

Questions and Answers - Closure of Aristotle Lane

1. Q. Why does Network Rail want to close Aristotle Lane crossing. A. The planned capacity enhancements will increase the number of tracks, train carrying capacity, operational complexity and line speeds at the crossing and hence the level of risk to the crossing users. The use of whistle boards as the current arrangement for warning crossing users is not suitable for these changed arrangements and would not be accepted by the Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR). It is both Network Rail and Rail Industry stated policy to close foot crossings in circumstances where change is increasing the safety risk to users and where a reasonable alternative method of access exists or can be created.

2. Q. Why are whistle boards not suitable? A To provide a longer warning time the boards would need to be relocated further from the crossing to be effective exceeding the 400m allowed under current industry Standards. The new frequency and pattern of train movements on the reversibly signalled lines will make it unacceptably complex for users to decide whether it is safe to cross and in some instances stationary freight trains will mask the approach of fast passenger trains. The increased frequency of trains (44 per hour post 2019) would also result in an increased noise disturbance to the local school and residents arising from the use of the boards.

3. Q. Why not install an alternative warning system? A. There are two types of system available for use at crossings. The Miniature Warning Lights system and the fully controlled barrier, neither of which prevent access. Industry Standards do not allow a warning light system to be installed where there are more than two tracks because of the time taken to cross the line and the risk of a change in the safety circumstances within the traverse time. The on-demand mini barrier system operated by the signaller is only approved for vehicle crossings and its use would require a change to the Standards and approval from the ORR (See Q5 below) Given the planned frequency of trains (44 per hour), stationary freight trains, the interface with the signalling system and the dependency on signaller availability there would be long periods of time when access over the crossing would not be possible. This in turn would increase the risk of misuse as the lights / barriers would not prevent access to the line for pedestrians. The circumstances at this site are not suitable for an exception to the Standards.

4. Q. Why not protected the crossing by reducing the speed of the trains, as has happened already? A. The ORR has assessed that with for an extra track / longer crossing distance the line speed would need to reduce to somewhere in the order of 25mph. This would make it impossible to achieve the planned capacity enhancements and significant economic benefits that these will bring. Furthermore, a

reduction in line speed would not be acceptable to train companies, since a reasonable alternative exists.

5. Q. Why is it not possible to create a centre refuge between the tracks to reduce the length of the proposed crossing? A. There is insufficient room available to create a suitably sized refuge at this location given the type of usage. A central reservation would have to be fenced and located 1.5m from each running line. The refuge itself would have to be at least 2m wide to accommodate inward opening gates and users with cycles, wheelbarrows etc, making an overall width requirement of 5m. Current proposals require a new double junction at this location, with high-speed crossovers connecting the lines. Space to locate this is constrained and slewing the lines is not practicable due to the site constraints of the drainage channels and the adjacent SSSI Port Meadow. The available space for a new line on the west side is also limited by the position of the existing drainage ditches. Network Rail's proposed location for the new track minimises the length of ditch enclosed within a new culvert and the impact on the existing drainage system and the Port Meadow drainage. The risks of misuse of dual warning light systems, raised in Q3. above, would not be eliminated and could be compounded by the extra wait time in a refuge.
6. Q. Why is Network Rail ignoring the findings of the Evergreen III TWA public inquiry in respect of the closure of Aristotle Lane crossing? A. The current schemes being discussed are separate to EG III and not subject to the findings of the enquiry. Network Rail has considered the findings / proposals in the TWA application by Chiltern Railways carefully. However, it should be noted that the planned additional passenger loop line on the west side and general increase in traffic will not be running on separate lines to the existing tracks, as was the case in the EG3 proposal.
7. Q. Will Network Rail use its Permitted Development powers to build the new passing loop at Aristotle Lane? A. The consent strategy /planning process for the planned new line is yet to be finalised whilst we continue to take legal advice and discuss further with Oxford City Council.
8. Q. Will Network Rail be using its Permitted Development powers to build the new footbridge at Aristotle Lane footbridge. A. A planning application could be made in respect of these works and pre-application discussions are being held with the City Council and other key Stakeholders, albeit a final decision on a consent strategy has yet to be made.
9. Q. What are the timescales for closing the crossing? A. The current plan is to complete the works to the footbridge by spring 2014. When these works are complete the crossing will then be closed. These timescales will be subject to the completion of the planning approval process

10. Q Why close the crossing before the new track is brought into use? **A.** With an improved footbridge in place Network Rail would be failing in its duty of care not to reduce risk so far is reasonably practical.
11. Q. What effect will electrification have on the bridge? **A.** The footbridge will need to be lifted by about 500mm to improve electrical clearances and the ramps gradients adjusted to suit. The bridge parapets will also need to be raised to 1.8m to protect against vandalism. Network Rail is currently in discussion with the City Council planning department over the details.
12. Q. Closure of the crossing will discriminate against older and disabled users. **A.** The planned increased train frequency, faster train speeds and longer crossing length will significantly increase the risk to the less mobile or encumbered users of the crossing. Network Rail has tabled a number of proposals to improve the access over the existing ramps to the adjacent bridge and is willing to consider reasonable proposals.
13. Q. The footpath from the bridge, across the Port Meadow, currently floods which will limit access to the allotments. **A.** As part of the works to the footbridge we have proposed a number of improvements including a proposal to raise the path to reduce the risk of flooding.
14. Q. Will you be accessing across the Port Meadow to undertake these works. **A.** Any use of, or work to, the Port Meadow will only be with the agreement of all the Stakeholders including the Freeman and Natural England and when the appropriate approvals are in place.
15. Q. Why did you install a new gate and key pad on the east side of the crossing? **A.** The keypad was installed with the agreement of the Trap Ground Allotment Association to reduce the risk of trespass at this private crossing.
16. Q. Will you be providing car parking for the allotment users? **A.** Network Rail is in discussion with the Council on possible locations for parking but it is likely to be adjacent to the east ramp of the footbridge.
17. Q. Will your proposals impact on the plans of the local school to expand the area of their play ground? **A.** We have discussed this with the representatives of the school and Council, who support our ideas which seek to maximise the amount of ground available to the school.
18. Q. Will you improve the footpath along the east side of the railway? **A.** Network Rail is willing to discuss local improvements such as this with the City Council
19. Q. What compensation will you offer to the TGAA members? **A.** See Q18 above.

20.Q. Why are you so determined to close the crossing? A. Because Network Rail believes it is in the best interest of the local community and school, Oxford City Council and the wider Railway Network.