

# **Proposed joint response by South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council Councils to Network Rail's Ely Area Capacity Enhancements 2 consultation**

## **Introduction**

This response to the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements 2 (EACE) consultation is provided by Greater Cambridge Shared Planning on behalf of Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. Our response focuses on:

- The overall approach to EACE, highlighting that capacity enhancements must account for all expected future rail use
- The impacts of the proposed capacity enhancements on existing communities at Fen Road Chesterton, and at Waterbeach

## **Overall approach**

Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council strongly support the overall aim of the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements, in supporting increases in both passenger and freight rail services and improvements affecting Greater Cambridge. Achieving these aims will help address many of Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council's own aims of supporting the transition towards net zero carbon, improving air quality, creating better access to services and supporting delivery of housing and employment growth.

To fully achieve these aims we consider it critical that the scheme provides adequate future capacity for both passenger and freight services, taking into account future growth, including from planned development. We are not convinced that the proposed enhancements set out in the consultation material will achieve this. Rail capacity enhancements should include account for planned growth set out in the adopted Cambridge Local Plan 2018 and South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018, which includes - of particular relevance to the Ely Area capacity enhancements - the

new town north of Waterbeach which will provide a home for more than 25,000 people with direct access to the Kings Cross - King's Lynn line via a relocated Waterbeach station. Capacity enhancements should also consider the likely passenger growth arising from the joint [Greater Cambridge Local Plan First Proposals consultation](#) which Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council are developing together. The emerging Local Plan seeks to minimise carbon emissions from new development, of which the primary factor is transport. As such it focuses development in locations which are or which will be accessible by train, including at North East Cambridge (~8,000 homes / 15,000 jobs). The proposed allocations in the joint Local Plan will generate substantial further rail passenger demand on this part of the rail network.

Setting aside planned development, we note national and local government transport policies seek to encourage people to make more sustainable travel choices to help the UK meet its 2050 net zero target. Relevant local policy includes [Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Transport Plan 2020](#). The Local Transport Plan is currently being revised as the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan with additional focus on addressing climate change ([early consultation](#) is currently taking place November-December 2021). Behaviour shifts to public transport can only increase rail passenger demand, heightening the need for these enhancements to fully account for expected passenger increases. Beyond behaviour change, the East West Rail proposals for Bedford to Cambridge and any potential future through services to and from the East of Cambridge will likely add to the need for additional rail capacity in this area, adding further weight to this argument.

Further to the above, we agree with the more detailed points on this topic expressed in Cambridgeshire County Council's response to this consultation, noting that since this is a large 'once in a lifetime' scheme it is vital that it provides adequate future capacity for both passenger and freight services.

## **Chesterton Level Crossing**

In relation to Chesterton Fen Road level crossing, the Councils would like to reiterate and expand upon points made in our joint response to the previous consultation.

We note that this level crossing is within the scope of the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements and that it was one of the 127 level crossings considered for potential intervention within the area, but that it is not one of the twenty two level crossings proposed for intervention as part of the Ely Area Capacity Enhancements 2 consultation.

The Councils are very disappointed with the decision not to propose further interventions at Chesterton Fen Road level crossing. This is an issue the Councils feel very strongly about and one that our communities regularly raise with Members. The Councils therefore ask Network Rail to reconsider their decision and to include the crossing within their scheme, noting the following points:

- **very significant impact of current level crossing downtimes, which will be exacerbated by the proposed service enhancements** - The crossing is controlled by means of a full barrier. On weekdays there are currently at least six train movements an hour in each direction, resulting in the barrier being down for around 32 minutes out of each hour and causing severance to the community to the east of the crossing, which has no alternative vehicular means of entering or exiting the area. This is having a negative impact on the Fen Road community of some 1,000 people and their livelihood, and potentially leads to frustration and high risk behaviour with the associated implications for public safety. Whilst we understand from Network Rail that the proposed Ely Area enhancements may only result in an additional one train in each direction per hour in this location, the cumulative impact accounting for current and proposed services will be very significant, and can only result in further frustration and risk to public safety. Additional train movements resulting from additional capacity on the line would clearly further increase the length of downtime at the crossing and without a solution, would become untenable for the community to the east of the railway. Accounting for future rail traffic growth beyond the current consultation period – as we are asking – will serve only to narrow further access arrangements and make the case for intervention greater and more expensive in the future.
- **the level crossing provides the only access to a significant resident and business community** – The level crossing provides the only means of

vehicular access, including by emergency vehicles, to Fen Road (and currently provides the main pedestrian and cycle access), for a significant community including well over five hundred people and a significant number of businesses. While we understand that there may be other level crossings in East Anglia which also act as the only vehicular access for dwellings, we consider it unlikely that there will be many that provide the main access for such a large community. This has been a significant issue raised in responses to the draft North East Cambridge Area Action Plan.

- **The community affected by the level crossing downtimes is already disadvantaged** – a large percentage of the Chesterton Fen Road resident community belong to the Irish Traveller ethnic minority group, which is a protected characteristic under the Equalities Act 2010. The Irish Traveller community in general faces significant disadvantage including in relation to education, health and access to employment. The current downtime at Chesterton Fen Road level crossing forms an additional literal barrier to access to emergency services, education, health and employment opportunities. Increasing barrier downtime will only add to this.

From discussions with Network Rail, it is understood that the crossing is already of the highest safety level and is operated as efficiently as possible from the signal box, leaving closure the only other avenue to be explored. If Network Rail were to determine now or at a future point that the crossing should be closed, alternative vehicular access would need to be provided. The location of the crossing is in a highly constrained area and there is unlikely to be a straightforward solution to providing an alternative crossing in the current location. Therefore it is likely that land would need to be safeguarded elsewhere in the vicinity. Should the transport and highway authorities identify preferred alternative accesses requiring land to be safeguarded this could be implemented most appropriately through the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan, however work on this is continuing at pace. Unless there is a clear steer from Network Rail that an alternative to the Chesterton Fen crossing is likely to be needed in the future, it will be difficult to safeguard land and the opportunity to address the constraints at the crossing could become increasingly more difficult in the future.

The enduring issues arising from barrier downtime at Chesterton level crossing are of significant local concern, both to the councils and also to local communities. Despite continued efforts by the local authorities to engage with Network Rail on this specific issue, the Councils have been disappointed by the lack of constructive engagement. In particular, since August 2020 the planning authorities, along with Cambridgeshire County Council as Highways Authority and the Combined Authority as Local Transport Authority, have sought to engage with Network Rail through the Greater Cambridge Local Plan Transport Sub-Group which meets on a 6-weekly basis, as the responsibility for any changes to a level crossing needs to be taken by Network Rail. Despite early engagement and discussions on this issue and how options for addressing it could be considered through the Ely Area Capacity Enhancement programme, disappointingly there has not been any direct engagement from Network Rail for a number of months. As such it is considered that the urgency and significance of this issue is still not fully understood. Without a long term strategic view from Network Rail, there remains no confidence that the access problems faced in this area will be resolved or that local strategies can provide a complementary role in support of that objective. As such, we would welcome further engagement with Network Rail's team to explore the feasibility of alternative access options available; EACE scheme development and future funding bids must in our view consider this issue further.

Network Rail attended the Cambridge City Council North Area Committee on Thursday 18 November at the Councils' invitation and made a presentation on the current EACE consultation and why no measures were proposed for Fen Road crossing. In response to questions from councillors from both Councils raising their strong concerns and the safety of the crossing including access for emergency vehicles, Network Rail representatives indicated that if the Councils wished to discuss the matter, Network Rail would be willing to do so. They commented that Network Rail was not suggesting that it was for others to resolve matters which are the responsibility of Network Rail but that it needed to work with third parties to discuss options.

Drawing on the above points, we encourage Network Rail to start to work with the local planning, transport and highway authorities, in a meaningful way and at the

earliest opportunity, to actively explore measures to address the exclusion of the community severed by the Chesterton Fen Road crossing caused by the existing and forecast increases in barrier down time.

## **Burgess Drove Level Crossing**

Of the two options proposed, the Councils support option 1 - Remove vehicle crossing rights but retain access for pedestrians and cyclists (consistent with County Council draft response and also City/SCDC priorities).

We note that the Level Crossing provides the most direct access from Waterbeach village to Burgess Drove Allotments, and also provides the most direct pedestrian access to the river bank from the centre of Waterbeach. Retaining access for pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists is consistent with the Councils' community food growing and access to nature aims.

Further to this, we would like to make the following supplementary points, which have also been raised by Cambridgeshire County Council:

- The retained route over the crossing at Burgess Drove should be open for all Non-Motorised Users: that is equestrians, as well as pedestrians and cyclists
- As stated in the consultation document, we would support the proposal to upgrade Burgess Drove for vehicular use to provide access via Bannold Road for the businesses and residences that are located on Burgess Drove to the east of the rail line.
- Greater Cambridge Shared Waste colleagues have confirmed that the proposals will not affect their household refuse collection operations.

Further, the Council notes the views of the local residents who note that Network Rail have not offered an option of upgrading the crossing, which they have on many crossings considered for closure to the north and installing electric gates. The residents feel that the cost of installing electric gates in this location would be modest compared to the ongoing costs of maintaining the made-up Burgess Drove, which will fall to the County Council in perpetuity. In addition, closure would leave just one

rail crossing for some 39 dwellings on the east side of the Bottisham Road/Bannold Road crossing.

This response is subject to a call in period of five working days from Friday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2021. The Councils will confirm if any points in the response change as a result of member discussions within this period.