

Minutes of Meeting with Network Rail about Shortwood Common Foot Crossing

16th November 2017 10:30-12:00

Present:

Susan Turp –Principal Environmental Health Officer, Spelthorne B.C.

Louise McVey – Environmental Health Regulatory Officer, Spelthorne B.C.

Damian Hajnus – Liability Negotiation Manager Wessex, Network Rail

Mark O' Flynn – Level Crossing Manager, Network Rail

Councillor Gething –Portfolio Holder for Environment and Compliance, Spelthorne B.C. (joined the meeting halfway through)

1. Purpose of Meeting

To discuss means of mitigating the noise disturbance to residents caused by the requirement for trains to sound their horns at the whistleboards approaching Shortwood Common crossing.

2. Crossing Use and Misuse

The Wessex route covers the major commuting areas of South West London as well as from London Waterloo to the South and South West of England.

This route is one of the busiest on the rail network, taking in all or part of the counties of Surrey, Berkshire, Hampshire, Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire.

There are 312 level crossings (including vehicle crossings) on the Wessex Route of which Shortwood Common is rated the 9th riskiest footpath crossing. The risk at this crossing takes into account the number of trains (299 per day); sighting deficiencies at the crossing; the number of users; near misses; as well all deliberate misuse incidents amongst other things.

Between May and November 2016 there were 6 incidents at the crossing. Mark has agreed to send Environmental Health (EH) the details of the near misses for that period.

3. Risk Assessment

Mark has agreed to send EH extracts from the current risk assessment and to forward a copy of the new assessment with updated information upon completion in January 2018 of the current more detailed risk assessment for Shortwood Common Crossing. Mark has offered to involve EH with next the risk assessment process which is due to take place in January 2018.

4. Sight Deficiencies

The main sighting deficiency is caused primarily by the train usage of the sidings and is worse on the London bound track (upline). A sighting distance test is required for a person to cross safely, and this is calculated by distance, speed of train and the time it takes to cross (they have an

equation for this). This sighting distance required is increased by 50% at Shortwood due to the crossing being used by vulnerable persons who would take longer to cross. This sighting deficiency has warranted the installation of whistleboards a mitigation measure and these have been in situ for more than a decade.

5. Alternative solutions discussed

5.1. MSL Scheme (Miniature Stop Lights)

This system (red and green lights at the crossing like a pelican crossing on a road) would be a standalone safety measure (and would therefore need to be failsafe). It will be very costly due to the complexities of the track and thus an integrated version would be required. It is proposed as a long term solution at Shortwood Common crossing as part of a planned upgrade on the line. These are likely to be delivered as part of the Feltham Re-signalling Scheme which is scheduled to take place in 2022, which both Damian and Mark considered to be a realistic timeframe.

5.2. Line speed reduction

This is not a feasible option for Network Rail due to cost implications. They would incur substantial fines from train operators due to effects on timetables. They gave an example at Wokingham where due to a speed restriction approaching a crossing that they imposed for safety reason; over a 3 year period, they had to pay out a significant compensation; and significantly less trains use the Wokingham line than at Shortwood Common.

5.3. Auxiliary measures

'Covtec' (a warning sound at the crossing which sounds like an oncoming train) was discussed as an option but due to the problems associated with the sidings and the complexities of track at this crossing, it would not be able to be used as a standalone safety measure, and therefore whistleboards (and resultant need for drivers to sound horns) would remain in place.

5.4. Provision of a footbridge

They could only consider providing a footbridge if the crossing was a public right of way (which we believe Shortwood Common crossing is not), however, even if it was, the likelihood is that there isn't the space required to install it since it would also need to have ramped access (to ensure it was Equalities Act compliant). Also due to the high cost of such (in excess of £2M), it would not pass the cost benefit analysis

5.5. Train horn noise

Current inconsistencies in the sounding of train horns still needs to be addressed with South Western Railway who are predominantly the main line user.

5.6. Noise barrier/baffles

Mark had discussed this option with residents at their meeting on 18th October, and having made some local enquiries is unaware of any barrier/noise protection currently being used. Damian was also concerned that if they were to install barriers this would set a precedent (and an expectation) across the whole network, which would involve an unaffordable cost to Network Rail. He advised that this would not be considered since they have no obligation to install barriers. Furthermore, it is questionable as to how effective such a measure would be

due to the close proximity of the noise receivers (residents) in this case, the height and the direction of the noise source (ie the horns). It is likely that for a barrier to provide any effective attenuation, it would need to be very high (probably above the height of the houses).

5.7. Directional horns

Damian and Mark understand that this is new technology but we would need to find out more from South Western Railway about whether it is, or can be, used on their trains to reduce the level of noise that reaches residents living near the crossing.

5.8. Closing of crossing

This was discussed as the most favourable option for Network Rail since it would eliminate all risks at the crossing and would also resolve the noise problem from the horns. It is recommended by their regulator The Office of Rail and Road. Damian is looking into the legalities of the access rights of the crossing as this would determine the process, the timeframe and also what actions are necessary to close the crossing (such as whether a diversion of the footpath/byway is needed).

6. Conclusions

Closure of the crossing would be the safest option and would also resolve the noise disturbance from horns to residents. This option is therefore first going to be explored. The next option to explore would be a footbridge, although this would depend on the right of way status, public objection to closure of the crossing, and also whether it is feasible considering available space and cost. There is still the need to discuss further the horns and operation of them with South Western Railway. The final option is the installation of the MSL system which is currently scheduled for 2022.

7. Actions

- Damian will come back to us in 2 weeks once he has clarified the legal position regarding closure of the crossing.
- Councillor Gething has emailed all Councillors regarding consulting with residents about potential closure of the crossing.
- Councillor Gething to organise an additional public meeting at which Network Rail would attend if following Damian's clarification of the legal position, closure still seems like a likely option.
- Damian to investigate further the option of a footbridge depending on right of way status and public objection to closure. However, Damian advised that given its cost and objective constraints, it would be very unlikely to be found a viable option.
- Louise to make further contact with South Western Railway to enquire about directional horns and to discuss inconsistencies with the sounding of train horns by drivers.