

FRIENDS OF NARBOROUGH STATION

HINCKLEY NATIONAL RAIL FREIGHT INTERCHANGE

COMMENTS, FEEDBACK AND OBSERVATIONS

THE PLANNING INSPECTORATE

THURSDAY 2ND NOVEMBER 2023

My name is John Harrison and I am Chair of the Friends of Narborough Station, better known as FONS. FONS consists of a user group of volunteers, whose main aim is to promote and protect the interests of the Users of Narborough Station. Although getting freight off the roads and on to our railways is an obvious necessity, its location is in the wrong place and has serious implications not only on the environment and green belt, but on the roads and railways in our area. The wider effect on the whole South Leicestershire railway line is what I want to address here.

Firstly I would like to refer to the “Explanation of the Narborough Level Crossing Table” produced by Tritax and issued last Friday 27th October 2023. As the data states it could not be analysed to provide the highway closure times ie. red light to raised barrier times as required, can I respectfully suggest that this information is therefore meaningless. Referring to paragraphs 2 and 3, as some of the dates for the video surveys coincide with local school half term holidays, I consider this to be hardly representative. With reference to paragraphs 4 and 6, any information provided should be compared to data from the Real Time Trains system, in order to ensure it is correct.

The information contained in paragraph 5 states it is a “Work in Progress”, therefore it is inconclusive. I was interested to read that closure time for the level crossing at Narborough is maintained at 2:31 seconds for freight trains travelling at 75mph. I assume this is a mistake and should read 2 minutes 31 seconds. I was also interested to read that further detail will be provided as part of the Technical Note to be submitted in due course, which relates in part to improvements underway at the Derby Control Centre. My question is; What are these improvements and who will pay for them.

At the junction leading into and out of the site from the Leicester to Nuneaton railway line, a considerable amount of track and point work will need to be worked on and new connections made to the existing signalling system. We assume Network Rail will carry out this work, with the cost picked up by Tritax. The carrying out of this work will require possessions of the line. Will this mean a loss of business for XC and will replacement ‘buses be needed. When replacement ‘buses are in operation, this puts a lot of people off from using rail. Will XC be compensated by Tritax through Network Rail for this loss of business and indeed the cost of hiring replacement ‘buses. The foregoing is detail, but needs to be considered in order to protect the tax payer through Network Rail, from picking up any costs.

We at FONS have carried out timings at the Level Crossing and we estimate that barrier down times if HNRFI goes ahead, will be up to 40 minutes per hour. Traffic congestion now is a serious problem, but will get significantly worse, badly affecting the villages of Narborough, Littlethorpe Whetstone, Cosby, Enderby, Huncote and the B4114 road.

There is no doubt that these long and heavy freight trains will have an effect, on both the operation and geology of the South Leicestershire line. Whatever Tritax may say, the South Leicestershire line is not a main line and was not built as a main line. The vibration from existing freight trains is far greater than that from the presently operated lightweight turbostar passenger trains. The maximum length of the present freight trains using the line and causing this vibration is 600 metres, we see that Tritax freight trains will be 30% longer at 775 metres. Who will pay for any damage caused, remembering that Tritax have said that their project will incur no cost to the tax payer.

FONS has posed many questions in its response to Tritax about its proposed railway operation, none of which have been answered. These questions relate to both safety aspects concerning rail access to the site, and rail operations at the site. For instance the railway line at the entrance to the site is on a 1:162 gradient. Railway rolling stock unless properly braked, can "Run Away" on a gradient of 1:330. Thankfully it is a rarity, but it is a concern that has been raised recently by the Rail Accident Investigation Branch.

The rail junction into the site, will be situated between Elmsthorpe and Hinckley. For safe access, trains will almost certainly be slowed to a stand or to a maximum 10mph before being cleared to enter. Depending on the direction the train is coming from, will mean crossing over the opposite running line. This will cause a prolonged obstruction of both eastbound and westbound trains, until the train is fully clear of the main running lines and safely into the terminal.

Trains leaving the terminal will inevitably cause similar delays to passenger trains, during the cross over process. Restarting a 1,500 tonne half mile long train is not a quick process, particularly in winter time and during adverse weather conditions. The fact there is a 1:162 gradient to climb, will require extended occupation while the train gets up to line speed. Delays to passenger trains will be inevitable and will thus compromise aspirations, to improve connectivity between the East and West Midlands.

FONS has a good relationship with Network Rail, however there are a number of issues we have raised with Tritax which will directly affect Network Rail. These relate to the;

- Effect on the Operation of Narborough Level Crossing.
- Effect on the Operation of Narborough Station.
- Effect on the Operation of the Midland Main Line.

Three basic questions which need to be answered relating to the operation of the proposed Terminal are; 1. Will Tritax or Network Rail be responsible for the

provision of an auditable “Fitness to run” certificate, for all rolling stock that leaves the Terminal. 2. Will covered facilities be provided for the inspection, maintenance and repair of locomotives and wagons and if so, 3. What will be the level of noise emitted and will wagons have to be lifted by crane making it’s own noise, or will below ground inspection pits be provided.

There is at present a known rail capacity problem between the junctions at Wigston and Syston. This prevents XC trains that are already running, from not calling at Narborough and Hinckley in the morning and evening peaks. A situation we have strongly disputed with XC for a number of years. This we have been told is a major factor why the Ivanhoe line, has never reopened, although it is used by freight trains. Our suggestions to transfer passengers between trains and Park and Ride ‘buses at Meynells Gorse, have always been rejected due to railway line capacity problems in the area.

So why will it be acceptable for half mile long heavy freight trains hauled by dirty diesel locomotives, to use that capacity. The operation at Leicester Station which is already busy with EMR and XC trains, will bound to be affected when a Tritax train turns up and has to cross the main line. The South Leicestershire Line only has three aspect signalling, as opposed to four aspect on a main line. There are no refuges, no passing loops and no facilities for Bi Directional working. Putting that simply, it means that any breakdown or other incident, could close the line for hours or days. Who would pick up the bill for it’s effect on the country’s economy?

Capacity and resilience is already an issue on the present operation of the South Leicestershire Line and is regularly tested, particularly by freight train failures. Earlier this year for example, the 05.33 GBRF freight train from Hams Hall to Felixtowe South broke down between Nuneaton and Hinckley at 06.15. This closed the line completely until 11.15. This resulted in hundreds of people being heavily delayed, including students who missed their exams. On behalf of FONS, I asked for a full investigation to take place. I received very detailed responses from both Network Rail and XC, for which I was very grateful. These however give no indication that problems with capacity and resilience, have gone away.

Finally, I understand from the English Regional Transport Association that there is a wish to convert the Radlett in Hertfordshire Airfield into a Railfreight Terminal. The M25 motorway crosses the entire site, it could also have direct access to the Midland Main Line on one side and the A5 on the other side. Could we persuade Tritax to move their thoughts in that direction?

I am more than happy to take questions and provide more information with particular regards to Tuesday’s Agenda Item 4, if you so wish.