

Statement for Highways and Transport Committee 7 December 2021, item 9 - Ely Area Capacity Enhancement Study

from Cllr Anna Bradnam, County Councillor for Waterbeach Division.

I welcome the move to improve capacity on the Ely line, to encourage a shift from private to public transport and from freight on the highway to freight on rail.

Bottisham Road/Bannold Road crossing – upgrade from half barrier to full barrier.

- a. I note that this will affect residents in the 39 dwellings to the east of the crossing, whose only vehicular access will be via this crossing if Burgess Drove crossing is closed to traffic.
- b. Downtime will increase with a full barrier. The more unreasonable the downtime appears to be, the more risk-taking behaviours will be encouraged.
- c. **The number of pedestrians using the Bottisham Road/Bannold Road crossing is very high, especially at weekends. Please widen the crossing slightly so pedestrians can cross the railway safely on a path beside vehicles, rather than in the main carriageway.**

Burgess Drove Crossing – Option 1 “Remove vehicle crossing rights but retain access for pedestrians and cyclists. Vehicle users would be diverted to Bannold Road level crossing which would add 1.4km to a journey using available routes. The road surface of Burgess Drove would be upgraded for vehicle use.”

1) Vehicular access

- a. If Burgess Drove crossing is closed to vehicular traffic, Network Rail have undertaken to upgrade Burgess Drove (track) to adoptable standards. This would provide alternative access for the residents at Hall Crest Farm and 1 Burgess Drove just west of the crossing and improve access for The Cottage, towards the north end of Burgess Drove. This track is currently very badly and deeply potholed, to such an extent that it is impassable to all but 4WD and agricultural traffic during winter.
- b. One of the resident/businesses objects strongly to closure for numerous reasons including loss of proximity and accessibility to the village and potential loss of business. The other business does not object.
- c. **If Option 1 is followed, Burgess Drove crossing closed to vehicles and Burgess Drove (the road) improved, then can I strongly suggest you consider closing the crossing to vehicles in such a way that it can in fact be opened to vehicles in an emergency. So, if Bottisham Road/ Bannold Road were to be closed for overnight works (which happens once or twice a year) there would, by definition, be no trains on the line. At that time therefore it would be useful to enable residents on the east side, access across the line at Burgess Drove, to be opened at Network Rail’s discretion. This would provide the emergency access that does not practically exist at present.**

2) Long term viability of the upgraded Burgess Drove for residents at southern end and potential long-term costs to County Council

- a. **Ditches** - I understand the upgraded track would be single track road with passing places. I am extremely concerned that the ditches on either side will be maintained as open ditches and not covered over to provide width for passing places. This catchment

drains into the Award Drain at Bannold Drove which is pumped into the River Cam at Bottisham Locks. It is essential that these ditches can be maintained and kept clear.

- b. **Long-term maintenance** - Even if initially built to adoptable standards, the cost of maintenance would fall to the County Council in perpetuity. The Drove runs across peat and the area floods in winter, so establishing a road to adoptable standard would be one thing but long-term maintenance would be entirely different kettle of fish. Note the platform extension at Waterbeach Railway Station had to be on a floating pontoon system, because the peat is so unstable.
- c. **Isolation and Safety** - For residents at the southern end this would be their only vehicular access and yet it would be a single track with passing places, running between ditches, with no barrier between the carriageway and those ditches, prone to ice in winter, very remote and dark (unless lit). I am concerned about the safety of this road.
- d. **Initial and ongoing costs** - If Burgess Drove was the only access for the residents near the Burgess Drove crossing – the Drove would have to be on a massively improved sub-base all along this northbound stretch, with street lighting. If permitted it would be reassuring to see crash barriers to stop vehicles sliding into the steep drainage ditches on either side. I suspect this would cost NR millions to build and subsequently would cost the County Council millions over the years to maintain it.

Option 2: Close Burgess Drove Level crossing. All road users would be diverted to the Bannold Road crossing. For pedestrians and cyclists this would add a 600 metre journey to cross the railway, with vehicles following the 1.4km diversion as in Option 1. The road surface of Burgess Drove (east of the crossing) would be upgraded for vehicle use. The footpath to Waterbeach would be upgraded to cater for pedestrians and cyclists and would provide a new route to the east side of Burgess Drove level crossing

- a. I object strongly to Option 2. Closure of the crossing to all users would be completely unacceptable to the residents on both sides of the crossing.
- b. The diversion route for vehicles attracts the same concerns as listed above.
- c. This route is a historic walking route from the village, giving access to the river.
- d. The diversion route for pedestrians and cyclists via Station Road level crossing and along the eastern side of the railway – adding 600m to the journey – is impractically long and inconvenient, even for a leisure user. This would prompt all those who currently walk to their allotment, to go by car. Network Rail would be encouraging modal shift in the wrong direction if they did this – away from active travel and to use of vehicles. This would be highly undesirable when we are mindful of climate change.

3) Instead of closing to vehicles, the reasons to upgrade the crossing at Burgess Drove to make it safer.

- a. Please give serious consideration to maintaining a vehicular crossing, with an upgrade to electric barriers. There are already lights at the crossing, which indicate when it is safe to cross. There is already a light at Burgess Drove which warns if it is safe to cross or not. Visibility is excellent as the line is straight here. It is close to the current railway station so trains can be seen easily and most are moving relatively slowly. Even if the railway station moves, trains would presumably need to be at modest speed because of the level crossing at Station Road, Waterbeach.
- b. I note the residents of 1 Burgess Drove have made a careful analysis of the proposals for crossings to the north. They point out that at other crossings numerous different options have been considered including upgraded barriers, a viaduct footbridge, a bypass and

upgraded barriers. Burgess Drove appears to be the only crossing where these positive solutions have not been considered and only closure to vehicles or complete closure have been proposed. I believe it to be the only crossing where the alternative vehicular route is a 2km diversion.

- c. There are about 70-80 allotments on the east side of the crossing, with holders travelling by car to carry tools, materials, fertiliser and produce. Allotment holders object strongly to the closure of the crossing for this reason. Many purchased homes in Burgess Road and Rosemary Road precisely because they looked forward to renting and managing an allotment just over the crossing.

If you do decide to close the Burgess Drove crossing to vehicles, I urge you to recognise:

4) The importance of maintaining the Public Right of Way for pedestrian, equestrians and NMUs

- a. **Importance of pedestrian access to local businesses** – The owners of Doggy Day Care at 1 Burgess Drove say that about 1/3 of their business, so 3 out of 10 dogs they look after every day come by car but they currently park west of crossing and walk over. The remaining customers walk their dogs to the business. The residents purchased the house and set up this business precisely because it offered a quiet location away from residential neighbours and with instant access to the countryside. They doubt that customers would walk or even drive the 4 km there and back if the crossing were to be closed completely. I support the establishment of a turning head west of the crossing to allow safe turning.
- b. **Importance of pedestrian access to current residents** – The residents of 1 Burgess Drove have explained eloquently how isolated their home would become in winter (even if the Drove were made up). They fear ice and snow would make the Drove impassable and serving so few residents, they doubt it would be gritted or given any priority at all in terms of repairs or maintenance. They could be effectively cut off. Whereas currently they can walk over the crossing to take part in activities in the village, if the crossing were to be closed to pedestrians, they would have to drive up the Drove (see above) to Bannold Road (2km each way) just to get to the heart of the village (0.5 km away).
- c. **Importance of pedestrian access to allotment holders** - allotment holders object strongly to any change in the crossing and particularly Option 2 closure to vehicles. Since the only other option offered is Option 1, they would support that to retain pedestrian access. At least with pedestrian access they could take tools and bring back produce in a wheelbarrow.
- d. **Importance of access to pedestrians, equestrians, runners, non-motorised users - equestrian businesses have fields on the west side of the crossing and regularly use the crossing to access the countryside to the east. The route across the crossing is used by numerous walkers, dog-walkers, runners and cyclists every day of the week. If you choose Option 1 and retain pedestrian access, I would strongly support the County Council's request that you upgrade the crossing to make it safe and suitable for equestrians and NMUs, with sufficient refuges in either side where horses can wait on a level surface, set back from the line.**

