

Cabinet.

12 December 2017



Title	The submission of a petition seeking alternatives to trains using their horns on the approach to the Shortwood Common footpath crossing in Staines-upon-Thames.		
Purpose of the report	Interim report for the provision of information		
Report Author	Tracey Willmott-French		
Cabinet Member	Councillor Gething	Confidential	No
Corporate Priority	None		
Recommendations	Cabinet is asked to note the petition and progress made so far, and to keep the matter under review.		
Reason for Recommendation	On its own the Council cannot effect a change in the noise disturbance being caused by train horn soundings. Network Rail is considering alternative options but these will not be scheduled until 2022. They will consider the possibilities for interim measures until then.		

1. Key issues

- 1.1 The Council has received an e-petition with 88 signatories regarding the 'sounding of train horns on the approach to Shortwood Common' from residents of Leacroft and Staines who are being disturbed by the noise; **Appendix 1** refers.
- 1.2 Residents have advised that the noise has increased substantially over the years mainly due to the installation of whistle boards, the introduction of faster trains, and the reduction of the Night Time Quiet Period.
- 1.3 The Rail Safety and Standards Board reduced the Night Time Quiet Period from 23:00-07:00 to 23.59-06:00 hours to help mitigate the risk of incidents at passive level crossings. This decision was based on research into events where people were nearly hit by trains.
- 1.4 For safety reasons, train drivers are instructed by the Rail Safety and Standards Board to sound the horn as a warning when passing a 'whistle board'. Failure to comply with these requirements places the train operating companies in breach of health and safety requirements.
- 1.5 The Rail Safety and Standards Board's 'rule book' requires the train's horn to be sounded "as a warning" to anyone who is on or near the line on which the train is travelling at any time day or night, or when passing a 'whistle board' between the hours of 06:00 and 23:59 hours.

- 1.6 Details of a crossing use survey (May 2016 to November 2016) has been provided by Network Rail which estimates that the crossing is used 50 times per day.
- 1.7 The safety precautions at level crossings are determined by risk assessment. Frequency of assessment ranges from 1¼ to 3¼ years. The Shortwood Common footpath crossing was last assessed in October 2015 and is due to be re-assessed in January 2018.
- 1.8 Environmental Health has received log sheets from residents, carried out noise monitoring and witnessed the noise. The train horns are audible and on occasion very loud. Noise levels between 70dB(A) and 80dB(A) were regularly monitored between the hours of 06:00 and 23:59.
- 1.9 World Health Organisation, Guidelines for Community noise, states that for a good night's sleep, the equivalent sound level should not exceed 30dB(A) for continuous background noise, and individual noise events exceeding 45dB(A) should be avoided.
- 1.10 In light of the disturbance to residents, Environmental Health has requested Southern Western Railway and Network Rail to reconsider the safety precautions employed at the Shortwood Common pedestrian crossing as part of the safety risk assessment of the crossing due for review in January 2018. Also, to determine whether other methods of safety could be used in place of the whistle boards.
- 1.11 Network Rail has stated that while they are sympathetic with the local residents in respect of the disturbance caused by the train horns, Shortwood Common pedestrian crossing is the 9th riskiest crossing on the Wessex line. The whistle boards combined with a speed restriction provide a solution for the safety of the public using the crossing. Network Rail also informed the Council that alternative solutions were currently being developed but a suitable, permanent engineering solution integrated with the existing signalling infrastructure would come at a very significant cost (estimated £1.5 million) and are not scheduled to be implemented before 2022. However, they might be able to consider some interim measures.
- 1.12 Environmental Health and Cllr Gething met with Network Rail on the 16 November 2017. Minutes of the meeting are provided at **Appendix 2**. Network Rail also met with concerned residents on the 18 October 2017.

2. Options analysis and proposal

- 2.1 A number of options were discussed during the meeting between the Council and Network Rail as outlined in Appendix 2.
- 2.2 Closure of the crossing would be the safest option and would also resolve the noise disturbance being caused residents. However, it will be important to seek residents' views on this.
- 2.3 Installing a footbridge will also be considered, although this would depend on the right of way status along with the feasibility considering available space and cost.
- 2.4 The final option is to await the installation of the MSL system which is currently scheduled for 2022.
- 2.5 Environmental Health are still looking to speak with Southern Western Railway regarding the train horns and their operation.
- 2.6 These options will be explored as will others as they arise. A further report will be brought to Cabinet detailing the outcomes.

3. Financial implications

3.1 Not applicable

4. Other considerations

4.1 The considerations and proposal within the report have no Equality and Diversity, and Sustainability.

5. Timetable for implementation

5.1 Actively ongoing

Background papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix 1 - The Petition

Appendix 2 - Minutes of Meeting Network Rail/Council of the 16 November 2017

Appendix 3 - Environmental Health report detailing its investigation to date

Petition - We the undersigned petition the Council to Seek alternatives to trains using their horns for Shortwood Common footpath crossing.

Trains travelling from Staines to Waterloo sound their horns as they approach the footpath crossing at Shortwood Common, Staines. The reason for sounding their horn is to alert any pedestrians using this crossing, however the intensity and duration of these horns causes excessive noise pollution for the local residents. We knew that a rail track existed when we moved to this area of Staines, however the problem has become worse in recent years. This petition is raised to highlight the problem, and seek alternatives to trains using their horns.

Residents of Silverdale court, Leacroft, Staines started complaining about train horns to South West Trains (SWT) in 2007, when trains first started sounding their horns approaching this footpath crossing. With up to 16 trains per hour (in both directions) sounding their horns over an 18 hour period, that's up to 288 trains per day; 7 days per week; 52 weeks per year, the noise pollution has become intolerable. (It would be like sounding your car horn every time when approaching a zebra crossing with nobody on the crossing!)

The horns have gradually changed from short/ muted blasts to longer duration and/or higher intensity. The night time quiet period (NTQP) was changed without notice at the end of 2016 from 23:00/07:00 to 23:59/06:00. Residents of Silverdale Court, Leacroft and Chestnut Manor Close, submitted complaints to Spelthorne Borough Council (SBC). Network Rail's position is that "modern trains have become faster and more frequent, train horns have necessarily become louder to ensure that crossing users continue to receive sufficient protection".

The footpath crossing at Shortwood Common is rarely used (approximately four pedestrians/cyclists per day according to Network Rail). There are alternatives to horns, e.g. other means of crossing the railway; audible warning systems; warning lights; reduced train speed approaching the crossing; adjusting the NTQP to align with crossing usage.

Started by: David Wyatt

This ePetition runs from 22/07/2017 to 10/11/2017.

88 people have signed this ePetition.