

BRIEFING NOTE

Agenda Item no. 8

TO: Regeneration Scrutiny & Performance Panel

DATE: 17th October, 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) which has been included in Network Rail's Strategic Business Plan for 2014-19. Associated with this 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;
- £113m Gross Value Added benefit per annum to the West Midlands economy;
- Support for Black Country Core Strategy Regeneration Corridor 7 (Bloxwich-Birchills-Bescot);
- Business case for investing in a new station at Aldridge; the electrification of the line; and the provision of new passenger services 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.

Consultation Events

Network Rail has been conducting a series of public consultations on the electrification proposals. A general drop-in consultation was held on Friday 4th October, 2013 in Walsall Council House from 11.00am to 7:00pm. Similar events were held in Cannock on the 2nd October and Rugeley on the 3rd October.

A consultation specific to the proposals for Broad Lane Bridge was held on Friday 27th September, 2013 in Bloxwich Library. This was attended by approximately 70 people, the majority of whom wanted to discuss either Broad Lane Bridge or the future of Bloxwich Level Crossing.

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 (exact date not yet confirmed) and expect a 16-week construction programme. This will necessitate a road closure for 12 weeks.

At the time of writing, officers are still working with Network Rail to try and secure the best possible bridge design, which incorporates sufficient carriageway and footway width, and appropriate highway design on the approaches. Network Rail has confirmed that there will be a temporary footbridge during the works, and officers continue to lobby for measures to minimise disruption/noise and appropriate traffic management.

Bloxwich Level Crossing

Signalling improvements (separate to the electrification project) have recently been completed on the Chase Line. A component of these works involved converting the Bloxwich Level Crossing to remotely controlled CCTV monitored type, which is now controlled from the West Midlands Signalling Centre. This upgrade took longer than expected, which meant the associated road closure had to be extended.

Network Rail have also proposed permanently 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 further technical meeting is planned to discuss this mitigation package with Network Rail in week commencing 21st October. 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.

Recommendations (if required)

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

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