



The Local Council for Narborough and Littlethorpe

21 March 2022

Tritax Symmetry (Hinckley) Limited  
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Dear Sirs

#### **PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON A RAIL FREIGHT INTERCHANGE ON LAND SOUTH OF ELMESTHORPE**

The following is a response to the public consultation on the above proposal made on behalf of Narborough Parish Council. It summarises the Council's concerns about the proposed Rail Freight Interchange.

#### **About Narborough Parish**

The Parish of Narborough is situated to the south west of Leicester and three miles from Junction 21 of the M1. It is classed as a large village. The Parish itself comprises two discrete communities - Narborough and Littlethorpe - separated by the main Birmingham to Leicester rail line and the River Soar. The Parish had a population of 8,448 at the last census.

#### **Our interest in the proposal**

The main road which runs through Narborough and Littlethorpe crosses the main Birmingham to Leicester railway between the two villages where a level crossing is situated. This is the only level crossing on this main line railway route that runs through a built up area between Birmingham New Street and Peterborough. Whilst Narborough itself sits outside of the proposed Development Consent Order area, the Council's primary concern is about the impact additional rail traffic may have on the closure of the level crossing.

#### **General observations**

As a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, this application will be judged against the policy framework set out in the National Policy Statement for National Networks. Whilst the long term need for Rail Freight Interchange capacity is given in the Statement, this does not automatically mean that any and every application should be consented. There are a number of factors set out in the NPS which the Secretary of State will have to take into account in reaching a decision. Or put more simply, he will have to decide if this particular proposal is the most appropriate means of meeting that need for capacity. We believe that the nature and location of the proposal means that it fails a number of key tests.

The NPS states that strategic rail freight interchanges should have good rail and road connectivity and be located near the markets that they serve, advocates a network of large hubs which offer economies of scale, and operating efficiencies, offer the ability to handle increased capability in the longer term, and reduce community severance.

We are of the opinion that this proposal fails a number of these tests and that other locations are more suitable, offer greater opportunities for longer term expansion of capacity and would cause less disruption to communities and environmental impacts. For example, expansion of the existing RFIs in the area would avoid costly and extensive road improvements as the infrastructure to support those facilities is already in place. Added to this, the lack of refuge loops and sidings on the main Leicester to Birmingham track in this vicinity will be a limiting factor especially if planned passenger service improvements on that route are made.

### **Specific concerns**

As mentioned above, down time at the Narborough level crossing is a major problem; at peak times the main road route between Littlethorpe and Narborough can be closed for as much as 20 minutes or more in an hour with vehicles queued in both directions, the resultant congestion having an impact on air quality, journey time to Leicester and Coventry, access to services and local businesses. However it is not just a problem at peak times; the barrier can be down for significant periods outside of those times in the non peak daytime and evening. A recent survey found the barrier was down for an average of more than 16 minutes an hour. Planned increases in passenger rail services, other rail freight journeys (including proposals to bring HS2 spoil to Croft Quarry through Narborough by rail) and the inevitable increase in car journeys from additional housing in the area during the period covered by the next Blaby Local Plan will already exacerbate an unacceptable situation that both rail and highways bodies have ignored for too long. Some estimates suggest the impact of all these proposals in combination could double the existing closure times.

So why is the RFI proposal such a problem with a planned maximum of 12 additional closures of 2 minutes (a figure we dispute and which we believe to be over 6 minutes) with all but one outside of peak times ? Put simply, it will be the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back. We acknowledge that the issue with the level crossing is already an issue and not necessarily of Tritax Symmetry's making. However its proposals will make a difference and a significant one. Its proposals have not been assessed to include longer term and cumulative impacts in respect of this issue as the NPS requires or their impact in combination with other likely changes, nor are there any measures to avoid or compensate for adverse impacts or to reduce community severance. Again, we acknowledge that it is problematical to quantify air quality impacts as there is no baseline data as no monitoring currently takes place. The NPS requires the Secretary of State to consider air quality impacts over the wider area likely to be affected as well as in the near vicinity of the scheme and this should include Narborough and Littlethorpe and an assessment by the applicant should also cover this aspect.

### **Other concerns**

Narborough in common with other smaller local stations on the Birmingham to Leicester main route has narrower platforms than the bigger main line stations and is not currently connected to a voice warning system. Freight trains passing through the station at speed by virtue of their size would cause significant turbulence and a potential health and safety concern. Were this proposal to be consented, it should be a condition of any Development Consent Order that such voice warning systems be put in place.

We also consider that a development of this size presents greater opportunities for positive biodiversity measures and the aim of compensatory measures should be to deliver net gain for biodiversity rather than no net loss.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Narborough Parish Council cannot support this proposal and, once an application for a development consent order has been made, will make a formal and fuller representation to the Planning Inspectorate objecting to the proposal.

Yours faithfully

Julie Whitehouse (Mrs)  
Parish Clerk