
TITLE: IPSWICH CHORD – FORMAL CONSULTATION

Committee: Planning Committee

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[K316]

1.0 ISSUE

1.1 To consider the Council's response to a formal planning consultation from Network Rail on the proposed Ipswich Chord for the purposes of section 42 (b) of the Planning Act 2008.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 It is recommended that the Head of Planning and Sustainable Development forward the following response on behalf of the District Council to Network Rail:-

“ East Cambridgeshire District Council remains concerned about the cumulative impact of the additional freight traffic which the Ipswich Chord and the other associated rail improvement projects would permit on the A142 Ely Level Crossing which will increase the level of delays and congestion at this crossing to unacceptable levels for road users in this area.

Whilst the District Council is supportive in principle of encouraging more freight traffic to be transported by rail, and of the expansion of the Felixstowe Docks, it has significant concerns that the cumulative impact of additional freight traffic on the Felixstowe – Nuneaton rail route on the A142 Ely Level Crossing has not been assessed in Network Rail's Environmental Statement and mitigation measures have not been identified. The District Council would wish to see the Environmental Statement take these into account and proposals for ameliorating the position.”

This response to be supported by the information in paragraphs 4.1- 4.4 of this report.

3.0 BACKGROUND/OPTIONS

3.1 The proposal has been brought to this Committee as a formal consultation under the planning legislation. The Ipswich Chord works are classed as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project which will be determined by a Development Consent Order, issued by the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) under the 2008 Planning Act. As part of this process, an Environmental Statement (ES) has to be prepared by the applicant which fully

describes the likely significant environmental effects of the proposed works and details any measures necessary to avoid, reduce or mitigate these effects. Network Rail are formally consulting the District Council on their Environmental Statement for the Ipswich Chord and the draft application documents prior to submitting their formal application to the IPC.

- 3.2 Once Network Rail have submitted their application to the IPC there will be further opportunities to comment on the proposed development and the adequacy of the Environmental Statement submitted, including the opportunity to submit a 'Local Impact Report', which the IPC is required to have regard to when making their decision.
- 3.3 The proposed Ipswich Chord is one element of a wider proposal to improve rail freight capacity between the Port of Felixstowe and Nuneaton. In order to fully achieve the freight capacity aspired to by the Felixstowe to Nuneaton Scheme, a number of separate railway infrastructure projects need to be implemented along the length of the route. As such the Ipswich Chord would not achieve the desired freight capacity increase alone, but would ultimately contribute to the overall scheme aims. The infrastructure works to increase the freight capacity of the Felixstowe – Nuneaton Route are required to increase the predicted growth in container traffic associated with the expansion of the Port of Felixstowe. Current capacity restrictions across the rail freight network mean that only 23% of surface freight can be distributed by rail from Felixstowe, with the remaining 77% transported by road, principally the A14. The Felixstowe to Nuneaton Project would provide a more direct cross country route utilising the existing railway network to avoid routing via north London, thus easing congestion on these rail routes.
- 3.4 The works for the Ipswich Chord are focused primarily around Ipswich itself, astride the River Gipping. It will consist of a twin track rail line connecting the Great Eastern Main Line and East Suffolk Line on a raised embankment, of approximately 1.2km in length. The chord would cross the River Gipping on a newly constructed bridge.

4.0 ARGUMENTS/CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 The concern for East Cambridgeshire is that the Environmental Statement prepared by Network Rail does not take into account the cumulative impact of the increased freight traffic on the railway crossing at Ely Station, which is already causing significant traffic delays and congestion.
- 4.2 Information from Network Rail indicates that there will be a possible 18 additional freight paths by 2014 if the Felixstowe to Nuneaton upgrade goes ahead, and that this could increase closure time of the Ely railway crossing by 4-6 minutes per hour.
- 4.3 Surveys undertaken during September 2010 show that the Ely Level Crossing already has a significant impact on traffic using the A142 due to the

closure of the barriers causing HCV traffic to block the A142. The main delays occur during the weekdays, associated with the high frequency and duration of level crossing barrier closures. The most significant queuing is in the northbound direction since the available space for queuing is less than in the southbound direction, and the average maximum queue length is between 125m and 225m. Currently the daily weekday average number of closures is 8 per hour with an average closure time of 35 minutes.

4.4 With a potential increase of up to 40 minutes per hour as a result of the increase in freight traffic on this route, the situation at the Ely Level Crossing will become unacceptable for motorists. It is the cumulative impact of additional freight traffic that is of concern.

4.5 In informal discussions with Network Rail, they have indicated a willingness to work with the Highway Authority to see if there are any short term mitigation measures to minimise barrier down time consistent with the safe operation of the railway and highway. However they have also stated that it is not for Network Rail the owner and maintainer of the rail infrastructure to provide highway solutions for the highway authority, the responsible body for the highway network.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None

6.0 APPENDICES

6.1 None

Background Documents

Consultation letter 8/3/11 and CD with relevant documentation.

Location

Room FF102
The Grange
Ely

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