

**HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

<b>Title/Subject Matter:</b>	East Coast Main Line – Level Crossing Closures Feasibility Study
<b>Meeting/Date:</b>	O&S Panel (Environmental Well-Being) – 10 <sup>th</sup> March 2015 Cabinet – 19 <sup>th</sup> March 2015
<b>Executive Portfolio:</b>	Planning & Housing Strategy
<b>Report by:</b>	Head of Development
<b>Ward(s) affected:</b>	Eynesbury, Gransden & The Offords, Stilton, Upwood & The Raveleys, Yaxley & Farcet

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**Executive Summary:**

To provide a progress report on the proposed closure of all crossing points on the East Coast Main Line throughout Huntingdonshire and to seek the agreement of this Council of the work completed to date and to endorse the project as the project moves towards the submission of a Transport & Works Act application.

**Recommendation(s):**

It is recommended that;

- i) the Council notes the work undertaken to date and based on the proposed improvement of the rail network that the scheme would deliver including the removal of all crossing points while providing alternative access for vehicular, pedestrian, cyclist and equestrian traffic, that;
- ii) the Council supports the proposed scheme as shown in Appendix B, including the Appendix C revision, leading to the submission of a Transport & Works Act application

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## **1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT/PURPOSE?**

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update Members regarding the planned closure of all level crossings on the East Coast Main Line (ECML) within Huntingdonshire.
- 1.2 The purpose of the current work being undertaken by Network Rail (NR) is part of an ongoing commitment to deliver a safer, more efficient and reliable railway.

## **2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 As part of this study, NR are trying to find solutions that benefit the railway, highway connectivity and local communities, whilst also managing the environmental impacts of the proposal and responding to all user needs.
- 2.2 The benefit of closing level crossings on the ECML are as follows;
- Improved railway performance for passengers
  - Improved reliability of journey times for highway users
  - Reducing risk of accidents
  - Opportunities for NR cost savings allowing additional investment in the railway
  - Provides an opportunity for NR to work with all affected local authorities to deliver an improved highway network and community benefits
- 2.3 In December 2013, the NR Investment Panel approved the work now being undertaken. The proposal looks to close 73 level crossings on the ECML between London Kings Cross and Doncaster and to identify options at each location to address any local effects of such closures. At the present time, the project is a feasibility study only with a funding programme for closures still to be confirmed.
- 2.4 The crossings within Huntingdonshire are shown at Appendix A.

## **3. OPTIONS CONSIDERED/ANALYSIS**

- 3.1 Since the commencement of the study, NR and their consultants have undertaken extensive consultation with this Council and the County Council, the latter in their role as local highway authority, on a number of scheme options. All affected Parishes have also been consulted, including public exhibitions outlining the full proposals. All County & District members have been invited to specially convened briefings.
- 3.2 If funding for the scheme is approved, NR will require a Transport & Works Act Order (T&WA) containing the necessary powers to deliver the scheme, which would include compulsory purchase powers if needed. While local authorities are not decision makers under this Act, they are statutory consultees.
- 3.3 To date, all baseline surveys have been completed and a two-stage round of options have been consulted upon. A consultation report will be produced as part of any T&WA submission.
- 3.4 Detailed preferred options for all affected crossings are included at Appendix B

#### **4. COMMENTS OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL**

4.1 Members expressed satisfaction with the amended plan for a roundabout at The Offords, scheduled as part of the level crossing closures. However, there was concern that closing the level crossings could lead to increased road traffic, which the Panel were advised would be minimal. Overall the Panel supported the recommendations of the report.

#### **5. KEY IMPACTS - HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?**

5.1 In the case of all proposals included at Appendix B, these all represent acceptable solutions in principle in addressing the proposed crossing closures whilst providing an acceptable form of alternative access for users of the highway network, whether that be vehicular, pedestrian, cyclist or equestrian.

5.2 In terms of those proposals at Yaxley, Holme and Connington, these have potential impact on the environment at Great Fen and NR and their consultants have also been in consultation with the Great fen Steering Committee in order to discuss the proposals and to outline mitigation works that would be necessary as part of any T&WA application.

5.3 At Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 10<sup>th</sup> March, a draft revised plan for the proposed Offords layout was tabled. This has arisen as a result of local representations from the Parish Council and residents and involves re-siting the proposed roundabout to the north of the village further away from the residential properties on that side of the settlement.

#### **6. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN/TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

6.1 Subject to any approval of funding for the whole scheme between London Kings Cross and Doncaster, the remaining timetable is as follows;

- Finalise Scheme options for the Environmental Impact Assessment- February 2015
- Confirmation of additional funding – April 2015
- Draft/submit T&WA documentation – Summer/Autumn 2015
- Works implemented (subject to planning permission arising from T&WA consent) – 2017 to 2020
- Works completed - 2020

#### **7. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN**

7.1 In terms of the project removing infrastructure barriers, supporting growth in rural areas, promoting cohesive communities and providing accessible opportunities to leisure and the countryside, the proposed scheme fully aligns with the key priorities of the Corporate Plan, namely;

- A strong local economy
- Thriving communities

#### **8. CONSULTATION**

8.1 As outlined above, the scheme promoters have undertaken appropriate public consultation to date, including with key stakeholders and if approved, will be required to undertake further consultation as part of any T&WA application.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None

## **10. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 None

## **11. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

11.1 None

## **12 REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS**

12.1 It is evident that these emerging proposals will improve the efficiency of the railway and also reducing the risks to the safety of the public and passengers.

12.2 In progressing to the next stages and the submission of a T&WA application, Network Rail will continue to work with the local community, including this Council and the County Council to develop final solutions of benefit to the wider travelling public.

## **13. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix 1 – Affected Crossings within Huntingdonshire

Appendix 2 – Detailed Preferred Options

Appendix 3 – Draft Offord Option 2 Rev. B

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

ECML Level Crossing Closures – Hunts & Cambs Member Briefing 191115

## **CONTACT OFFICER**

Stuart Bell – Transport Team Leader

(01480) 388387

[stuart.bell@huntingdonshire.gov.uk](mailto:stuart.bell@huntingdonshire.gov.uk)