepped bridleway bridge. This would ensure that the footpath, bridleway and cycle links at this site are maintained.

Comments:

- The closure of the level crossing and the route to through traffic will divert the existing traffic elsewhere. The traffic modelling must provide a robust “picture” of where this traffic will be diverted to. There are presently concerns that this traffic will be diverted to and through other villages where any significant increases in traffic will be inappropriate/unacceptable. We will expect diverted traffic to be encouraged to use major routes. Further comment cannot be made until the outcome of the on-going traffic modelling and proposed mitigation is known

- Linked to the above point, any mitigation to deal with any 'diverted' traffic will need to consider the historical context of the area to ensure that it is appropriate from a heritage perspective.
- It is agreed that the constraints of the area around Lolham Bridges, particularly the scheduled monument and grade II* status of the bridges, mean that it would be inappropriate to construct a new road to accommodate through traffic as is proposed at Helpston, as this would have an adverse impact upon the setting of the Bridges. The surrounding water environment would mean that such a structure would be a very significant and dominant feature in a sensitive landscape. As such the principle of a bridleway/cycleway bridge only is supported (if in terms of the traffic issues noted above, the impacts of the closure can be appropriately mitigated).
- The creation of a new footbridge will create an intrusion into the landscape and will to an extent affect the historic setting of the bridges. More comment will be made once a detailed design is produced. It is accepted that removing significant traffic from the scheduled monument will be beneficial to its preservation. It is accepted that the design of the bridge will need to ensure it functions for riders, cyclists and walkers. However, given the setting a utility type structure should be avoided where possible and the bridge should be of the highest design and quality that is possible.
- The creation of a car park for people wishing to visit the Lolham Bridges area is welcome, however there are some concerns about possible mis-use of the car park and it is considered that entry to the car park will need to be managed.

7 Recommendation

That Members endorse the comments set out above and report any further comment they wish to make at the meeting in order that officers can forward the comments to Network Rail on behalf of PCC as Local Planning Authority.

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