

Notes from a Meeting held with representatives of Network Rail, Shropshire Council and Wem Town Council held on Tuesday 16th October 2018 at 11.00 a.m.in the Roden Suite, Edinburgh House, New Street, Wem.

Present:-

Wem Town Council - Penny O'Hagan

Shropshire Councillor for Wem – Chris Mellings

Shropshire Council - Cllr Steve Davenport, Victoria Doran, David Gradwell, Matt Johnson

Network Rail - Christine Booth, Rebecca Heeley.

Chris Mellings welcomed everyone to the meeting which was called to discuss recent issues with the level crossing and to discuss the data arising out of the census carried out by Network Rail in February 2018.

Incidents

Christine explained that the recent issue when the level crossing barrier was down for a considerable amount of time was exacerbated because the most local Mobile Operation Manager (MOM) who was able to deal with the fault caused by an issue with the axel counters was based in Hereford and it took over 1 hour 40 minutes for them to reach Wem. By the time the unit was able to reach Wem the town was blocked with traffic. She explained that the Hereford team had also not been made aware that the crossing had been affected. All agreed that this situation was not acceptable and Christine reported that she had recently put in a request for a new post to be created which would enable a MOM unit to be located in Shrewsbury 24/7 so if this was to happen again the response time would be reduced to a maximum of 30 minutes.

Cllr Davenport asked whether a formal diversion route could be signposted for traffic to use if the level crossing was down for a considerable amount of time again. Matt Johnson suggested that a diversion could be added to the Elgin App that was currently in development.

Christine also explained that Wem level crossing is the safest of its type and there would be no plans to change it for over 20 years.

A discussion took place on whether Network Rail would be looking to move the station in the future and Christine responded that she was not aware of any plans to do this. It was explained that as Shropshire Council was undergoing a Local Development Review and it would be useful if Network Rail responded to this with any future plans they may have with regard to the station to ensure that potential land that could be used for a new station was not used for housing. Christine also suggested that the Long-Term Strategy was updated as the last one was completed in 2014.

Communication

As it was clear that there are no plans to change the level crossing all present recognised the need to improve communication with residents over the level crossing and train station. A number of suggestions were made including

- Issuing a press release explaining the background to the recent incident when the barrier was down for a considerable period of time.

- Network Rail to compile a six-monthly incident report that is sent to the Town Council to monitor
- Listen to the views of local people and improve communication with the community by holding an information session for the public at Wem Town Hall.
- Restart the Road Rail Partnership Meetings for the area so that there is a mechanism to feed concerns directly to Network Rail through this forum

Census data

The data from the census undertaken in February 2018 was considered and it was recognised that whilst Wem Level Crossing was not the busiest crossing on the network, level crossing failures had a huge impact on traffic flow through the town.

Christine highlighted that she had concerns over the number of blocking back incidents that had occurred during the census period (where a car is stopped on the hatched yellow lines) and reported that this was an exceptionally high number in relation to the amount of vehicles using the crossing and a very dangerous thing for drivers to do.

A discussion took place on whether the road junction could be changed to give priority to vehicles travelling from town and turning right into Aston Road as this could reduce this problem significantly. Victoria Doran indicated that they could look into running a trial to see whether this would improve matters or create additional problems however this would be subject to budgets being available.

It was agreed that as the blocking back levels were so high there was a need for both an education and enforcement campaign on this issue and Network Rail agreed to address this as soon as possible.

Meeting ended at 12.00