

ELY CROSSING

Statement to Cambridgeshire County Council Cabinet Meeting

17 September 2012

Introduction

This paper has been produced jointly by Network Rail (the owners of rail infrastructure) and Greater Anglia Ltd (train operator and the station operator at Ely), in consultation with:

- First Capital Connect
- East Midlands Trains
- Cross Country Trains
- Freightliner Ltd
- DB Schenker
- GB Railfreight

all of whom run trains through Ely station. The purpose of this paper is to present a railway industry overview of the proposals for the Ely Crossing, to assist the County Council In its choice of preferred option.

Approval in principle

The railway industry partners are fully supportive of the principle of creating an alternative route for road traffic across the railway at Ely, which would remove the significant risks to operation posed by the level crossing and the potential for strikes to the present underpass bridge. Taken in the overall context of our proposals to increase the number of passenger and freight services operating through the station within the next 5-10 years, this proposal will be a significant element in the mix of improvements required to achieve the necessary network capacity increase.

Choice of preferred option

We believe that the choice of preferred option needs to take into account two specific factors that relate closely to the continued development of our business in the county. These are as follows:

Access to Ely Station

The current access to Ely station for rail customers is severely hampered by the road layout and congestion caused by the level crossing in the areas of Station Road and Angel Drive. Allied to constraints on the shape and size of the forecourt, which significantly limits both car park capacity and the creation of a fully functioning multi-modal interchange, we are not able to offer the appropriate level of facility to what is a growing customer base at Ely. If this situation is not addressed, it will restrict the growth in rail travel that is essential to the sustainable economic development of the Ely to Cambridge corridor envisaged in Core Strategies and the County Council's Local Sustainable Transport Fund programme.

The forthcoming consultations by East Cambridgeshire District Council on a strategy for the Ely Station Gateway area will help to identify solutions to these issues, but choice of the preferred option for the Ely Crossing is equally as important. The underpass option will not achieve the required relief of traffic congestion, whilst the by-pass and overbridge options (Options B & D) will have exactly the desired effect.

Impacts on rail services during construction

The options report produced by WS Atkins for the County Council reviews the feasibility of constructing the underpass option. At this stage we understand that construction of an underpass could be technically feasible, but despite the large amount of risk contingency included in the costings for this option, we feel that there remain significant risks to the continued operation of train services through Ely during the construction period.

The report cites the requirement for a limited number of 52-hour possessions during the construction period, but the industry experience of this type of project is that it is more disruptive to the day to day operations of the railway than overbridge construction, and carries much greater risk to the continued operation of services in the event of problems. Given the proximity of the works to the station, it is not known at this stage whether electric or diesel trains could continue to use Ely station during whatever possession periods are required. If they could, bus replacement services would need to negotiate a busy and constrained worksite in order to gain access to the station. In the event that for safety reasons trains could not access Ely station, the bussing arrangements would have to take place over a very wide area, and the lengthy possession periods would be hugely disruptive to both passenger and freight businesses.

In complete contrast, our experience with the construction of an overbridge such as that required for Options B & D is much more positive. The operational risks are well understood and can be minimised, resulting in lower costs to the industry, and therefore to the project.

Conclusion

The rail industry partners are very supportive of the County Council's proposals to resolve the issues posed by the level crossing at Ely station. However, on the basis of both future improvements to station access, and the potential for disruption to rail operations during construction, our preference is for a solution that includes an overbridge across the railway to the south-west of the station.