

# Friends of Narborough Station



## Hinckley National Rail Freight Interchange Consultation Comments to the Planning Inspectorate.

### 1) INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Friends of Narborough Station is a group of people, whose main aims as defined in our Constitution, are to;

1.2 Act as a User Group and provide support for the Station Adoption Scheme, currently promoted by East Midlands Railway.

1.3 Promote and protect the interests of Users of Narborough Station, with an objective of ensuring that better services are provided by Train Operating Companies – TOCs.

1.4 Work closely in a constructive and responsible manner with TOCs, the Department for Transport and local councils at all levels. This includes Narborough Parish Council as Stakeholder and Blaby District Council whose area the station serves.

1.5 Monitor demographic changes in particular new housing and commercial developments in the Blaby District Council area and the impact these will have on the station's capacity and the ability of the surrounding area to cope with such changes.

1.6 Liaise with other public and private bodies, with an interest in rail travel and other associated travel arrangements.

1.7 Take an interest in the Narborough Station Buildings and their surroundings, including the Station Garden and Signal Box.

### 2) BACKGROUND

2.1 There are at least ten Existing, Proposed or Planned Competitive Warehouse and Container Facilities already within 50 miles of Hinckley, these are at:

- Northampton Gateway
- Wellingborough
- DIRFT
- Coventry
- Hams Hall
- East Midlands Gateway
- Magna Park
- Birch Coppice
- Landor Street, Birmingham
- and now proposed at Hinckley

2.2 The developer argues that the project will bring jobs to the area and that employees will not have to travel any significant distances between home and work. This is not true as the unemployment rate in the area, is well below the national average and one of the lowest in England.

2.3 The site would be situated in what is already a heavily polluted area, with the additional road journeys by employees over a 24 hour period making the area even more polluted.

2.4 Light and Noise Pollution would be tremendous with local residents having to suffer at all times of the day and night. This is in addition to the noise of cranes, lorries and train movements coming into and from the site itself.

2.5 Local people would lose the enjoyment of their long-standing conservation and leisure areas, such as Burbage Common and Aston Firs.

### **3) RAIL ACCESS TO THE SITE**

3.1 Firstly it has to be discussed that the railway line at the entrance to the site is at present on a 1:162 gradient. Railway Rolling Stock unless properly braked can "Run Away" on a gradient of 1:330. This tends to happen in private yards but thankfully not often on running lines, but there have been plenty of instances where it has happened.

3.2 We raise this matter as the Rail Accident Investigation Branch has indicated its concern in their latest Annual Report. Such incidents happened at Clitheroe in Lancashire in 2020 and at Toton in Nottinghamshire in 2021.

3.3 Will there be a guarantee that a locomotive will always be attached to a train during container handling, and will there be a clearly specified procedure that the fixed brakes are always applied to the train at all other times. Will the Operator or Network Rail be responsible for ensuring that the running lines are protected by catch points or a sand drag arresting facility.

3.4 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 of 10 mph 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 lines, until the train is fully clear of the main running lines and safely into the terminal.

3.5 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 to line speed. Delays to passenger trains will have to be accepted and will certainly compromise aspirations by Midlands Connect and others, to provide a more frequent service and thus improve connectivity between the East and West Midlands.

### **4) RAIL OPERATIONS AT THE SITE**

4.1 All Freight Train Rail Heads in this country have what is called a "Cripple Road". These are situated for instance at Power Stations, Mines, Collieries, Oil Terminals, Quarries and other locations where freight trains

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are loaded and unloaded. These facilities are where “Red Carded” Wagons and Containers are shunted out of the way in order to prevent delays to both freight and passenger trains.

4.2 Will these facilities be provided and will they be covered? Will covered facilities be provided for the necessary Vehicle Inspection and Brake Tests (VIBTs), maintenance and repair of both locomotives and wagons and if so, what will be the level of noise emitted? Will wagons have to be lifted by crane making its own noise or will below ground inspection pits be provided?

4.3 In some overseas countries these “Cripple Roads” are called “Sick Roads”. Whatever they are called, their importance in support of a safe operational railway cannot be stressed too highly.

4.4 Will the terminal have an auditable “Fitness to run Certification” procedure in place for all Locomotives and Wagons that depart from the Interchange?

## **5) EFFECT ON THE OPERATION OF THE SOUTH LEICESTERSHIRE LINE**

5.1 There is no doubt these long and heavy extra trains will have an effect on the operation of the South Leicestershire Line. We understand the longest trains at present are some 600 metres, the extra trains proposed will be 775 metres long a 30% increase.

5.2 Containers themselves are specified to measure up to 40 feet long and 8 feet 6 inches high. How many of these will be on one train?

5.3 Whatever Tritax Symmetry may say, the South Leicestershire Line is NOT a main line and was not built as a main line.

5.4 The line only has three aspect signalling, as opposed to four aspect signalling 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 its effect on the country’s economy?

5.5 Capacity and Resilience on the line is poor. Freight trains break down quite regularly in the area, which causes delays to both passenger and other freight services. On one occasion in 2023, the 05.33 Hams Hall to Felixstowe South GBRF train, came to a stand on the up line at Pasge Hall Level Crossing between Nuneaton and Hinckley with loss of power from the train. The line was closed to traffic from 06.00 to 11.00, resulting in severe delays to thousands of passengers, including students missing their examinations.

5.6 If resilience on the line is poor today, are any improvements planned for example; Bi Directional working, conversion to four aspect signalling, or the provision of refuges, cross overs or passing loops.

5.7 FONS has many more questions, which have never been answered throughout the consultation process.

5.8 Local residents hear the trains and feel the vibration from freight trains, particularly during the overnight period now. It could be argued that the railway line was here first. When residents moved to the area, the trains were not as heavy as they are today, remembering it was not built as a main line and there was never any intention of it taking such traffic.

5.9 Has the geology underlying the line been analysed to ensure it is capable of supporting the longer, heavier trains? Will the additional cost of maintaining the tracks, be picked up by Tritax Symmetry or Network Rail? If the latter, it will be a cost to the tax payer, remembering that Tritax claim there will be no cost to the tax payer and that every aspect of the project will be 100% privately financed. Is this still the case?

5.10 Further constraints are the fact that both Wigston North and South Junctions were some years ago, reduced to single lead rather than double lead layouts.

5.11 Capacity and Resilience on the line is therefore poor.

## **6) EFFECT ON THE OPERATION OF NARBOROUGH LEVEL CROSSING**

6.1 FONS has done barrier timings at the crossing and taking into account all current proposals, road closures will increase from the current 25 minutes per hour to 40 minutes per hour. Timings taken by FONS were from the time the red light flashes (Ordering vehicles and pedestrians to stop) to the barriers going up and the roadway being fully clear again.

6.2 As a result of these timings, a report was published by FONS in 2019 entitled "Will Narborough Be Ready", which revealed that the crossing was closed to road traffic for an average 16.25 minutes per hour. The report stated "Whilst this doesn't sound too much, excessive delays are caused to road traffic, particularly at peak times and if there is a build up of trains".

6.3 In 2019 there were very few freight trains using the South Leicestershire Line and thus going through Narborough. There are now up to two freight trains per hour, hence the conservative estimate of barrier down time has increased to 25 minutes per hour.

6.4 FONS has submitted a Freedom Of Information Request to Network Rail, in order to ascertain if barrier timings are electronically recorded. A key request to Tritax Symmetry and indeed Network Rail, would be for full transparency over the numbers used to calculate line availability and barrier downtime.

6.5 It would also be useful to know the average speed and length of current freight trains, against what is expected of Tritax services. If slower (As expected due to acceleration from the Interchange) or longer, then downtime will be far in excess of four minutes per train. It is imperative this information is obtained, so that meaningful, truthful and accurate information is duly analysed.

6.6 This is a busy crossing for both road and rail traffic. At peak times, road traffic queues through Littlethorpe towards Whetstone and in the other direction it completely clogs up the narrow roads and two mini roundabouts in the Narborough village area and spills on to the already busy B4114 dual carriageway, thus creating even further dangers.

6.7 The narrow pavements on the approaches to the crossing at school times, see children and adults having to walk on the road in order to proceed. Being held by the extra trains using the crossing, will create even more congestion and dangers than there are at present for all pedestrians.

6.8 Many of the parents taking and collecting their children to and from school, have younger children and babies in their families. As they cannot be left on their own at home, this means negotiating prams and push chairs etc. along the busy pavements and if not possible on to the also congested roadway.

6.9 This situation will only get worse and indeed more dangerous, if barrier down times are extended. The two settlements of Narborough and Littlethorpe are separated by the railway line, although the crossing acts as an important link between the two settlements.

6.10 A flyover was proposed some years ago, but this now would not be possible, due to a housing estate having been built on the Narborough side.

6.11 Tritax Symmetry have taken no cognisance of the impact these half mile long and heavy trains will have on the operation of the crossing, the effect on the village and the overall effect on the community itself.

6.12 It is not good enough to say that nothing can be done to resolve the so called Narborough problem, it is however better accepted that nothing should be done that knowingly makes the situation more dangerous.

6.13 If the Secretary of State does make the wrong decision, money and planning permission will be needed to resolve the so called Narborough problem. County Highways will have to be involved and at least one Pedestrian Lift, provided at the Level Crossing.

6.14 There appear to be no guidelines for the amount of time that the barrier can be down for. This is an automatic process, with Trains whether freight or passenger always taking priority over road traffic.

6.15 There is a "Right Side Failure" process in place, which means that on occasions when the barriers have failed, the Signaller at the Railway Operating Centre in Derby is not aware there is a problem, until advised by a member of the public.

6.16 Whilst it is the Signallers role to monitor a CCTV screen to check the crossing for any vehicle or other obstacle trapped on the crossing when the barriers come down, is this a pure fail safe system? Cars and Tractors have been hit recently by trains due to Signallers being distracted and unclear communications between Signallers and Control Centres.

6.17 Pollution from the engines of road vehicles left running while waiting at the crossing, is an issue which will only get worse if HNRFI is implemented.

6.18 According to ARUP, this is potentially the fourth most dangerous level crossing in the country. Freight trains when they derail at speed caused by for example a broken axle or track spread, can mean wagons and containers end up well away from where they should be. Recently in the Carlisle area following a derailment, some wagons ended up in the River Eden.

6.19 We mention this as heaven forbid, a similar catastrophe doesn't happen to a train on it's approach to Narborough. The consequences could be horrific, bearing in mind the narrowness and closeness of the station platforms to the running tracks.

6.20 On the 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023, a serious incident arose whereby a passenger was taken ill on the 17.18 Leicester to Birmingham New Street train. The passenger needed emergency treatment. Unfortunately this caused significant traffic congestion around Narborough station, caused by the level crossing barriers being kept down to protect the train. This meant the ambulance could not get anywhere near to the station. Subsequently the emergency services decided, after some delay, to meet the train at Nuneaton instead.

6.21 This incident highlights the situation we have at Narborough and acts as a warning should a similar situation occur. We understand it was 90 minutes from the passenger being taken ill to receiving treatment. HNRFI will make the situation at the crossing even more of a risk, hopefully another incident doesn't occur with more serious consequences for anyone taken ill on a train at Narborough. To say "lessons will be learnt" will not be acceptable when the lessons need to be taken into consideration now.

## **7) EFFECT ON THE OPERATION OF NARBOROUGH STATION**

7.1 FONS has for many years been concerned about various safety aspects concerning the operation of the station. The size and weight of trains operating to and from HNRFI and speeding through the station at 75

mph will be an issue. It has to be remembered that the locomotives roaring through the station themselves weigh some 126 tonnes.

7.2 At present and particularly on windy days, there is a serious danger that people waiting on the platforms could be swept under a train. This is not a dramatic assertion, but a fact.

7.3 The narrowness of the platforms present their own danger, particularly the widths from the yellow lines to the station buildings. Waiting passengers are never told to stand behind the yellow lines, as is customary at most other stations.

7.4 Thankfully wagons are no longer of an open type and we do not any longer have passengers showered with coal dust and other materials, since what were called HAA Wagons have been withdrawn.

7.5 There is however still a frightening draught and noise created, made even worse due to few advanced safety announcements being made. Occasionally when a stopping passenger train is announced and the level crossing barriers come down, a freight train passes through as waiting passengers are moving themselves forward to the edge of the platform.

7.6 Both passenger and freight trains not stopping at the station, are not required to sound their horn. There are no "W" Warning Signs either side of the station, which FONS considers should be in place to protect the level crossing, the station itself and for passengers waiting on the platforms.

## **8) EFFECT ON THE OPERATION OF THE MIDLAND MAIN LINE**

8.1 Most passenger and freight trains that come off the South Leicestershire Line and thus head towards Leicester Station and onwards, have to wait for a path on to the Midland Main Line before heading northwards. This is always to give priority to trains already on the MML. The 09.39 train from Narborough to Leicester is not booked to stop at South Wigston, but nearly always waits at the signal due to congestion on the MML.

8.2 Additional trains were introduced by East Midlands Railway a few years ago, in order to provide a better more frequent service between the East Midlands and London St Pancras, in order to boost the East Midlands economy, get cars off the roads and support the government's levelling up agenda.

8.3 This has resulted in a known serious capacity problem between Wigston Junction and Syston Junction, the route trains to and from HNRFI are planned to use.

8.4 There has been a proposal to reopen the line for passenger trains to run directly between Burton on Trent and Leicester, known as the Ivanhoe Line. This would have relieved traffic on the A50 and other roads into and out of Leicester. This we are told cannot happen due mainly to the foregoing capacity problem between Wigston Junction and Leicester.

8.5 So if we cannot relieve local roads to help the constituents of Leicestershire and Staffordshire, plus the obvious help with the environment, why can capacity be found for long and heavy freight trains hauled by dirty diesel locomotives?

8.6 In addition this stretch of line will be subject to long delays and closures, when MML electrification is under way north of Wigston. This is a far more definite project than any plan to electrify the South Leicestershire Line.

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## **9) SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL AND SAFETY FACTORS**

9.1 Tritax Symmetry claim the Interchange will have NO impact on the environment or wild life. We consider this to be a totally unsubstantiated statement. Tritax Symmetry also claim that Blaby District Council and that Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, were both happy with the way measurements were taken.

9.2 Interestingly the outcomes and results of these measurements, have we understand not as yet been disclosed.

9.3 Can we be sure that HNRFI will not have it's rain water drain off on to the railway.

## **10) OVERWHELMING CONCLUSIONS**

10.1 Both of the Tritax Webinars posed more questions than answers, supplementary questions were not allowed. There was no mention about passing loops, refuges, bi directional working or that freight trains even today cause delays to passenger trains.

10.2 Tritax Symmetry claim there will be "No Impact" on the environment or wild life and "Little Impact" as far as the railway line was concerned. No evidence of these claims has as yet been provided.

10.3 Safety matters relating to Narborough Station highlighted by FONS have not been addressed, in fact Tritax Symmetry seem to have no concern about the effect their project will have on the station, the level crossing or indeed the village itself including the overall community.

10.4 A question to be asked relates to the genuine requirement for the use of rail, or is it solely to expedite planning consent. Could it be there could be railway sidings and other related railway facilities built with all the loss of green belt land, never to be used or even see a train.

10.5 We have highlighted a number of serious problems with this application, with huge implications not just in the Elmsthorpe and Hinckley area, but in an extremely wide radius from it.

10.6 Tritax claim the project will be 100% privately financed. Assuming Network Rail will carry out the necessary changes to the signalling and point work at the entrance to the site, is there a guarantee this will be paid for by Tritax.

10.7 We at FONS respectfully suggest that while this whole enquiry has raised many very justified objections to this proposal, it has failed to address the wider effect it will have on not just the South Leicestershire Line, but on the whole East Midlands railway infrastructure.

10.8 It has been frustrating throughout the planning process, that representatives of the applicant have continually not responded to many of the questions and concerns raised throughout the process.