

CCNB 5 minute Right to Speak - BBC Planning Committee Meeting

- Monday 22 July 2019 at 6.30pm

Re: PA 19/00370/FUL - Reconstruction of Bromham Road Railway Bridge

Introduction

- 1 Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you about on this application on behalf Cycling Campaign for North Bedfordshire (CCNB)
- 2 We do not object to the proposed rebuild only to the plans absence of cycling provision across the bridge.

Setting the Scene

- 3 The Government's recent cycling strategy is to make cycling the natural choice for shorter journeys with the aim to double cycling activity by 2025.
- 4 Bedford has always been a 'Town of Cyclists' and the latest statistics show that it is in the top quartile of UK towns.
- 5 Today it has an extensive cycle network but there are still several major gaps, one of which is the Bromham Road railway bridge.
- 6 Although used by several hundred school and commuter cyclists every day, most ride across illegally on the narrow footway. The bridge acts as a divide for cyclists between the west and east sides of the town and its dangerous nature has been brought out in a number of questionnaires and petitions carried out over the years.

Background

- 7 Cyclists have been waiting for 20 years for this '**once in a lifetime**' opportunity.
- 8 It was originally placed in the old County Council's work programme for 1999/2000 as a result of the government and Railtrack's request to improve access to stations, but was never implemented due to funding problems.
- 9 A further attempt to create a cycle path was put in the Borough's 2010/2011 work programme.
- 10 The work was not followed through due to the announcement of the Midland Mainline electrification scheme that this would require a bridge rebuild.

- 11 Network Rail were first made aware of the need for a cycle path across the bridge and an underpass into the station car park by the Borough in 2013.
- 12 But with pausing and un-pausing of the project it was not until an hurriedly arranged public consultation in April 2018 that a plan was first seen (dated March 2017) which showed a bridge with no provision for cyclists.
- 13 The consultation attracted 145 responses concerned about the lack of cycle infrastructure including ones from the Borough, The Mayor and several Borough members.
- 14 Network Rail's response was that a wider bridge would require a complete demolition and rebuild, require more land and be too expensive, etc (several of these comments have been discounted by CCNB).
- 15 In June 2018 Network Rail put in a request for a Transport and Works Order and deemed planning permission to carry out the work.

Public Inquiry

- 16 Due to objections by CCNB and others this resulted in a Public Inquiry which took place on 8 February 2019.
- 17 CCNB considers it strange that Network Rail submitted this planning application to the borough on the day the Public Inquiry closed (19 February 2019).
- 18 The national and local policy statements cited by Network Rail for trains in their Planning Statement (v10) are the same ones covered in the Public Inquiry and are equally valid for other modes such as cycling.
- 19 These can all be summed up by a paragraph in the Government's National Policy Statement for National Networks (December 2014),

*The Government [also] expects applicants to identify opportunities to invest in infrastructure in locations where the road network acts as a barrier to cycling and walking, **by correcting historic problems, retrofitting the latest solutions and ensuring that it is easy and safe for cyclists.***

Recommendations

- 20 In CCNB's Closing statement to the Public Inquiry we stated that as the A4280 was no longer part of national strategic road network it was not necessary to have a carriageway width across the bridge of 7.2 metre. The Manual for Streets and other documents state that in urban settings the carriageway width need be only 6.2-6.5 metres as per Shakespeare Road and Ashburnham Road.
- 21 We believe It is therefore possible to amend the road bed of the bridge to give a 3.5 metre cycle/pedestrian path on the north side without further widening and if the application is approved tonight we would like to see this made as a condition.
- 22 The opportunity to provide a safe crossing on the bridge for cyclists is not likely to present itself again as the rebuilt bridge is expected to have a life of more than 120 years.

Separate Bridge

- 23 CCNB would like to add that it is grateful to Bedford Borough Council to earmark £3m from its capital reserves to build a 4 metre wide separate cycle bridge alongside the main bridge.
- 24 However based on Network Rail's reasons for not being able to widen the main bridge it is likely that this will result in a number of problems making it difficult to obtain planning approval.

Transport and Works Order Latest

- 25 Finally - The Department for Transport were contacted on Thursday 18 July 2019 and in their reply a spokesman said that they had no knowledge of this planning application but stated that "**the works cannot go ahead until the Secretary of State has reached a decision on making the Transport and Works Order and granting the deemed planning permission**".