EIA Quality Mark Case Study

Felixstowe Branch Line Improvements – Level Crossings Closure

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<th>Key Issues</th>
<th>Purpose of the project</th>
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<td>Port of Felixstowe was granted a Transport and Works Act Order for doubling the Felixstowe Branch Line in 2008, subsequently updated in 2014. With Network Rail managing the transfer of powers from the Port of Felixstowe, the scheme delivery was constrained by the requirement to commence works within the timeframe of the compulsory purchase powers by July 2019. As the feasibility and scheme development of the branch line progressed, and budget and operating requirements were confirmed, the extent of track doubling of the Felixstowe Line was reduced to a 1.4km section at Trimley. This alteration in scope, as well as change in level crossing guidance, resulted in the additional requirement of permanently closing six Public Right of Way (PRoW) level crossings, and provision of an alternative crossing; powers for which were not granted within the existing TWAO for the Capacity Enhancement. To meet the programme for the extant TWAO works, a further TWAO application had to be submitted within seven months with an accompanying Environmental Statement. Hence a streamlined and proportionate approach to the EIA had to be adopted to meet the required project timescales.</td>
<td>The Felixstowe Branch Line serves the Port of Felixstowe, which is the largest container port in the UK. There are ambitions to grow and increase the capacity of the Port of Felixstowe. Network Rail is planning to build an additional track to increase the capacity of the line from 33 freight trains per day to up to 47 freight trains per day to support this ambition. A Transport and Works Act Order has been granted for this Capacity Enhancement, including upgrading four existing highway level crossings between Westerfield and Trimley, as well as signalling and rail systems modifications to support these works. The proposed works under the EIA for the Line Improvements Order comprises the closure of additional six level crossings, installation of a bridleway bridge and diversions/ upgrades to the Public Right of Way (PRoW) network to facilitate the consented Felixstowe track doubling scheme.</td>
<td>The proposed works lie between Trimley St. Martin and Trimley St. Mary within Suffolk Coastal District Council. A bridleway bridge with a steel structure across the railway will be provided at the location of Gun Lane level crossing, with ramps to facilitate equestrian use and access for cycles, pushchairs and wheelchairs, as well as steps up to the bridge. With the level crossing closures and the bridleway bridge providing an alternative crossing route, the existing PRoW network will be reconfigured to maintain access to local amenities and make provision for leisure purposes. In addition, Network Rail has committed to landscape restoration consisting of woodland, hedgerows, scrub and ground flora, to provide visual screening of the proposed bridge. Landscape restoration will also provide compensation for the habitat lost due to the construction of the bridge.</td>
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EIA Learning Outcomes
Lessons learnt

The following key lessons were learnt for streamlining EIA delivery and producing a proportionate Environmental Statement:

- **Identification of milestones:** to help ensure timely delivery of details confirming assumptions for use in various EIA technical assessments, the project programme identified clear dates by which baseline data and design form, massing and construction methods had to be identified and provided to the relevant environmental team.

- **Delivering activities in parallel:** The EIA Scoping Report was developed concurrently with commencement of baseline data collation and environmental impact assessment. To de-risk this concurrent approach, the programme for the submission of the TWAO was scheduled with sufficient lag from receipt of the Scoping Opinion to accommodate any clarifications or additional assessment. Pre-submission stakeholder engagement and consultation was programmed early, to discuss likely scoping responses prior to the statutory response period, so that key considerations could be accommodated in the assessments as early as possible. In addition, a consolidated mitigation and control measure regime with the extant TWAO capacity works was developed. The assessments in relation to noise, air quality and the water environment were scoped out, as approved by Secretary of State, due to the nature of the proposed works and lack of nearby sensitive receptors. This was accomplished by demonstrating the planning authority and statutory stakeholders that these topics could be dealt with effectively through the implementation of standard best practices during construction and the incorporation of best practice measures in design. By developing a combined mitigation and control measure regime, cumulative effects of the two schemes were also effectively managed and reduced. Advance environmental mitigation and compensation works, such as ecological licence works and archaeological investigations, will commence prior to the resolution of the TWAO application.

Lessons learnt continued

- **Using assumed baseline to meet key deliverable dates:** The EIA programme ran from August to March so the TWAO delivery programme fell outside many of the seasonal ecological survey windows. To overcome this, an assumed ecological baseline was agreed with the client, planning authority and Natural England. Where there was potential for the presence of protected species, the worst-case scenario that these species were present was assumed. To mitigate risk and potential delay to project programme, Natural England and the planning authority were consulted to agree a commitment to complete the survey effort and finalise mitigation measures after the TWAO was submitted. This helped to ensure the timely submission of the TWAO and ensured that determination of the Order and construction programme would not be delayed by a year to accommodate ecology surveys. Following completion of the surveys in the suitable season, an End of Survey report was submitted to the local planning authority and Natural England, outlining the results and verifying the appropriate mitigation and consenting strategy.

- **Accelerated assurance:** A rolling review process was established with concurrent client and legal review periods, providing consolidated comments for final edits by each technical lead. In the final completion of the ES and supporting documents, the EIA lead and TWAO manager consolidated the review of all topics into a final page-turn exercise. This reduced the overall review period from ten to five weeks.

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