

OBJ/106

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15th February 2010

Regarding The Chiltern Railways (Bicester to Oxford Improvements) Order

Dear Sir/Madam

My wife and I are writing as property owners adversely affected by this proposal, and wish to make our objections known to the Application. Quadrangle House comprises sixteen self-contained flats which directly border Network Rail land. Our particular flat, at the rear of the development, is situated about ten metres from the current position of the nearest rail of the Oxford to Bicester line.

Existing Damage:

The main problem we face is from excessive and dangerous vibration from heavy freight, though the increase in noise and emission pollution is also a massive consideration. Quadrangle House has already suffered significant structural damage due to heavy Amey Roadstone trains using the track, when last twinned, in the 1970's. This damage has manifested itself in the form of cracking throughout the first floor concrete patio slab (thereby breaching its waterproof membrane), cracking throughout horizontal concrete slabs at second floor level, cracking to supporting brick piers in the garage area, and misalignment of door and window frames. We have been informed the speed limit at the time was 40mph. Quadrangle House has suffered no further damage since the heavy Amey Roadstone trains ceased operation, however we do still suffer serious vibration when loaded goods trains pass the property with the line in its current, central location.

Proposal:

The Application proposes to re-twin the line between Oxford and Bicester to enable increased services to run on the line through to London as well as consideration for an East-West rail link. Through correspondence with Chiltern Railways we have been informed that the current speed limit for the line at our position is 30mph, and that this will remain the maximum speed limit for freight trains while passenger train speeds are scheduled to increase to between 70 and 75mph.

Impact/ Response:

This railway branch line was not built as an Oxford-London, high-speed main line, nor was it built as part of an East-West cross-country freight route.

This proposal will bring the nearest track to within around 8 metres of our bedroom windows and massively increase the amount of vibration and noise inflicted upon our building and us as residents respectively. We also believe that the application does not represent Quadrangle House accurately, nor do the measurements taken at King's Sutton reflect the likely impact the project will have on our property which is far closer to the track.

The unmitigated noise impact to this property is estimated to be "*substantial*" post-Phase 1, and "*high*" post-Phase 2. The proposed noise mitigation here is a noise barrier which is misguided at best as there are no ground floor flats in the part of the property nearest to the line. An acoustic fence would have to be 3 stories high to be of any real effect, and in so doing, would prevent most light from reaching our bedroom windows. Clearly alternative mitigation solutions, such as rail dampers, special resilient track forms and triple glazing, need to be explored here, especially as re-twinning the track will move it to under 10 metres from our property wall.

A set of points is currently to be located 150 yards to the north of Quadrangle House. These points will generate extra noise and emissions from breaking trains which will then idle only to accelerate away from our property. Since switch and crossings are intended to be located away from noise sensitive properties we believe these points should be relocated nearer to Oxford North Junction. We are likely to suffer anyway from increased emissions following this proposal as we are so close to the track and our property offers a sheltered position.

The Department for Transport published a document in September 2009 entitled 'Britain's Transport Infrastructure Strategic Rail Freight Network: The Longer Term Vision'. It is clear from this document that there is every intention to increase the freight usage of the UK railways. On page 15 of this document specific mention is made of the "*East-West Line (Oxford-Bedford)*" being earmarked for "*early capacity enhancement*" in order to "*meet industry growth forecasts*". This marks our section of track as what the Department for Transport call a "*core trunk freight route*". These intentions will lead to increased freight on this line, especially at night. It is important that all aspects of this document are taken into account before any decision or inquiry.

We consider the following requests essential to the safety and quality of life of all track-fronting properties and their residents along this route, and in particular Quadrangle House as this uniquely structured building is the closest residence to this line:

- We are asking for baseline measurements of vibration to be carried out at Quadrangle House as we do not believe that structural damage is "*highly unlikely*". This needs to happen before a Public Enquiry so that decisions about mitigation are well informed.
- We are asking that the inaccuracies about Quadrangle House be corrected (there are no ground floor flats at the rear, and the second floor flats have not been taken into account).
- We are asking for the speed limit for freight trains to be limited to 25mph, as they will potentially carry heavier weights than the freight trains that currently use this line and they will use the line more frequently with potentially more carriages.

- We are asking for the speed limit for passenger trains to be limited to 50mph between the Oxford North Junction and Water Eaton Parkway, which will only add a few minutes to the proposed journey times.
- We are asking that those be the statutory line speeds set and maintained by Network Rail, and that they be conditions on any Planning Consent. It is important for our own safety that they cannot be overridden by any parties in the future.
- Setting the above speed limits will mitigate noise, vibration and emissions to safe and acceptable levels for all residents at Quadrangle House in the cheapest and most effective way.
- We are asking that appropriate and effective mitigation for noise, vibration and emissions is provided through a Planning Condition attached to the Order. Both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the project, and the future intentions of the Strategic Rail Freight Network document, need to be taken into account when agreeing the nature of the mitigation offered. It is not good enough to wait until the design stage to make these decisions.
- We are asking that noise, vibration and emissions be closely monitored for a satisfactory period following the implementation of each stage of the scheme, and that any future developments in freight traffic and infrastructure be monitored for changes in noise, vibration and emissions at Quadrangle House.
- We are asking that the set of points currently to be located 150 yards to the north of Quadrangle House be relocated nearer to Oxford North Junction, away from noise sensitive properties.
- The Department for Transport's 'Britain's Transport Infrastructure Strategic Rail Freight Network' document also sets out the desire for a 7 day & 24 hour working network. We therefore ask for no additional freight at night as this is such a sensitive residential area.
- In addition, we would like some consideration given to the likely effect on property values should the Order be granted without sufficient mitigations in place.

So to sum up, we object to the proposal in its current form as it does not sufficiently take into account our specific residential circumstances. In order to preserve our property and quality of life we request that every possible effort be made to reduce the speed of trains to 25mph for freight and 50mph for passenger trains, that those be the statutory line speeds set and maintained by Network Rail, and that they be conditions on any Planning Consent. We ask that appropriate and effective mitigation for noise, vibration and emissions is provided through a Planning Condition attached to the Order, and that both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the project, and the future intentions of the Strategic Rail Freight Network document, be taken into account. We ask that all other funding and maintenance bodies (East-West Rail and Network Rail) will carry out and maintain such mitigation elements and that Quadrangle House be continually monitored and measured as the various stages of the proposal are implemented.

Kind regards,

Edwin & Leanne McClements