



SCRUTINY TOPIC REGISTRATION

Date:	6 th January 2019
Name of person proposing topic:	Cllr Dr David Willingham
Contact:	
Suggested title of topic:	Network Rail, GWR & British Transport Police
What is the issue that scrutiny needs to address?	
<p>The main line from Bristol to Birmingham passes through Cheltenham and the town is served by Cheltenham Spa Station. The tracks and infrastructure are managed by Network Rail, the station is operated by GWR and the policing responsibility lies with the British Transport Police (BTP).</p> <p>There is dissatisfaction with Network Rail's operations (specifically the contempt shown towards railways neighbours) and significant public concern about issues such as ticket pricing, commuter parking and communications about work at the Station. Discussing local Policing concerns with the BTP would be relevant to some of the anti-social behaviour issues.</p> <p>The specifics of the issues are as follows:</p> <p>1 Level Crossing Down-times</p> <p>There are three level crossings in Cheltenham that all experience excessive barrier down times. This causes various problems and we would like Network Rail and GWR to amend their operating procedures to reduce the impact on local people. I undertook some observations over several level crossing cycles, to measure the difference in the timings.</p> <p>At the Bozard Lane level crossing (automatic half barrier near Gotherington), the shortest safety margin was 15 seconds from the barriers being fully down to the train passing at high speed, and the longest total crossing cycle time for a single train was 70 seconds. I use this crossing reasonably often when cycling and its operational timing has negligible impact on traffic.</p> <p>At the Alstone Lane level crossing, the shortest safety margin was 80 seconds from the barriers being fully down to the train passing, and the longest total crossing cycle time for a single train was 150 seconds. At this crossing multiple trains seem to be very common, and the longest total down time I measured was 225 seconds for two trains, the crossing remaining down for three trains does occur. This has a severe impact on traffic at peak times. Traffic queues longer 300m are not uncommon in the westbound direction. This causes some drivers to ignore No Entry signs and drive the wrong way down Alstone Croft. It is also likely to have a detrimental impact on air quality in this area.</p> <p>At the Morris Hill level crossing (SO 938246) a single observation for a train had a total barrier down time of 185 seconds, had 14 vehicles + some pedestrians waiting and was almost causing tailbacks onto Wymans Lane. This was a Sunday and at peak times during the week, such down times can cause traffic disruption, especially if traffic queues back onto Wymans Lane. This crossing can also cause significant traffic issues.</p>	

At the Swindon Road level crossing (SO 939257) a single observation had a total barrier down time of 397 seconds for the first train, with the barriers being triggered a second time after less than 20 seconds and then being down for a further 210 seconds. In this case, the total barrier down time was over ten minutes. This route is also popular with cyclists wishing to avoid Hyde Lane, and barrier downtimes in excess of 180 seconds are quite common.

Whilst no-one would disagree that level crossing safety must be paramount, and level crossings in urban areas are full-barrier and may need more than a 15 second safety margin, waiting over six minutes for a train can only be described as excessive. It is believed that these problems are exacerbated by departure management procedures at Cheltenham Spa Station, and a lack of consideration for railway neighbours in the operation of these level crossings.

2 Litter

Litter is a problem in any urban area where the railway is adjacent to or crossed by publically accessible areas. Areas of concern include the tracks around the following overbridges:

Swindon Road OB

Tewkesbury Road OB

Arle Road OB

Lansdown Road OB

Hatherley Lane OB

The Cloddymore Foot Bridge (linking Draycot Rd to Hatherley Rd)

The Hatherley Crossing (where Up Hatherley Footpath 12 crosses the railway)

Litter is also a problem where roads or paths are parallel to the railway line:

Cheltenham Footpath 11 – linking Hatherley Lane near Hatherley Lane OB to Nettleton Rd

Cheltenham Footpath 91 – Behind Reddings Park and Farrington Road

Lane to northwest of Arle Road Bridge – behind Graduate Court and Tutor Court.

Litter is an issue at the Alstone Lane level crossing.

It is recognised that clearing litter from the railway presents some challenges and there may be opportunities for CBC to work with Network Rail to get litterbins installed at some locations to try to mitigate some of these issues.

3 Drugs, dead land and unauthorised access

There is at least one site I know of where Network Rail land is used by drug addicts for the injection of Heroin. This is evidenced by needles, syringes and other drugs-related paraphernalia being visible on the land. With issues such as the contamination of Heroin with more powerful synthetic opiates such as Fentanyl, there are multiple risks to addicts, railway staff and the operation of the railway.

Area affected is where the railway line crosses the River Chelt: This will be approximately BAG2 85m 77ch. At this location, repeated successful attempts have been made by drug users to damage the fence and enter the secluded operational Network Rail land. Resolving this may require co-operation with the BTP and Gloucestershire Police as well as looking at whether the vegetation needs to be cleared so that trespassers are visible. There are serious, potentially fatal issues caused by intoxicated drug users on operational railway land.

In some cases, reports of damaged fencing that allow the public to access operational railway land, have not been promptly acted upon by Network Rail.

4 Vegetation

Issues with vegetation from Network Rail land causing problems to local residents or obstructing paths that cross or are parallel to the railway are common throughout the area. I know from letters sent to "Railway neighbours" that a scheduled clearance program is in operation. However, concerns have been raised that reactive responses to issues raised by local residents, local councillors or the council are lacking. In some cases, narrow pavements are completely obstructed by vegetation and this leads to pedestrians being endangered.

5 Parking / transport to & from the Station

Work is being done to improve parking at the Station. However, ward councillors have not been kept informed of this. Commuter parking remains a problem in several areas around the station and at certain times of the day, there are reports of "parking rage" occurring at the station.

What do you feel could be achieved by a scrutiny review (outcomes)

I believe that O&S should request representatives from Network Rail, GWR and the BTP to attend a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny or a specially constituted O&S sub-committee. This will allow questions to be asked from the committee, from ward members with the railway in the ward they represent and from the public. It would hold these organisation to account, and may identify ways to improve the above issues for the residents we represent.

If there a strict time constraint?	No
Is the topic important to the people of Cheltenham?	Yes
Does the topic involve a poorly performing service or high public dissatisfaction with a service?	Yes
Is it related to the Council's corporate objectives?	Not known

Any other comments:

I have tried engaging with Network Rail on the ward specific issues, but without much success.

This may be something more suitable for a stand-alone or pre-council session rather than part of an O&S meeting.

The wards affected by railway land are: Benhall & the Reddings, Lansdown, Park, St Mark's, St Peter's, Swindon Village, Warden Hill and Up Hatherley.