



SUPPORTING REPORTS TO PLANNING & HIGHWAYS COMMITTEE – 15 May 2023

Agenda Item 10: To consider any further information received from Network Rail regarding the Henley Footpath Diversion

Background:

The diversion of Henley footpath railway crossing proposed by Network Rail and associated with the planning approval for a development on land at the top of Kithill.

We have received the following information from Network Rail:

Documents being submitted with the diversion application:

1. A to B will be stopped up, with A-C-D-B being the new route, and the existing path in green to the south of the crossing to remain.
2. The path to be stopped up is marked A-B-C, in a solid red line, and the new path is marked A-D-E-C, in a dashed blue line. Somerset Council felt this diversion route may be more favourable for path users. It is the same to the north of the crossing, but to the south it would run parallel to the road (in the field), and then turn west to follow a row of trees to meet the existing path. It is hoped that this route may be more scenic than the one running parallel to the railway.
3. Information Report, with the relevant part of their diversion application which sets out Network Rail plans and reasoning behind the chosen option.

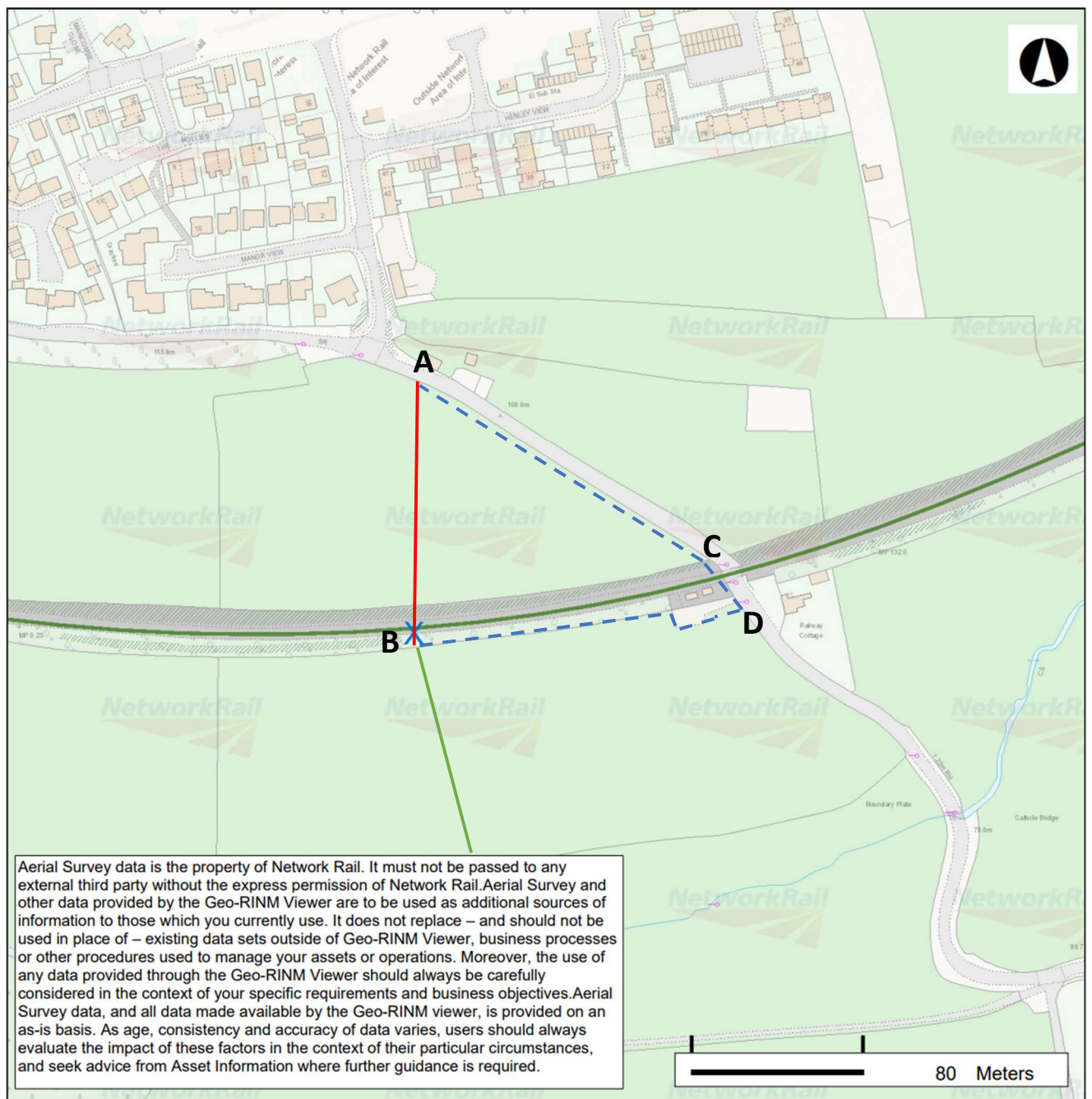
Again, after tomorrow Pamela will be returning to her substantive role for 4 weeks, so it may take her up to 4 weeks to reply to any residents. In the meantime, they invite anyone with questions to contact Pamela Elkington directly at Pamela.Elkington@networkrail.co.uk.

Somerset council are conducting a site visit to see which option may be preferable, Network Rail have no strong views either way.

Recommendation:

To await further information in June 2023.

Plan A



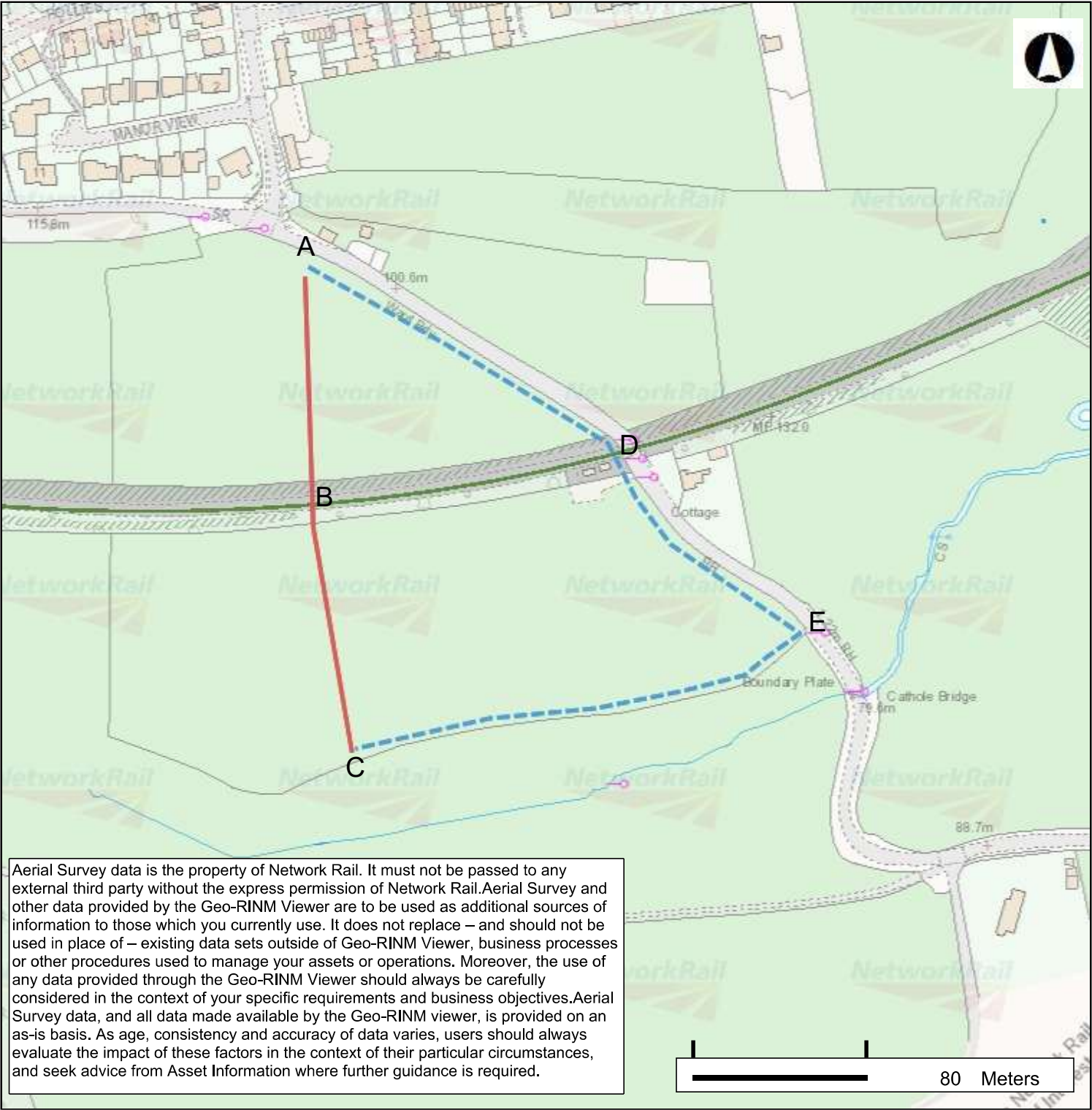
A to B extinguished bold

A to C north crossing dash

C to D crossing bold

D to E south crossing to Henley dash

Crossing X



COPYRIGHTS
This product includes map data licensed from Ordnance Survey. © Crown copyright and database rights 2023 Ordnance Survey 0100040692.
© Local Government Information House Limited copyright and database rights 2023 Ordnance Survey 0100040692.
Contains British Geological Survey materials © NERC 2023
The Five Mile Line diagrams are copyright of Waterman Civils and must not be passed to any third party.

Please note that this map is not suitable for legally binding documents. If you require a map for a legally binding document, please contact the land information team: landinformation@networkrail.co.uk

	
Scale	1 : 2,500
Plot Date	12/05/23 13:25
Printed By	

Henley Footpath Crossing- Closure and Footpath Diversion Information

Background

Henley Footpath Crossing ('the Crossing') serves public footpath CH27/21, which forms part of the public right of way network according to Somerset Council's definitive map and statement. The Crossing congregates amongst the riskiest level crossings (top 25%) in the Wessex route portfolio and has been earmarked for closure as a result.

The current risk profile stands to be exacerbated by the local development of some 150 new homes due to the inevitable increase in pedestrian use. Resultantly, Network Rail have devised several options for closure and believe, in the interests of public safety, it is expedient to permanently close the Crossing and divert the public footpath over a new widened pedestrian footway over the AHB Crossing.

The rationale from closure will be set out in detail below.

Grounds for the Diversion

Sighting Distance

The sighting distance for approaching trains at the Crossing is non-compliant with the prescribed minima. The sighting distance is the amount of sighting a user at the level crossing has of an approaching train. It is the key decision-making tool at this location for a user to decide if it is safe to cross or not. Here, there is insufficient sighting in the downside direction to allow the user to safely reach the other side if they decide to cross with a train approaching.

The recommended decision point for a footpath crossing stands at a minimum of 2 metres from the nearest running rail. From this position a crossing user should be able to decide if it is safe to cross the line. The length of traverse is then calculated from this point until 2 metres past the furthest running rail. Anything below the 2-meter range is considered the danger zone. At the Crossing, the decision point for safe sighting is less than 2 meters in all directions and is therefore insufficient for safe use. In the interim, mitigation measures have been employed in the form of a Supplementary Audible Warning Device (SAWD) and Whistle Boards to minimise risk to users. However, the Crossing is a passive level crossing which means the onus is on the user to decide when it is safe to cross and, in the absence of any physical deterrent, a user is at liberty to misuse the Crossing by ignoring the mitigation measures.

Vulnerable Users

A motion sensor camera census was carried out in 2014 and 2017 to assess the level of usage at the Crossing. Of the daily usage, the census revealed that there is a high proportion of vulnerable users, defined by Network Rail to include elderly people, unaccompanied children, those who are mentally impaired, people with prams, family groups with children and those with more than one dog on a lead. Evidence also shows that users often wear headphones whilst crossing, which introduces further risk.

As vulnerable users are expected to take more time to traverse the Crossing, it follows that the mitigations in the current form are insufficient in view of our safety ambitions. As such, permanent closure of the Crossing is the only safe and viable option to eliminate risk to users.

Sighting Distance and Vulnerable Users

The overall traverse length at the Crossing is 5.5 metres. A walking speed of 1.189 metres per second is used to calculate the time it takes for an able-bodied user to traverse the Crossing – this would give an overall traverse time of 4.63 seconds. However, the traverse time is increased by 50% if there is evidence of vulnerable users which, in this case, there is. As such, the adjusted overall traverse time is 6.94 seconds to traverse the Crossing. However, these calculations become irrelevant if the user disobeys the SAWD and Whistle Board indications, and only exacerbates the risk profile despite the mitigations implemented.

The maximum line speed at the Crossing is 75mph for passenger and freight trains. For sighting calculations, the assessment is mandated to use the maximum attainable line speed that trains can travel. At 75mph, a train coming from the downside direction will cover the available sighting distance faster than it takes a user to complete the traverse if they approach from the upside or downside. A sighting distance of 233 metres is required to safely traverse a level crossing, but the highest recorded sighting distance is 201 meters, and the lowest is 159 meters, which provides users with less warning time than is required to cross safely.

Increased Usage

During the last census, conducted in August 2020, a high of 71 users in one day were seen to traverse the crossing. The average number of daily users during the census was 35. This shows a relatively large increase in usage from previous census data with the average daily recorded use in 2014 was 8. Usage of the Crossing varies seasonally, with a higher number of users in the summer, and on public holidays. Since the data has been collected at the Crossing, planning permission has been granted for the development of 150 homes within the immediate vicinity of the Crossing. Once occupied, it is expected that the current user profile will increase by 15%, which includes further vulnerable users. Resultantly, the new development would inevitably cause an upsurge in potential misuse events.

Misuse

During the camera census in 2017, there were 4 instances of misuse of the Crossing committed by children for one 45-minute period. Whilst not reported by drivers, and therefore not logged as recorded incidents, this demonstrates the danger the Crossing poses to users who may not appreciate the speed at which a train may approach. This is just one example of unreported dangerous activity occurring, but our experience dictates that the incidents reported are significantly less than the actual number of misuse events. Appreciably, the Crossing exceeds our risk appetite despite the relevant mitigations implemented thereby rendering permanent closure the only safe and viable alternative.

Limitations of Mitigations

The current mitigations at the Crossing (SAWD and Whistle Boards) are not fully reliable when considering the safety of the Crossing. SAWD provide no indication if they have failed, meaning that in a failed state, a user may assume it is safe to cross despite a train approaching. Whistle Boards rely on the driver obeying the signage and sounding their horn at the correct location, and do not apply during the night-time quiet period, during which engineering trains may be running. With increased use associated with the development, there is an increased likelihood that the Crossing would be used if the SAWD or Whistle Board has failed or not been applied.

Options

Footbridge

A footbridge option has been explored to eliminate the risks identified. The cost of a footbridge is in the region of £1.5m for construction and installation followed by ongoing maintenance costs. Given the proximity of the AHB Crossing, the addition of a footbridge in this location is unjustified in terms of creating a positive business case and spending public money responsibly. Additionally, land within the Network Rail's freehold demise here is limited. Consequently, if a footbridge were to be selected, it is likely that third party land would need to be acquired from neighbouring properties to facilitate construction.

Miniature Stop Lights (MSL)

MSLs are one of few methods for making the Crossing safer without permanent closure. These provide users with a green or a red light depending on if it is safe for them to use the Crossing or not. However, the onus is still on the user to obey these lights, which cannot be guaranteed given the recorded issue. Overlay MSL's are not integrated with the signalling system and are estimated to cost £210,000. Integrated MSL's interact with the signalling system and provide a higher level of protection if the system fails. These are estimated to cost £810,000. Both would have ongoing maintenance costs. Neither type of MSL provides a positive business case here, given the risk of misuse that would remain after installation.

Closure and Diversion over the Footway

The current route, from Point A to Point B on Plan A, is 115 meters. The proposed diversion route, from Point A to Point B via Points C and D, is 285 meters, which adds 170 meters to the overall journey. With a walking speed of 1.2 meters per second, the diversion route will add 2 minutes 20 seconds to a user's journey time.

According to census data, the Crossing is mainly used for leisure purposes with evidence of a high level of dog walkers. Dog walkers are often not looking for the quickest and most convenient route, but rather for enjoyment of local amenity. As the proposed new footpath will be of the same make-up to the existing one, it is not expected that the average user of the Crossing will be significantly inconvenienced by the diversion.

The diversion will cross the railway using Crewkerne AHB Crossing. Whilst still crossing the railway on the level, this provides a safer alternative to a passive crossing such as Henley. Half barriers are provided to give a physical and visual barrier to ensure pedestrians do not cross when a train is approaching, with an average barrier down time of 50 seconds. Taking an average of 2 trains per hour during the daytime, this is a down time of 1 minute 40 seconds per hour, providing minimal time within which a user would be required to wait. Crewkerne AHB Crossing also provides a direct phoneline to the controlling signal box, allowing large groups of users or vulnerable users to phone the signaller before crossing if they require extra traverse time.

The existing footpath has stiles on each side of the Crossing at the railway boundaries. Consequently, wheelchair users, those with pushchairs and those with bikes are unable to use the existing route over the Crossing. The proposed new footpath has no stiles, but the footway will contain one set of stairs which achieves the same net result to the provisions already in situ. Therefore, in line with the current use profile, no user is disproportionately affected by the option to close the Crossing and divert over a new footway at the AHB Crossing, which is a safer alternative. Detailed plans for the stairs to be provided are currently being undertaken, but initial plans suggest that between 5-10 steps will be required to be installed at Crewkerne AHB Crossing to facilitate the diversion.

A ramped option in place of stairs has been explored, however initial research suggests that the cost would be disproportionate when measured against the benefit and usage, and Network Rail's land ownership is unlikely to be sufficient to facilitate a ramp.

Alternative options for a diversion route from the south of the crossing have been explored, but both have been deemed less suitable than the chosen option. One such route would lead diagonally south-west from Crewkerne AHB Crossing to meet footpath CH27/21, however this is unlikely to be consented to by the landowner. A further option would be for the diversion route to follow Cathole Bridge Road to the south of Crewkerne AHB Crossing, then turning in a westerly direction to follow a line of existing trees. Due to the proximity of the road, it is predicted that this route would not be the preferred option for users of the footpath. It would also require a much larger length of the existing footpath CH27/21 to be stopped up. Further, detailed surveys would be required to ascertain the suitability of this route for a footpath due to the vegetation and trees within the area.

Network Rail undertakings

If the diversion is confirmed by the order making authority, the existing stiles and level crossing furniture will be removed and the gap in the fencing will be closed thereby leaving no evidence of a level crossing. A widening would facilitate the construction of a footway over Crewkerne AHB Level Crossing, to be installed by Network Rail, with steps leading from the northwest side of the crossing to the new path to the north of the railway. Temporary signage at the existing footpath crossing showing the new diversion route will also be erected.

Next Steps

Network Rail will shortly be submitting a footpath diversion application under S119A Highways Act 1980 to Somerset Council. Network Rail have contacted all statutory consultees but would also be keen to hear any views or concerns residents may have whilst the specifics of the diversion path are still in the planning stage. It is important to note that, even without the development, the Crossing would still be earmarked for closure due to its risk score and type. **Network Rail's diversion application does not relate to the development.**