

BRIEFING NOTE

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5

TO: Business, Employment & Local Economy Scrutiny & Performance
Panel

DATE: 23rd October, 2014

RE: Chase Line Electrification and Bloxwich Level Crossing

Purpose

To provide an update to the Panel on Network Rail's progress in electrifying 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 proposed closure of the level crossing at Reeves Street, Bloxwich. All electrification and associated works are programmed to be complete by December 2017.

Park Street (Town Centre)

Town centre businesses have been engaged to inform them that Network Rail will have to partially reconstruct the rail bridge in Park Street in the town centre. A programme of utilities diversions will commence imminently, followed by a temporary cessation of works in the Christmas shopping period and then the main bridge works from January 2015.

Pedestrian access will be kept open at all times, but vehicle access for loading will be restricted with alternative traffic management/loading arrangements in place whilst works are undertaken on two of the four bridge quadrants. A prior approval notice is now approved. Information sessions were held on 19th & 20th September in the town centre (adjacent to Walsall Art Gallery).

Central Drive, Bloxwich

A full reconstruction of the overbridge is required and commenced earlier this month. The bridge will be widened and the footway improved as part of the traffic mitigation package. Central Drive will be closed at the structure until Spring 2015. A prior approval notice was submitted August 2014.

North Street, The Butts

A full reconstruction of the overbridge is required and commenced earlier this month. North Street will be closed at the structure until April 2015. A prior approval notice was submitted August 2014.

Bloxwich Level Crossing

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 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 and work is ongoing with Council officers to design improvements that will keep heavy goods traffic away from residential areas.

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;
- Changed highway priority at Central Drive/Croxstalls Road junction to encourage traffic away from the Dudley Fields Estate (subject to road safety approval);
- 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.

Stakeholder consultation took place on 25th and 27th September at Dudley's Fields Estate Youth Centre and Bloxwich Library respectively. Approximately 45 people attended the former event, and 25 people the latter.

An overview of the views received (submitted via a comments form) are appended. The main themes that emerged were: -

- Displaced traffic should be encouraged to use non-residential roads.
- Existing traffic signals at Sneyd Lane/Sneyd Hall Lane should be improved.

These views will inform the Council response to Network Rail on the mitigation measure proposals. Initial feedback has been provided to those people who provided their contact details. The Council website has also been updated accordingly.

The Council's Employment Growth Team supported these events to help coordinate a support package tailored to the needs of those businesses affected in the local area.

Broad Lane Bridge, Bloxwich

Works are now substantially complete having reconstructed the overbridge at Broad Lane, adjacent to Bloxwich North Station. Work commenced in November 2013. The road re-opened fully in August 2014. At the time of writing, work was nearing completion to final landscaping.

Recommendations (if required)

Note the contents of the report, especially the progress of the current works at Central Drive Bridge and North Street Bridge.

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