

# BRIEFING NOTE

**TO:** Regeneration Scrutiny & Performance Panel  
**DATE:** 18<sup>th</sup> July, 2013

**RE: Chase Line Electrification and Bloxwich Level Crossing**

## **Purpose**

To provide an update to the Panel on Network Rail's proposals to electrify the Chase Line Railway (Walsall – Rugeley Trent Valley section) which has been included in Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan for 2014-19. Associated with this (and the signalling improvements currently being implemented on the line) is the possible closure of the level crossing at Reeves Street, Bloxwich.

## **Electrification Programme**

Network Rail has announced their intention to electrify the Chase Line and improve line speeds in 2014-19. Key benefits for the Borough include: -

- London Midland (or its successor) to invest in a more frequent passenger service between Rugeley – Walsall – Birmingham;
- Liverpool – Walsall – London direct services made possible;
- Additional £113 million of Gross Value Added benefit generated per annum to the West Midlands economy;
- Support for Black Country Core Strategy Regeneration Corridor 7 (Bloxwich-Birchills-Bescot), which includes proposals for 1,645 new dwellings and 156ha of gross employment land by 2026;
- Business case for investing in a new station at Aldridge, the electrification of the line and the provision of a new passenger service from Aldridge to Birmingham via Walsall Station to be improved.

Network Rail expects to deliver the scheme in its entirety by December 2018, although central government would like this accelerated to December 2017 if possible.

## **Broad Lane Bridge**

Advance works in Walsall have been identified by Network Rail and these include the reconstruction of the overbridge at Broad Lane, adjacent to Bloxwich North Station. They propose to commence this work in November 2013 and expect a 16-week construction programme. This will necessitate a road closure for 12 weeks.

The Council is currently liaising with Network Rail regarding the design of the bridge; the traffic management arrangements; and resident and stakeholder engagement. A number of concerns have been raised by local residents and ward councillors and these will inform this process.

## **Bloxwich Level Crossing**

Signalling improvements (separate to the electrification project) are already underway on the Chase Line. A component of these works involves converting the Bloxwich Level Crossing to remotely controlled CCTV monitored type, which will be controlled from the West Midlands Signalling Centre; and demolition of the signal box. These signalling improvements are due to be commissioned in September 2013.

Network Rail have also proposed closing the level crossing on safety grounds at the same time as the electrification works are commissioned in 2017/18. With increased train paths and a higher line speed on the electrified route, the level crossing barriers will be down for a significantly larger amount of time – typically 40 minutes per hour at peak times, as opposed to 20 minutes per hour currently.

The proposed closure would be detrimental to local vehicular access and will obviously force some traffic to re-route in the area. Network Rail has therefore acknowledged the need to fund mitigation works. The following principal works have been identified: -

- 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 on both sides of the bridge;
- Changed highway priority at Central Drive/Croxstalls Road junction to encourage traffic away from the Dudley Fields Estate;
- Signalisation of 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.

A report will be brought to a future meeting explaining these proposals in more detail and the programme of consultation that will take place prior to the Council making any decision on the proposed closure. The Council now awaits the appointment of a Network Rail project sponsor to the proposed closure scheme, who will work with the Council to secure the financial package to fund the required mitigation works.

## **Recommendations (if required)**

Note the contents of the report, especially the timetable for the advance works at Broad Lane Bridge.

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