

SUBJECT - METROWEST 1 development consent Portishead Branch Line phase 1

Written Representation by interested Party Rob Harvey (Pill Toad Patrol) in response to written questions from the Planning Inspectorate.

My reference: 20025032

Date 29/10/2020

RE. TR040011-000730-Portishead First Written Questions;
ExQ1 BIO.1.2 page 13 of 61 Toads at Lodway Farm

About Pill Toad Patrol

Initially I feel I should answer the question about **Pill Toad Patrol** and how it began. I started looking for toads in Pill about 18 years ago (when we moved here). I discovered that there are two, possibly, three populations (one appears to have been virtually extirpated). I focused on the migration from Lodway Farm and other areas across the railtrack and cyclepath as that is where I found most activity and most casualties. I registered the crossing with Froglife and started Pill Toad Patrol a few years later as I discovered more people interested in toads and protecting them within the local community (we now have around 30 active patrollers and many more casual patrollers plus others from outside the community contacting us through Froglife e.t.c..). I maintain a Facebook presence and an email group that allows me to inform local people when would be good times to patrol e.t.c...and often make presentations at community events and local schools. I also maintain records of animals "helped" and some other natural history notes for this site that I pass on to Froglife each year. Pill Toad Patrol is active from September (when the toads begin their migration - before taking some time off in December/Jan depending on the weather) through to July (when the toadlets emerge from the ponds on the Avon side of the railtrack) each year but primarily we patrol as a group from **January to the end of April** when movement across the railtracks and the cyclepath are at their peak).

Question i)

The common toad (*Bufo bufo*) lives all year round on and around Lodway Farm and the nearby railtracks between Pill station and Portishead; a large proportion of the population of toads makes a migration across the field at Lodway Farm and across the railtrack at various times during the year. The common toad is not the only species of interest around Lodway farm there are resident **badgers, foxes, slow worms, grass snakes and hedgehogs** that I know of. It is also the home and migration route for a small population of **common frogs** (*Rana temporaria*) and a much larger population of smooth or **common newts** (*Lissotriton vulgaris*). Lodway Farm also provides an important conduit for species such as deer to move through the village towards the foreshore of the river Avon (RAMSAR site and SSSI) and back (not ideally available again for wildlife movement after this because of the Portbury car parks – despite some level of mitigation re the rhynes – and further towards Bristol there is some access via Ham Green Lakes but not really viable for wildlife again until you get to Leigh Woods).

Question ii)

Please refer to my initial statement about Pill Toad Patrol for some information on movement. **The potential toad movement on Lodway Farm and the railtrack is significant year round** as part of the population is resident to both sites (though, not to the ponds on Lodway Farm, frogs and newts here yes but I have seen no evidence that these are favoured by the toads). From September through to December (temperature dependent) there will be a large influx of toads from the surrounding area (back gardens e.t.c., I have followed toads making their way from the main road in Pill) with many accessing via the gated entrance on the Breeches. They will move slowly (or not at all) over winter before ground temperatures incite further movement (some individuals and quite often the females appear to make the whole journey in Jan/Feb/March) towards the breeding pond in January/February with the peak of movement occurring in the first week of March (but that refers to peak movement across the railtrack and cyclepath – peak movement across roads like The Breaches could come days, weeks or even months earlier). They return from the breeding pond from March through May and would normally be back in their resident locations by the end of May. The hatchlings/toadlets will leave the pond in late June/early July “en masse” and will quickly disperse across the railtrack and through Lodway Farm (I have not found them on the Farm but I have watched them moving directly towards it and away from the river).

NOTE – The information re toad movement is based around personal observations for the site and respected, research-based information from groups such as FrogLife.

In terms of **numbers**, it is a little speculative. I and other patrollers can only provide a glimpse of the migration each year; that shows massive variation depending on so many different variables. Our best recording year was circa 1800 in 2013, while in other years we have recorded less than 700. Our average would be in excess of 1000 individuals but we are not an exhaustive patrol that patrols every night nor, even on the most promising evenings do we stay out very late so there is a **good chance that we are significantly undercounting the population** (we don't stay out late too often as the later the time the less likelihood of potential threats, at this time of year most of the bike traffic is commute based).

Measures/Practices in place to manage the migration. We try to publicise the migration so that local commuters are aware of the potential hazards that their cars or bikes present to toads on certain nights of the year. We engage courteously and enthusiastically with the public as we patrol. We contacted The Highways Agency and Sustrans (who have an interest in the cyclepath/road) and they very kindly allowed for and paid for small “tarmac pillows” to be placed on the cyclepath next to storm drains to help prevent toads being trapped in the gully pots. Toads found on roads or streets by patrollers are gathered in a bucket and transported to the edge of the land where the breeding pond is situated. Public sponsored Toad ladders are fitted to storm drains where practical. Deaths are recorded - the roads around Lodway Farm such as the Breeches show the greatest numbers of fatalities at the moment due to numbers of toads and newts migrating across roads used by motorized traffic (rather than primarily bicycles on the cyclepath).

I am hoping that some mitigation/measure can be put in place that excludes the toads from the work site on Lodway farm (the stored aggregate e.t.c.. sounds like a very

attractive temporary toad home and working that aggregate with toads in the rubble would cause a massive numbers of deaths) but would still allow them access to the railtrack and breeding pond – perhaps something similar to the newt fence constructed at the Portbury Wharf nature reserve near Portishead. I also hope that the new track will feature access holes/tunnels for toads and other small creatures to pass under the trains safely.

If there is any more information you require or if there are any points that I have brought up that you need qualified, please do contact me.

Sincerely,

Rob Harvey

