

Woburn Sands Footpath Closure - Q&A

Woburn Sands footpath level crossing closure

I am writing to notify you of the closure of the Woburn Sands footpath crossing on Monday 24 August 2020.

In February 2020 the Secretary of State granted the Transport and Works Act Order for the Network Rail East West Rail Bicester to Bedford improvements.

This followed several years of development work that included rounds of consultation and a public inquiry. The Order gives authority to close the unprotected footpath crossing in Woburn Sands and divert pedestrians to the existing alternative crossing on Newport Road.

I have provided further information in the form of a Q&A below.

What's happening?

The footpath crossing that connects Cranfield Road and Woburn Skate Park will be closed on Monday 24 August 2020.

As part of a Transport & Works Act Order, powers were requested to close the unprotected footpath level crossing on safety grounds. The closure of the footpath crossing, and subsequent changes were discussed at length during consultation in 2018 and evidence both supporting and objecting to the closure was heard at Public Inquiry between February – April 2019.

A Government Inspector, appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport, considered all the evidence and he made his recommendation to the Secretary of State that the powers sought by Network Rail to close the unprotected footpath level crossing, should be granted as requested.

Their recommendation did not include alterations or improvements to Newport Road crossing.

Why are you closing the footpath crossing?

The footpath level crossing is high risk and unprotected which means the user must look and listen out for approaching trains and consider whether it is safe to cross.

We have a legal duty in health and safety legislation to, so far as reasonably practicable, not expose our passengers, the public or our workforce to risk at our level crossings.

There have been seven reported incidents of misuse in the past two years on the footpath crossing.

Closing level crossings is the only way to fully remove the risk and sometimes we need to do that, even if it has an impact on the community they serve.

Using the automatic barrier crossing on Newport Road, which protects users and will not allow pedestrians to cross when there is train approaching, is a safer alternative that keeps the local community connected in Woburn Sands.

This closure also takes into account future improvements between Bedford and Bletchley as part of the East West Rail project.

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Are there any improvements being made to Newport Road level crossing?

We regularly monitor and maintain the barriered crossing on Newport Road and it is in good condition.

The Government Inspector and Secretary of State agreed insufficient evidence was presented at the Public Inquiry to show the use of the alternative route justified any change to the powers requested in the Order, and no improvements to the level crossing or alternative route need to be made.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us on our National Helpline on 03457 11 41 41. This number is available 24 hours a day.

I'd like to take this opportunity to also thank you for your cooperation throughout consultation.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "V. Blenkiron".

Vikky Blenkiron
Community Relations Executive