



Your Ref:
Our Ref: 8285nov29\DH\da

Kings Place, 90 York Way
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29 November 2011

Helpline: 08457 11 41 41

Mr David Buckle
Chief Executive
Vale of White Horse District Council
Abbey House
Abbey Close
Abingdon
OX14 3JE

Dear Mr Buckle

LEVEL CROSSING, STEVENTON

Thank you for your letter of 7 November regarding Network Rail's plans to automate the level crossing at Steventon.

As you were writing to offer your support to Ed Vaizey MP's correspondence to me, please find enclosed a copy of my response to Mr Vaizey which I hope you will find informative.

Yours sincerely



David Higgins
Chief Executive

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29 November 2011

Ed Vaizey Esq MP
MP for Wantage and Didcot
House of Commons
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Dear Mr Vaizey

LEVEL CROSSINGS, STEVENTON, OXFORDSHIRE OX13

Thank you for your letter dated 31 October regarding ongoing conversations regarding Network Rail's plans to alter the crossing in Steventon. Please accept our apologies for the delay in responding.

As you correctly mention, representatives from the Office of Rail Regulation (ORR) and Network Rail attended a Public Meeting in Steventon on Friday, 28 October. Our objective was to try to alleviate some the concerns the local community had about the re-control of the level crossing to Swindon. We now acknowledge that earlier communication should have been provided to the local community to try and reassure them that the alteration to CCTV would not change how the level crossing is operated and managed. We will now review our Project Communications process to make sure that we do not repeat this oversight.

With regards to consultation, as you correctly state we have statutory requirement to consult with the ORR and Highways Authority. I can confirm that we have consulted with both these parties and this process is currently on going.

Each of the individual points raised in your correspondence are addressed below



Will you therefore undertake to delay the current works in order to commence statutory consultation for a full 2 months and to engage meaningfully with local residents?

As you are now aware, the re-control of the level crossings has been delayed and further information regarding the rescheduling of the control will be available soon. We are willing to continue to improve our communications with local community of Steventon.

We agree that Steventon is unique as it is bisected by a high speed line of 125mph with two level crossings. However, I can confirm that there are many other locations in the Western region that have level crossings which are controlled via CCTV.

Is there any other crossing in the western region which both bisects a built up area and runs frequent high speed trains at maximum speed?

As detailed above, there are other level crossings in the Western region that have CCTV crossings. The train speeds at these crossings are approximately 70 – 80mph. While this line speed is not as high as the one at Steventon, it is still significant and therefore indicative of our confidence in this CCTV signalling system.

There are also level crossings on our East Coast Main Line controlled by CCTV and which also bisect a populated area at a line speed of 125mph.

Has a safety case been prepared? What are the statistics for pedestrian incidents on CCTV manually operated crossings as compared to other crossings?

For any renewal to take place at a level crossing, we must go through a consultation process with the rail safety regulators, the ORR. This in itself is safety mitigation as the ORR will not approve any alterations to a level crossing which jeopardise the safety of its users. We cannot re-control the level crossing to CCTV without the approval of the ORR, which is there to judge the safety impact of this change. We also undertake our own level crossing risk assessments which analyse factors such as sighting, line speed, usage and visibility. These recommendations are made to the ORR but they will always have the final decision as to whether or not the renewal can take place.

The CCTV camera will be focusing directly on the level crossings. Telephones are not situated at either Stocks Lane or Causeway but there will be signage displaying a contact number to the Control Centre at Swindon. Therefore, any potential concerns with the crossing can

be reported to the Signaller who can liaise direct with our Control Centre.

As mentioned, the operation of the crossing for its user will not change. As a result, we do not feel it necessary to install equipment that notifies users of waiting times.

What measures will be put in place to ensure maximum safety for pedestrians if the crossing is CCTV operated?

As stated at the Public Meeting, the operation to the level crossing will not alter, especially if a fault occurs with the equipment. Should there be a fault with the system, the barriers will 'fail safe' into the down position to prevent any cars from travelling over the level crossing. Our Response Team from Swindon will attend to, if possible, resolve the issue. This process has not changed as this was the current arrangement with the Crossing Keeper present at Stocks Lane and therefore it will not impact our cost. It is worth noting that it is not the duty of the Crossing Keeper to undertake repairs to the level crossing's equipment as this may distract him from monitoring the train movement.

We acknowledge that, should there be a fault with the equipment, then vehicle users may have to wait at the crossing until the matter is resolved. We appreciate that this is an inconvenience for users of the crossings but it is essential that safety is not jeopardised and therefore it is vital the crossings is repaired before access across is granted. In addition to this, we are confident that the renewal of the level crossing equipment will greatly reduce the number of faults experienced.

What cost savings will result from the changes? Has any analysis been done of additional cost that could arise if the scheme goes ahead, such as the cost of call outs from Swindon?

We understand that Crossing Keepers can become a part of the local community but we must stress that any interaction with Crossing Keeper can distract them from monitoring train movement and the level crossing. Under the proposed new arrangement at Swindon, the Signallers' working environment will allow them to focus on the crossing, the rail network and to have prompt communication with our Response and Control teams.

As previously stated, our costs will not increase because of the Response Unit being based in Swindon as this is the current arrangement for the level crossings in Steventon.



I hope that the response above helps to clarify our position. However, should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at the above address.

Yours sincerely



David Higgins
Chief Executive