



Meeting of the West Sussex Local Access Forum Wednesday 23 April 2025

A meeting of the West Sussex Local Access Forum (WSLAF) was held at **10.30am**
Wednesday 23 April 2025, at County Hall, West Street, Chichester.

Minutes (Confirmed)

Present

Graham Elvey (GE) – Chairman
Tricia Butcher (TB)
Monica Collingham (MC)
Phil Miles (PM)

Carol Montgomery (CM)
Roy Allen (RA)
David Purcell (DP)

WSCC Officers

Neil Vigar (NV) - Interim Forum Officer, WSCC
Steve Alexander (SA) – Access Ranger Area 6
Lucy Watkis (LW) – Business Admin Scribe

Network Rail

Leyla Amir-Alikhani (LA)
Ormus Khan (OK)

1. Apologies and welcomes

- i. GE opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees and introduced Leyla Amir-Alikhani (LA) and Ormus Khan (OK) from Network Rail (NR) as guest speakers. Leyla provided a brief introduction of their roles within NR and expressed her gratitude for being invited to the meeting. Both Leyla and Ormus were warmly welcomed by the group.
- ii. NV introduced LW, who was taking minutes at the meeting and SA who has been appointed as Senior Access Ranger and Forum Officer.
- iii. Apologies were received from Geoff Farrell, Nicola Beard, David Green and Andrew Baldwin

2. Minutes of the Forum

a) Minutes of the formal meeting of 30 October 2024

- i. The minutes of the formal meeting held on 30 October 2024 were approved as correct.
- ii. Items relating to actions and matters arising are either on the agenda or had been completed.

b) Minutes of the informal meeting of 5 February 2025

Items relating to actions and matters arising are either on the agenda or had been completed other than:

- Item 10 - WSCC Rights of Way Management Plan 2018-2028 – DP raised that the words 'Annual Report' should read 'Management Plan', this was agreed.

Action – GE to amend and circulate

3. **Any urgent matters to be considered not on the agenda**

No urgent items raised.

4. **Network Rail**

LA and OK delivered a presentation to provide a comprehensive overview of level crossing safety. The presentation focused on current safety measures, the challenges associated with managing crossings on an aging rail network, and Network Rail (NR)'s future plans concerning public rights of way and infrastructure improvements.

LA began by outlining the company's overarching safety vision. She highlighted NR's commitment to protecting public safety across the rail network, encapsulated in their core motto: "Everyone home safe, every day." This guiding principle underpins all of NR's operations and safety investments.

The Nature of the Rail Network

A large portion of the UK's railway infrastructure dates back to the 1800s. Since then, many of these once-isolated railways have evolved to intersect with increasingly populated urban and suburban areas. Today, tracks run through a mix of busy towns, quiet rural communities, and densely populated residential areas, significantly increasing the interaction between the public and the railway system.

Currently, there are over 6,000 level crossings throughout the UK. Each one presents its own set of challenges and safety considerations. Managing such a vast and diverse network requires careful planning, prioritisation, and significant financial investment.

Safety Statistics and Concerns

Statistics covering the period from March 2023 to April 2024, were shared, highlighting the ongoing risks associated with level crossings:

- 426 near-miss incidents involving pedestrians.
- 56 near-miss incidents involving vehicles.
- 2 recorded fatalities at crossings during this period (accidents not suicide).

These incidents were often the result of users misjudging train distances or ignoring warning signs and signals. CCTV footage was shown to attendees to evidence real-life examples of the public misusing crossings — including individuals running across barriers or walking in front of oncoming trains and stopping to take photos.

NR emphasised that safety breaches are not isolated and that educating the public of crossing dangers is vital in addressing this issue. They highlighted the importance of community outreach and awareness campaigns.

Investment and Safety Measures

Since 2009, NR has invested over £200 million in safety upgrades aimed at reducing risk and improving accessibility. These improvements include:

- Building stepped and ramped bridges to go over level crossings, (ramped are more costly therefore are not as widely used due to budget constraints).
- Installing Miniature Stop Light (MSL) systems where appropriate.
- Enhancing signage to clearly communicate risks to crossing users.

- Using whistle boards, barriers, warning light, and audible alarms to alert pedestrians and drivers.
- Identifying and promoting safer diversion routes as alternatives to at-risk crossings.

NR highlighted that safety campaigns are also delivered to schools to educate young people on the dangers posed by railway crossings. Children are seen as a high-risk group due to their limited experience and higher likelihood of distraction – i.e. use of headphones, not wanting to wait, playing on the tracks etc.

Crossing Risk Assessment Procedures

Each level crossing in the network undergoes a Narrative Risk Assessment (NRA), which is updated periodically by a Level Crossing Manager. These assessments are holistic and include:

- A 7 to 10-day census to record usage patterns and determine user types and volumes.
- Analysis of environmental factors, such as visibility, weather conditions, and surrounding infrastructure.
- Evaluation of signage, lighting, telephone systems, and existing safety measures.
- User demographic profiling, including elderly individuals, children, people with mobility impairments, and horse riders.

If an incident — including a near miss, injury, or fatality — occurs, a new assessment is immediately triggered. NR managers from the region collectively review these assessments on a monthly basis to ensure consistency and identify priorities.

Mitigation strategies could include maintaining the current setup if deemed safe, improving signage, installing barriers, creating a diversion, or in extreme cases, initiating an extinguishment of the right of way.

Public Rights of Way and Legal Considerations

NR emphasised their respect for PROW and reassured attendees that extinguishments are only considered as a last resort. Their preference is to implement mitigation infrastructure wherever feasible to preserve access.

Three main legislative tools are used in relation to crossings:

- Section 118A Highways Act 1980 – Used to create safe diversions.
- Section 119A Highways Act 1980 – Used for extinguishments when no safe alternative exists.
- Section 120A Highways Act 1980 – Rarely used; applies to cases that require escalation due to unresolved issues over a prolonged period. (3 in total)

Consultation Process

In response to questions about community involvement, NR explained that statutory consultations occur after applications are formally submitted to the local authority. However, NR routinely carries out informal consultations beforehand. These include:

- Contacting Public Rights of Way teams.
- Engaging with the stakeholders including Ramblers Association.
- Consulting local Parish Councils.

Stakeholders were informed that members of the public or authorities can request a copy of the Narrative Risk Assessment via email to better understand the reasoning behind closures or diversions.

Issues Raised by Attendees - Equestrian Users

Concerns were raised about bridle path users, particularly the inconvenience and safety risk of dismounting to use phones at crossings. Specific concerns included:

- The short length of phone leads.
- Hinged phone box designs that hinder use.
- Loss of control over horses while dismounted.

LA confirmed she would relay these concerns to relevant teams within NR for consideration.

Transparency in Decision Making

LA encouraged stakeholders to submit requests for NRA reports and confirmed that NR is open to improving how information is communicated.

Disparity in Infrastructure

A question was raised about why some crossings lack any safety measures while others are highly equipped. LA responded:

Crossings are assessed individually. If sightlines are clear and usage is low, additional infrastructure may not be justified.

Some crossings may not have the physical space or conditions needed to support additional safety infrastructure.

MSL systems require signal workforce co-ordination and carry significant installation costs.

Infrastructure Cost Analysis

NR provided indicative costs:

- Miniature Stop Light (MSL): £400,000
- Stepped bridge: £1.5 million
- Ramped bridge: £3.5 million

Decisions are made based on historic incident data, projected usage, and cost-effectiveness models. In some cases, developer contributions (S106 funding) are used to support infrastructure changes. Budget limitations are a significant consideration when evaluating the available options.

Planning & Development Pressures

NR often learn of planning applications which involve housing developments and/or new schools that increase usage at existing crossings. They stated that:

- NR should be notified early in the planning process to request necessary safety measures.
- Applications may come from councils or developers directly.
- Occasionally, NR is not informed of such developments and must react retrospectively.

WSCC Feedback

NV discussed the process they follow before issuing Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTROs) for crossing closures. He requested more detailed information from NR on specific risk factors to aid in public messaging and reduce complaints.

NV also suggested a 5-year strategic plan from NR, to help local authorities engage with upcoming changes in advance, helping to elevate some of the public complaints received.

Updates - Footpath 323, Western Farm at Barnham

DP requested an update on a longstanding proposal from three years prior. NR responded that the case is still under active consideration and developer approval for new bridges is pending.

Cox's Farm Level Crossing

NR described this location as high risk, with trains frequently stopping for extended periods at a fixed signal. Pedestrians often assume it is safe to cross and walk around stationary trains — unaware that another train may be approaching on the opposite track.

Mitigation through infrastructure was explored but whistle boards and lights were deemed unfeasible.

Two diversion routes were proposed:

- One was rejected by the Ramblers Association.
- The other faced objections over accessibility and antisocial behaviour.

As no viable alternative remains, an extinguishment is being seriously considered. NR reiterated this would only proceed after exhausting all options and is not the preferred outcome.

Attendees thanked NR staff for attending and requested a copy of the PowerPoint which was presented.

Action – LA to send a copy of the National Rail PowerPoint to NV to circulate with meeting minutes.

5. Consultations and Advice

a) Current consultations

Chichester District Council Local Plan examination - main modifications consultation - Closing date 29 May 2025. Deadline for comments to GE is 19 May 2025.

b) Consultation responses, advice given

Members noted the responses sent since the last formal meeting:

- i. Hassocks consultation to upgrade footpaths 5K, 11K & 60Bh - WSCC
- ii. A24 Horsham to Dorking Corridor Feasibility Study - WSCC
- iii. Proposed AT Schemes in Crawley, Chichester and Horsham - WSCC
- iv. Cox's Farm Barnham Path Closure/Diversion - National Rail (NR)
- v. SDNP Local Plan Review - SDNPA

6. **WSLAF Matters**

a) **Website including members interests**

- i. **Website** - NV feedback that he requested the website to be updated on Friday 18th and is expecting it to go live within a few days.
- ii. **Members Interests** – Local Access Forum – Updates and Discussion board

The new community SharePoint site for Local Access Forums has been set up, but GE currently has not got access and will share details when he hears back. NV noted that he had contacted them and was granted access quickly. The homepage of the site looks useful, and it also features a group chat feature.

b) **WSLAF Support**

SA has successfully secured a new role as a Senior Access Ranger therefore he will now be taking over Jane's role as Forum officer. SA will continue overseeing area 6 until the role has been successfully filled.

c) **Ranger Recruitment**

- i. NV informed the group that Nigel Bird has secured a new role within Active Travel therefore PRow is looking to recruit both his role and Steve's. Interviews were conducted yesterday for both positions (Access Ranger Area 5 and Access Ranger Area 6) and NV will update the group once decisions have been finalised.
- ii. Lysianne Dallen has increased her hours to 0.8 to now cover both Area 3a & 3b.

d) **Members Priorities – Future Agenda Suggestions**

Members were invited to suggest any topics, individuals, or groups they would like to see included in future meetings. One suggestion was Level Road, which was noted as a successful case and could be worth revisiting. Members are encouraged to share any relevant contacts or ideas. Suggestions can also include topical issues or matters arising from members' other areas of interest.

7. **General Report**

The general report was noted.

8. **Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman**

NV took control of the meeting.

When invited there was no interest from members to put themselves forward for the role of Charman or Vice-Chairman. GE was asked if he was willing to re-stand as Chairman, which he was but commented that he would like to step down at some point. He was unanimously voted in. Members thanked him for his continued involvement in this capacity. No-one was prepared to stand as Vice-Chairman, although MC agreed to proof-read documents as required.

Control of the meeting was handed back to GE.

9. **AOB**

NV reported that Sussex is undergoing changes related to devolution, but it remains unclear how these changes will ultimately be structured. Strategically, the Chief

Executive and Leader of the Council are leading key discussions. NV anticipates Public Rights of Way (PRoW) to remain under the control of the unitary authority responsible for West Sussex.

In response to TB's question about whether these changes would affect parish councils, NV clarified that only District and County Councils are involved in the proposed merger, and Parish Councils will not be affected.

CM sought advice regarding a neighbour who appears to have converted a field into a cricket pitch, which is crossed by a public right of way. This has resulted in the path being obstructed, forcing the public to walk around the edge of the field. It isn't clear whether this constitutes a Change of Use in planning terms. NV advised that guidance should be sought from the Planning authority. SA suggested CM ask the neighbour if he knew it was a footpath and its legal status.

Date of next meetings:

- **Informal:** Wednesday 9 July 2025 - Horsham
- **Formal:** Wednesday 15 October 2025 – Horsham