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21 July 2020

Stephen Barclay MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Barclay,

Emergency works on the line between Ely and Peterborough

I am writing to inform you about a series of emergency works that Network Rail and its contractor Taziker will be carrying out on the line between Ely and Peterborough later this summer and early autumn. This will require closures of the line over a number of weekends and Sundays in August, October and November and a 28-day full closure in September and October. I recognise will cause significant disruption to passengers, so I'm writing to explain why this work is now required.

Following the derailment of a freight train on a wheel-timber bridge at Wanstead Park in east London earlier this year, we prioritised additional inspections on railway bridges with softwood timbers using a new piece of technology – a timber density probe, which helps us to better understand the internal condition of the timbers.

The four bridges at Manea were part of this additional inspection programme and as a result we found that 87 pairs of wheel timbers across the structures – which span four separate rivers and channels in the area – had deteriorated faster than expected, and now require urgent replacement.

There are currently 20 miles per hour speed restrictions over these bridges to enable the safe passage of trains, and this will continue until the work begins. However, if these timbers are not replaced soon, it is almost certain that further deterioration will occur. This would then lead to either additional speed restrictions or ultimately the closure of the line, significantly disrupting both passenger and freight customers. As a result this work must take place as soon as possible.

In considering timings for this work, the Manea bridges are in an area designated as a site of special scientific interest (SSSI), which is controlled by Natural England (NE). NE will only provide access for railway renewals works between July and October, and therefore the work has to take place in the coming months.

Following discussions with train and freight operators, the work is expected to be completed during a 28-day closure of the line from 6 September to 4 October 2020 and on the following weekends:

- Sunday 2 August
- Saturday 22 to Sunday 23 August
- Sunday 11 October
- Saturday 31 October to Sunday 1 November
- Sunday 8 November