

Consultation about a Proposed Rail Crossing Diversion Order – part of Heath Charnock Footpath 44(Chorley Borough)

Lancashire County Council have received an application from Network Rail to divert the part of the above mentioned public footpath in connection with their proposal to replace the Heath Charnock level crossing with a stepped footbridge.

Heath Charnock level crossing is a public footpath railway crossing, located approximately 1.5 miles south of Chorley, on the Bolton to Preston railway. The level crossing is set in a rural area, forming a link in the network of country paths and does not link any schools, employment or residential areas. The railway is raised up on a large embankment in this location and the approach to both sides of the crossing is by means of unmade footpaths and requires the user to negotiate a number of steps and gradients, including stepped access up and down the railway embankment. The level crossing and the footpaths to it on either side are unlit. There are warning signs either side of the crossing but no telephones, or any other audible or visual warnings.

The operational railway in this area is affected by Network Rail's Northern Hub transport improvement programme which will help meet growing demand for rail travel across the north. This will lead to an increase in the number of trains and the speed at which they will be travelling. The railway has current permissible speeds at this location of 75mph in both directions over the crossing with 72 stopping passenger services and 288 non-stop passenger services currently in operation per day (total in both directions). The transport improvement programme will increase the line speed to 100mph.

The increase in line speed requires an increase in the sighting distance that has to be available to users at the level crossing. Following the electrification works the minimum sighting distance will no longer be achieved. As part of the electrification works, stanchions will be erected within Network Rail's operational land to support the overhead power lines. These structures, together with the increase in line speed and frequency of services means some method of mitigation is required to reduce the risk to users of the level crossing.

Network Rail have explored all alternative options for a permanent means by which the risk can be reduced and their preferred option is to close the level crossing and provide a new footbridge. This will ensure that the public can cross the railway safely and they have applied for a diversion order to change the legal alignment of the footpath to enable the level crossing to be closed when the new footbridge is in place.

The route proposed to be diverted is marked by a bold black line A-D and the proposed alternative route is marked by a bold dashed line A-B-C-D on the plan illustrating the diversion proposal.

The outline design for the structure shows a 2 metre wide footbridge, approximately 6 metres from the ground which will be accessed by 2 flights of approximately 16 steps each side. It is proposed that there would not be any gates or barriers on the stepped access.

Wherever possible Network Rail provides a ramped access in addition to steps. However, Network Rail have advised that in this location it is not considered appropriate due to the nature of the terrain approaching the path in both directions, in particular the embankment on which the railway sits and the visual impact that such a large ramped structure would have on the surrounding countryside. Therefore it is the intention that a stepped crossing would be provided and Network Rail have secured the funds for the construction and delivery of the footbridge scheme.

Before proceeding further in the matter, if you have any comments or objections to the proposal, please submit these by 21 December 2016.