

Transport and Works Act 1992

The Felixstowe Branch Line and Ipswich Yard Improvement Order

Public Inquiry

13 March 2007

**Reference: Proposed Closure of Croft Footcrossing- the Closure of the Gun Lane
Crossing and the Proposed work at Thorpe Common Crossing]**

**Proof of Evidence by Gordon W Leverett
The Ramblers' Association Suffolk Area
Hon Assistant Area Footpath Secretary**

1 My name is Gordon W Leverett; I am The Ramblers' Association Suffolk Area Hon Assistant Footpath Secretary. I am authorised to speak on behalf of The Ramblers' Association by virtue of my post in The Ramblers' Association Suffolk Area.

2 The Ramblers' Association (RA) promotes walking, protects rights of way, seeks to maintain & extend access to open country and defends the beauty of the countryside.

2.1 What follows should in no way be taken to assume the RA supports those features of the Felixstowe Branch Line and Ipswich Yard Improvement Order to which the RA has not referred.

3. The Croft Footcrossing- Public footpath No 8 Trimley St. Martin.

3.1 This is an important path because it forms an essential part of the rights of way network leading from Kirton village, to connect with the coastal path, the Stour & Orwell Walk and towards Levington, Nacton and Ipswich.

It is also used as part of an attractive and interesting circular walk from Trimley St Martin via the Orwell estuary shore, Levington Marina, Seabridge Cottages then Trimley St Martin Public Footpath (FP) No 8 to its junction with the A14T at one of the few places along that road where there is a pedestrian refuge in the centre of the road.

Photo 3.1 The A14T crossing at junction with Trimley St Martin FP 8



Photo 3.2 Stratton Hall Drift Looking towards Seabridge Cottages



- 3.2** If Trimley St Martin FP No 8 is stopped up, then the alternative for the walker having arrived at Seabridge Cottages is for the walker to proceed along the Unclassified 3203 road (Stratton Hall Drift) which is a single track road with no footway. Then pass over the rail crossing to join the Unclassified 3219 for a short distance before continuing east along a shared footpath and cycle route to the junction of Trimley St Martin FP No 8 with the A14T.
- 3.3** The stopping up of Trimley St Martin FP No 8 would thus involve a road walk nearly double the length of the footpath stopped up and, not only along a significantly less enjoyable route, but one that has inherent dangers because Stratton Hall Drift is the recommended route for all vehicular traffic to the very popular and busy Suffolk Yacht Harbour.
- 3.4** It appears there is just one, sole, justification for the proposed closure of the crossing. It is said that a signal will be placed in the vicinity of the Croft foot crossing. And, although it is not expected that trains will stand there, it is just possible there may be occasions when that did occur. If that were to happen and, if the train in question was a long one, the last few wagons might block the crossing.
- 3.5** It is suggested that a walker might not have the patience to wait and might try to pass behind the standing train and, it is also possible that another train might be coming the other way at precisely that moment. It is further suggested this incautious walker might be so foolish or careless as to neglect to look along the rail line and fail to see or hear an oncoming train and might consequently be involved in an accident.
- 3.6** The probability of all these factors coming simultaneously must be very slight.
- 3.7** No evidence has been given why a signal must be placed at the exact location in question, or why it cannot be moved a few metres so as to entirely prevent the remote possibility which it is alleged could exist.
- 3.8** If there is a genuine or convincing reason why the signal cannot be re-located then an alternative would be to divert the footpath slightly to overcome the perceived problem.
- 3.9** Alternatively automatic gates that could be remotely locked, at times of perturbation, could

be provided at the crossing.

3.10 Additionally a telephone Help Point, both sides of the crossing, could be installed so the walker could be told of the how long they would have to wait before the crossing was safe to use.

3.11 Should the recommendation to the Secretary of State be that, the Croft crossing be closed, the RA asks that the Trimley St Martin Footpath No 8 be diverted to run adjacent to Stratton Hall Drift from Seabridge Cottages to the rail crossing and then to the Unclassified 3219 road.

4 Restricted Byway No 28 Trimley St Martin- Gun Lane Crossing

4.1 Whilst the RA has no particular concerns about the proposed extinguishment of non-motorised vehicular rights which now exist as a matter of law along Gun Lane, the RA strongly objects to the proposed diversion, and closure of the Gun lane crossing.

4.2 The reason put forward for the closure is similar to that for FP No 8, but carries less conviction, since there is no suggestion that the crossing would ever be blocked by a standing train.

4.3 If that, unlikely, standing train were nonetheless to be considered to provide sufficient grounds for closing the Gun Lane Crossing, then a diversion of the route a short distance would resolve the difficulty, whilst avoiding the undesirable consequences for the rights of way network in this locality put forward by the applicants.

4.4 The proposed diversion is not just a matter of inconvenience to those who are using the route as a means of getting from the village area around Grimston Hall by the shortest route. The issue is about the enjoyment of the route, even for recreational purposes. The RA would argue that a route which is altered so as to take abrupt changes of direction of such illogical and unnatural variety suffers a loss of character and function, which noticeably reduces its attraction as a recreational facility.

Photo 4.1 Crossing No 24 looking in both directions



Photo 4,2 Gun Lane Crossing looking in both directions



- 4.5 As it appears to the RA that there is little difference in the suitability between the two crossings and, if the aim of the applicants is to reduce the number of crossings, then the RA suggests this could be achieved by closing crossing No 24 and diverting footpath No. 29, from its junction with FP 30, southwards along the eastern side of the railway to join No 28 (re-classified as a Bridleway) at Gun Lane.
- 4.6 This would not only maintain the surface of the diverted route, by excluding usage of it by users other than pedestrians. It should be noted that the proposed, route (FP 30-BR 28) from the evidence on the ground, appears to be used already by walkers. The proposal would also largely preserve the integrity and purpose of the right of way affected.
- 4.7 The RA proposal would also eliminate the creation of a crossfield bridleway (FP 29) which would be subject to disturbance by farming activities.

5 Trimley St Martin Footpath No 1- Thorpe Common Footcrossing

- 5.1 This is a well used footpath, not only because it provides a direct access from the edge of a substantial residential area to the Orwell shore a short distance away, but, also, because it is part of the Stour and Orwell Walk section of the promoted walking route known as the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Path.
- 5.2 In order to improve conditions for users, we believe that the crossing at this location should be replaced by a footbridge. That would have the additional benefit for the rail authorities and for the local community by allowing for the removal of the existing

whistleboards. Such boards are cited by the applicants as being a major cause of disturbance.

5.3 If a footbridge is not acceptable to the applicants and/or Network Rail the RA urges that, consideration will be given to the provision of gates to replace the stiles that are presently in place there.

5.4 Further the RA urges that, should the application be successful then any structure affecting rights of way that are to be erected during and after the dualling of the Branch Line will comply with the spirit of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

6 Summary

6.1 Whilst fully aware of the dangers that can and do arise at rail line foot crossings the RA are not convinced that the applicant has made an incontrovertible case for the closure of the Croft Footcrossing and the consequential stopping up of Trimley St Martin Public Footpath No 8.

6.2 The RA commends their own proposal for the Gun Lane crossing.

6.3 The RA recommends the provision of a footbridge at Trimley St Martin FP No 1.