



31st January 2025

Rt Hon Heidi Alexander PC MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

ID 20038407

Dear Secretary of State

PROPOSED HINCKLEY RAIL FREIGHT INTERCHANGE

I am directed to write to you by my Council concerning the proposed Hinckley Rail Freight Interchange. You are currently considering the report of the Examining Authority following the Examination in Public. This letter constitutes my Council's response to the Applicant's comments on your predecessor's minded to decision letter following consideration of the Examining Authority's report.

My Parish Council notes the Applicant's comments and further representations. However, its view remains, as set out in my letter of 20 November to the former Secretary of State, Louise Haigh, that the proposal fails to meet the requirements of the National Networks National Policy Statement in a number of critical areas and the adverse impacts would outweigh any benefits as was detailed in my Council's evidence to the Examining Authority and at the Examination in Public, a view shared by the Examining Authority in its report. In particular, we question the degree to which this proposal would operate as a true rail interchange and deliver the modal shift claimed.

We also do not believe that the Applicant has adequately addressed all the concerns about impacts on the local road network including the issues of HGV traffic at Sapcote in its revised proposals.

The Applicant, in its comments, highlights its view that the benefits of this proposal outweigh the local impacts. We disagree. In that regard, in reaching a final decision, it should be acknowledged there is a significant difference between the public economic benefit accruing from the provision of rail freight interchange facilities and the private commercial benefit to the applicant alone. Indeed it is possible that greater public benefits would accrue if additional capacity were located in a more suitable location which had fewer local adverse impacts and could take greater advantage of economies of scale and opportunities for longer term increases in rail freight capacity.

The Applicant suggests in its comments that there is some sort of gratis benefit available to the public purse from some of the associated works that would take place as part of the scheme such as road improvements. This is pure spin. These developments would take place primarily to mitigate the anticipated adverse impacts on the surrounding area which would arise due to this proposal.

My Council accepts that the increased number of minutes projected with the additional trains may only add minutes to the downtime at the Narborough level crossing, using the Applicant's own figures. On a daily basis these still represent a significant percentage increase in the overall downtime which will mean an unacceptable increase in congestion and queue times through our village. We are still strongly of the view that this should be a factor in a refusal decision.

It also believes it to be invidious that the Applicant has been able to hide behind a National Rail policy statement to the effect that no intervention is needed until a level crossing barrier is down in excess of 45 minutes in any hour when a critical point is being reached at half that. Both National Rail and the Applicant consistently disregard the impacts on the local road network and community. My Council also strongly disagrees with the representations quoted by the Applicant on this point and attributed to Blaby District Council, that there are no additional impacts on our community. Such a view is not one which is fully rounded and does not take into account the full wider picture, including the evidence offered at the Examination in Public and is also at odds with the Examining Authority's conclusions.

In response to the particular issue of the Equalities Act, we note the Applicant's report and comments. My Council accepts that a duty that is phrased in terms of 'having due regard' does not dictate a particular outcome and recognises that the weight to be afforded to any additional disadvantage to those with protected characteristics is a matter for you as decision taker. Our comments are that, for many with ambulatory or other issues associated with advancing age, waiting facilities on the station some distance away are likely to be as frustrating as a wait at the level crossing barrier and fail to directly address the issue identified by the Examining Authority in a meaningful way. We note Network Rail's commitment to providing lifts when the line is electrified and would aim to keep its feet to the fire on that pledge. My Council would welcome confirmation of that from Network Rail and clarification of the likely time frame.

Finally, in its representations the Applicant has pressed for the opportunity to be able to comment on interested parties' comments made in response to its own submission. Effectively, it is asking to have the final word in this phase of the process. In the interests of natural justice, interested parties should have the same opportunity to comment on any further additional substantive issues that are raised by the Applicant, including any revisions to agreements with statutory bodies, after the 7 February deadline.

Copies of this letter go to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, given her overall responsibilities for the planning system, Alberto Costa MP, Gareth Leigh in your Department, the Chief Planning Officer of Blaby District Council and the Friends Of Narborough Station

Yours sincerely

J Whitehouse

Julie Whitehouse
Clerk, Narborough Parish Council