

19 April 2018**Agenda Item: 4****REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, PLACE****NEWARK CASTLE LEVEL CROSSING****Purpose of the Report**

1. To consider the results and lessons learnt from the investigation into the closure of Newark Castle level crossing in December 2017.

Information

2. Newark Castle level crossing is located on the Great North Road on the northeast side of Newark town centre and provides a key road into and out of the town across Trent Bridge. When the level crossing barriers operate this results in substantial disruption to road traffic and pedestrians. At times the barriers are down for a prolonged period causing widespread congestion in Newark town. It is therefore imperative that Network Rail recognise the impact and set this as a priority in their operation and management of the level crossing.
3. On Saturday 2 December 2017 the crossing was closed during the day causing a high level of disruption, particularly in the period immediately before Christmas. The closure was implemented as part of maintenance works to the line through Newark Castle station required due to the deteriorating condition of the line. Such closure had specifically been refused by officers on behalf of NCC.
4. When the Network Rail project team contacted officers to discuss the works and closures, the dates and times had already been set in their programme. The timing of the works were challenged due to the traffic impact and consequential potential economic impact on the town during the period immediately before Christmas. It was also noted that closures were planned to include full weekend periods including Saturday daytime in December; the worst time of year to implement road closures close to a town centre.
5. It would be usual to expect a works promoter to consult in the early stages of planning a project of this nature when strenuous objection would have been raised to such proposals due to the time of year. However, when Network Rail contacted NCC the programme had already been set and many arrangements put in place behind the scenes. It is understood that this included all the necessary negotiations to divert trains around the wider rail network and other extensive details. Nonetheless, the timing of works and programme of closures was challenged.
6. Following discussion, it was recognised that the condition of the line warranted urgent work and that delay could result in a worse situation if unplanned emergency works became

necessary. The line was already subject to temporary speed limits. It was also necessary to take into account that the works could not be deferred into the early part of 2018 due to programmed works by Severn Trent Water which required the introduction of a temporary one-way system around the town from February to June to facilitate their major sewerage upgrades. Therefore, it was necessary to agree to the time of year but insist that the programme be reviewed to avoid Saturday daytime closures if possible.

7. Network Rail reviewed the works and successfully removed the critical periods of closure, particularly those affecting Saturday daytime. It was with this significant improvement that the closures at this time were approved. Despite having agreed to changes in the works programme to avoid key closures, on Saturday 2 December 2017 a daytime closure was implemented and, to make matters worse, kept in place despite the error being challenged.
8. Whilst accepting responsibility Network Rail have simply stated that this was down to an administrative error.
9. Whilst the strategic importance of the rail network is recognised, it seems that the impact on the road network and local community is effectively ignored when closures of level crossings are planned. It is absolutely essential that Network Rail change their cultural attitude to the road network and ensure that the needs of road users are taken into account at an early stage. This will not only ensure that the proper balance is achieved between transport modes but also reduce the need for changing plans and thereby eliminate the type of error that occurred at Newark.
10. In February 2018 Network Rail announced that as part of its Control Period 6 programme there will be further work to the railway in the Newark area. Network Rail are urged to ensure that this will include improvements to the routine operation of the level crossing to reduce routine traffic delays. It is also imperative that works are planned and managed to take account of the impact on the road network and ensure that closures are agreed and implemented accordingly.
11. NCC has lobbied for improved and more resilient infrastructure to reduce closure periods and frequency of failures and maintenance.

Other Options Considered

12. Taking no action to highlight the incident on 2 December 2017 could result in no improvement in management of the crossing allowing continuation of disruption to the highway network and inconvenience to residents and businesses of Newark.

Network Rail Response

13. Network Rail has been invited to respond to the incident on 2 December 2017 and to comment on their future works, to which the following has been provided:
 - a) Network Rail recognises the impact that the operation of Newark Castle Level Crossing has on Newark town centre and the surrounding flows of traffic and has worked over the last year – including with stakeholders and the ORR – to improve the reliability and performance of the crossing.

- b) Clearly, Network Rail appreciates the very significant impact the error on Saturday 2 December had for Newark, especially for businesses and shoppers who were adversely affected in the run-up to a period as important as Christmas. The planned possession of the railway to carry out the work on Sunday 3 December was to carry out some essential signalling and telecoms testing. The error was wholly unacceptable and was the result of a failure in communication between Network Rail and Centurion, the contractor implementing traffic management. No work took place during the daytime of Saturday 2 December, or was planned to take place during this time.
- c) Whilst the work required was necessary for improving the railway and operation around Newark Castle, Network Rail recognises the processes explained. A critical factor in the planning of any such works is the access to the railway which is achieved in agreement with the train operators, which is secured before we submit plans for road closures. We acknowledge the support of NCC in ensuring the works could go ahead once the proposal regarding Saturday was removed.
- d) Whilst the possession to carry out the work on Sunday 3 December did overrun by around an hour due to some essential signalling and telecoms testing needing to be completed, primarily the reason why the road closure lasted until the Monday morning was due to a failure in communication between Network Rail and Centurion.
- e) We have worked closely with Centurion as they digitise their systems, a change which should mean that administrative errors such as this are less likely in future. Part of the new system which will be in place includes enhanced fail-safe procedures to prevent similar occurrences. In the interim Network Rail and our partners have conducted an After Action Review (AAR) following which we have asked for two further checks to be put in place for future works, which included the work in January.
- f) The error was recognised by station staff on Saturday morning and that it was subsequently reported to the national Network Rail helpline. Unfortunately the member of staff who took this call didn't recognise the severity of the report and failed to pass the information onto our route control team who I know would have acted promptly to rectify the situation. In the event that it wasn't reported, the crossing unfortunately did remain closed. As a result of this mistake retraining has been conducted at our national call centre with the team who were involved in responding to the incident on Saturday 2 December.
- g) Network Rail does recognise the significance of its impact on the road network, and across the country employs Centurion to advise, plan and execute required road closures to ensure the road network is taken into account when plans to undertake work are at an early stage. Due to the nature of the work, the access to the railway – which is applied for in conjunction with the train operators – can mean these discussions come first.
- h) Network Rail's plan for Control Period 6 are still subject to funding but nonetheless plans are being developed – in the Newark area we will strive to ensure the mistakes of 2017 are not repeated. We continue to take action to better monitor work when it takes place and to minimise any disruption which arises from it.
- i) Finally in relation to the associated issue of more general barrier downtime, the level crossing at Newark Castle is designed in line with safety standards and due to its adjacency with the station there will always be a period of barrier down time whilst trains

stop at the station. Whenever a train is on approach to the station, the barriers lower in order to protect safety should a train overrun the station for whatever reason. If the train then stops at the station the barriers will raise in order to allow road users to continue on their journey. We have worked hard in recent months to improve the performance and reliability of the crossing and we believe this is now evident.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

14. The recommendations seek to reduce impact on the road user and the local community.

Statutory and Policy Implications

15. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

16. Avoidable disruption to the road network and locality results in unnecessary economic impact.

Implications for Service Users

17. Disruption to the road network creates delay to road users. Residents have reported being late for appointments due to unexpected closures of the level crossing; this being one example of the impacts on the local population and businesses.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

18. Appropriately planned and executed work minimises disruption which thereby minimises the impact on the environment including air quality which may be compromised due to standing traffic.

RECOMMENDATION/S

It is recommended that:

- 1) As part of applications for road closures, Network Rail are required to demonstrate that due consideration has been given to the road network and that control measures are in place for their correct implementation;
- 2) Network Rail are urged to ensure that improvements to the level crossing operation form part of their future works to reduce operational closure times.

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Constitutional Comments [SLB 23/03/2018]

19. Communities and Place Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of this report.

Financial Comments [RWK 22/03/2018]

20. There are no specific financial implications for the County Council arising directly from the report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- None

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

- All