

08 September, 2016

Electrification of the Chase Line Railway

Ward(s): All

Portfolios: Cllr L Jeavons – Cabinet Member for Regeneration

Executive Summary:

This purpose of this paper is to provide an update to the Panel on Network Rail's progress in electrifying the Chase Line Railway (Walsall – Rugeley Trent Valley), which is included in Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan for 2014-19. Associated with this is the proposed closure of the level crossing at Bloxwich (Willenhall Lane / Reeves St) and journey time improvements which facilitate a more frequent off-peak service on the route.

All electrification and associated infrastructure works are programmed to be complete by December 2017.

Reason for scrutiny:

Members have previously required updates from Network Rail staff on general project progress, and the opportunity to question those responsible regarding certain aspects of scheme progress.

Recommendations:

1. That the Panel note the content of this report.

Background papers:

Not applicable.

Resource and legal considerations:

The project is promoted, resourced and financed by Network Rail.

Citizen impact:

An improved local rail service i.e. more punctual, more reliable and increased off-

peak frequency at select stations, will benefit local residents and businesses.

Environmental impact:

The scrutiny exercise will potentially allow the discussion of any environmental issues relevant to the delivery of the scheme.

Performance management:

The potential effect of the scrutiny exercise is the delivery of a scheme by Network Rail that is more aligned to the needs of local people and businesses, with greater political and public acceptance.

Equality Implications:

An Equality Impact Assessment (draft) has been undertaken.

The only location within Walsall requiring an Equality Impact Assessment relates to the closure of Bloxwich Level Crossing and its replacement with a footbridge.


A Diversity Impact Assessment has been drafted by Network Rail and, following preliminary discussion with Council officers and within Network Rail, is currently being finalised. It will propose the provision of an accessible footbridge with ramps to meet modern equality design standards.

Consultation:

The report has been prepared by Network Rail officers. Council officers in Economy & Environment were consulted as part of report preparation.


Contact Officer:

Martin Tiller (Network Rail) – Sponsor – LNW Route

 0121 345 3858

Martin.TILLER@networkrail.co.uk

Matt Crowton (Walsall Council) – Transportation Major Projects & Strategy Manager

 01922 654358

matt.crowton@walsall.gov.uk

Report

1. The infrastructure works are still expected to be complete by December 2017 and the start of electric passenger services is stated as May 2018 in the Enhancements Delivery Plan.
2. The Department for Transport (DfT) has instructed Network Rail (NR) to plan for 3-car Class 323 units (which currently operate most of the Birmingham – Walsall stopping trains) to operate the service to Rugeley Trent Valley (TV) when the line is electrified. As the existing franchise with London Midland ends in October 2017 the future service pattern will be agreed between DfT, NR and the new franchisee, but the intention is for a half hourly service to run from Birmingham to Rugeley TV via Walsall all day.
3. DfT have also asked NR to ensure that the route is clear for Class 350 (Desiro), 390 (Pendolino) and 325 (Royal Mail) units to operate (without calling at the stations) – we anticipate that this will be mainly of use during times of disruption or engineering work elsewhere.
4. The project is not funded to improve clearance for freight traffic but are expecting some “windfall” benefits in this respect.
5. The Network Rail Project Manager and Sponsor attend monthly liaison meetings at Walsall Council to discuss all elements of the work in the Borough. The constructive and collaborative spirit of these meetings is to mutual advantage.
6. A stakeholder event was held in May for local councillors, MPs, user groups and press, including a plaque unveiling at Tasker Street and a site visit to Park Street.
7. **Effect on rail traffic during the works**
 - 7.1 During 2016, access for the electrification and line speed improvement works between Walsall, Bloxwich and Rugeley will continue without disruption to passenger or freight operations.
 - 7.2 In 2017 (from February onwards) there will be minor disruption to late evening trains between Walsall and Hednesford/Rugeley on Monday to Thursday evenings. In addition services early on Sunday mornings will be disrupted. In these cases buses will replace trains between Walsall and Hednesford/Rugeley.
 - 7.3 In the Summer of 2017, there are plans (subject to agreement with Train Operators) for buses to replace trains on Sundays between 12 June and 31 July, between Tame Bridge Parkway, Walsall and Rugeley. In addition the first of these weekends may include Saturday 11 June 2017.
 - 7.4 During August 2017, it is anticipated that the line between Walsall/Tame Bridge Parkway and Rugeley will be blocked from 13 August to 28 August. Buses replace trains between Tame Bridge,

Walsall and Rugeley for the initial 10 days and, after 22 August, buses replace trains between Walsall, Hednesford and Rugeley.

- 7.5 These plans are subject to final agreement with our colleagues from Train Operating Companies and may change.
- 7.6 The August work will have a significant impact on both freight and passenger traffic and is timed to coincide with the holiday period & fewer football matches at Bescot Stadium. The aggregates terminal at Walsall will continue to be served during this period, avoiding lorry journeys for this heavy traffic.

8. Fencing / trespass measures

These will be reviewed throughout the route and improved where required. We are working with British Transport Police to identify hotspots. Network Rail's preferred solution is steel palisade fencing in areas where trespass and vandalism may be an issue.

9. Vegetation management

NR standards require vegetation to be 5m clear of the running line, and 3.5m clear of the nearest part of the overhead line equipment. The project will be undertaking work where necessary. Local residents will be kept informed.

10. Overhead line structure installation

About half of the piling required for overhead line structures on the route is now complete. Further work (percussive piling) will be taking place in October / November this year.

- 10.1 Network Rail aim to give local residents two weeks' notice of piling activities and to minimise the inconvenience they experience. Letters are sent to individual homes.
- 10.2 Installation of concrete bases will also take place around this time.
- 10.3 The erection of the structures themselves will follow in early 2017.

11. Work at specific locations on the route (south to north)

11.1 South of Walsall Station

- 11.1.1 Although the section from Bescot Jn and Darlaston Jn to Walsall via Pleck Jn is already electrified, we will be making some alterations to the overhead line equipment in order to tie in to the new electrification at the station. The detailed scope of this work is currently in discussion.
- 11.1.2 We will also be checking this route for clearance to ensure that it can be used by the rolling stock types identified above.
- 11.1.3 Earlier this year we opened our site office on railway land at Tasker Street in Walsall. This provides a local base for the project and employment for about one hundred people during the project works.

11.2 Walsall Station

- 11.2.1 Platform 1 and 2 are planned for electrification. Most of the work will take place during the closure in summer 2017.

11.2.2 A recent change in Railway Group Standard GL/RT1210 *AC Energy Subsystem and Interfaces to Rolling Stock Subsystem* has the effect of increasing the safety clearance required between public areas like platforms and the live electrical equipment. Owing to the nature of Walsall station and the adjacent tunnel this creates some design challenges which our designers are currently working through. NR are also working with the safety regulators to develop some good practice and risk assessment guidelines to be applied nationally.

- 11.3 Park Street (Town Centre)
The work is complete and the High Street has been restored to its former condition or better.
- 11.4 St Paul's Street
Parapet works complete (snagging works currently outstanding).
- 11.5 Albert St footbridge
Parapet works currently on site.
- 11.6 Littleton St
 - 11.6.1 Bridge parapet works completed (snagging works currently outstanding).
 - 11.6.2 Renewal work currently on site (grit blasting and painting of bridge structure).
- 11.7 North Street, The Butts
The bridge has been reconstructed and reopened to road traffic in February.
- 11.8 Footbridge to Mill Lane country park (ref RRN1/1)
Parapet works complete (snagging works currently outstanding).
- 11.9 Coal Pool Lane (road bridge)
Parapet works completed including snagging.
- 11.10 Coal Pool Lane (adjacent local authority footbridge)
Parapet extensions required, but structural integrity of existing bridge in discussion with Walsall Council and may require reconstruction.
- 11.11 Rutland Street
Parapet works completed including snagging.
- 11.12 Forest Lane
Works substantially completed; copers to be painted; snagging works currently outstanding.
- 11.13 Wyrley & Essington Canal Aqueduct
At initial design phase for the parapet upgrade works. Renewal scheme (waterproofing plus grit blast & paint structure) is at detailed design stage.

- 11.14 Bloxwich Road (B4210)
Parapet works complete (snagging works currently outstanding).
- 11.15 Green Lane (A34)
Parapet works complete. Issue with painting of coper.
- 11.16 Leamore Lane
Parapet works completed including snagging.
- 11.17 Bloxwich Level Crossing (Willenhall Lane)
- 11.17.1 Network Rail has proposed permanently closing the level crossing on safety grounds and in line with the electrification works. With increased train paths and a higher line speed on the electrified route, the level crossing barriers would be down for a significantly larger amount of time which would cause traffic problems.
- 11.17.2 The proposed closure will affect local traffic flows and will obviously force some traffic to re-route. Together with the reconstruction of Central Drive bridge (see below) and a new footbridge, NR have agreed a package of highway mitigation interventions in the surrounding area which will offset the changes to traffic flows. NR propose to provide £305k of project funding which will cover the majority of the cost of these works; and a contribution will be provided by Walsall Council from their ITB capital funding (and possibly LEP funding). A formal Funding Agreement is being drawn up between the two parties.
- 11.17.3 The following principal mitigation works have been identified and are subject to further design development:
- Fully accessible 'footbridge' (pedestrian, wheelchair, pushchair and cycle-friendly) across the railway at the current level crossing location;
 - Reconstruction of Central Drive rail bridge to remove the weight restriction and introduce an integral footway (see below);
 - Improvements at the Croxdene Avenue/Elmore Green Road junction;
 - Package of measures to further discourage re-routing traffic away from residential areas and encourage use of 'main road' routes.
- 11.18 Central Drive, Bloxwich
The bridge has been widened and the footway improved as part of the traffic mitigation package. The reopening of the bridge was delayed by issues with a gas main but is now structurally complete and reopening should be imminent following inspection by Walsall Council. Pedestrian access was maintained throughout the project.
- 11.19 Croxdene Avenue
Parapet extensions complete.
- 11.20 Bloxwich station

Existing clearances & stepping distances are being adjusted between track & platforms. Platforms will require modification works.

11.21 Sneyd Lane (A4124)

Parapet extensions on highway span. Parapet extensions to be undertaken on footbridge.

11.22 Bloxwich North station

Existing clearances & stepping distances are being adjusted between track & platforms. Platforms will require modification works.

11.23 Broad Lane Bridge, Bloxwich

Works are complete. Some snags (vegetation / screening) being closed out by NR and WC.

-ENDS-