

December 2014

Dear Ed Vaizey MP,

Network Rail's Great Western Electrification Programme has already caused huge cost and disruption to families and businesses in Oxfordshire.

The next phase – a 10 month bridge replacement at Steventon - has the potential to do even more long-term damage.

You have said that you cannot prevent these works.

However we ask that you intervene to delay them, at least until the case for demolition is proven beyond doubt. If the bridge must be demolished, we also ask that the proposed bridge is redesigned to allow for four tracks to be installed without further disruption to Steventon High Street.

A delay is required to the Steventon works to allow for works to the adjacent A34 to be completed. We are told that important road works to Milton Interchange and to improve drainage on the A34 cannot be delayed because they are dependent on government funding that will be withdrawn if the works are not undertaken by the end of this parliament.

However we have grave concerns about cumulative impact of the works on the A34 and closing Steventon High Street at the same time. These concerns were raised vociferously and repeatedly at a public meeting at Steventon Village Hall on 11<sup>th</sup> November. Yet the community did not receive satisfactory answers and your recent statement fails to adequately address this issue. With the A34 sporadically down to one lane until May many people will be looking to use Steventon and will get stuck, and what happens if there is a breakdown or accident that closes the remaining carriageway?

A delay to the bridge works is the only way to ensure that this part of Oxfordshire does not grind to a complete standstill. Traffic meltdown will cost our local economy and cause stress and disruption.

Further, we accept the need to invest in our infrastructure, but we should invest for the long-term. We believe that given the economic and population growth expected, the future for transport in Oxfordshire must include opening up the railway to services from Challow, Grove, Steventon and Milton. To do this effectively and efficiently the bridge at Steventon should be big enough to accommodate a quadrupling of the railway. By not doing so, the current design of the bridge may find itself in need of replacement when investment to increase rail capacity finally comes to Oxfordshire. If the road is to be closed for 10 months, let's ensure it doesn't have to happen again.

At a local level we have worked extremely hard to prevent and limit the damage of these painful road closures, closures that bring no benefit whatsoever to the communities they disrupt. If the Steventon works were delayed, and a forward-looking solution was proposed it would be a step towards a sensible compromise.

We read your statement on your inability to prevent the works with disappointment. We ask that you redouble your efforts to persuade Network Rail, Highways Agency and Oxfordshire County

Council to agree a sensible delay and a sustainable design to minimise the cumulative and long-term impacts on our communities.

Yours faithfully,

Alex Meredith  
Faringdon Town Councillor

Robert Green  
Steventon Parish Council

Julie Maberley  
Wantage and Grove Campaign Group

Richard Williams  
Drayton Parish Council