8.4 London Road level crossing, Bicester

East West Rail services would travel over the existing level crossing on London Road, Bicester.

Figure 11: London Road level crossing

At the route update announcement, we set out how we are trying to address several competing priorities in relation to the London Road level crossing.

We highlighted that:

- We recognise the importance of connectivity in Bicester.
- The barriers are currently down for approximately 10 minutes per hour while trains are running.
- With the addition of East West Rail services, the barriers would need to be down for much more time, resulting in significantly increased waiting times for people.

- The potential for traffic congestion would therefore increase, and there would be a significant safety risk due to potential misuse of the crossing.
- There are challenges with replacing the crossing with a road bridge: the significant visual impact on the town, the difficulty of its construction and high cost.

Noting these challenges, we said we were continuing to investigate ways to maintain connectivity for pedestrians and motorists, including carrying out a further level crossing risk assessment, an assessment of the amount of time the barriers would need to be down and traffic modelling.

Our further analysis has confirmed that, with four East West Rail trains per hour in each direction in addition to existing services, the minimum barrier down time at the level crossing would likely exceed 32 minutes per hour. This would create several significant issues:

- The waiting times for pedestrians, motorists and other users would not be acceptable as London Road would be closed for the majority of each hour during the day.
- There would be a significant impact on the build-up of traffic to the north and south of the crossing, with queuing expected to back up to Market Square and the A41/A4421 roundabout respectively. Our assessments indicate that the amount of queuing traffic would double.
- As a result of the increased waiting times, the potential for misuse of the crossing would also increase, raising safety concerns if the crossing is left open.
- The risk of people dying or being injured at the crossing would increase by more than 300%. This is based on an assessment using a model known as the Fatalities and Weighted Injuries score.

Public safety is paramount. We have given this matter careful consideration and our assessment is that the safety risk to the public would be unacceptably high and therefore the London Road crossing would need to be closed.

We have considered whether the crossing could remain open to local traffic only. Our assessment is that it would not be practical to restrict access to local traffic only, as London Road is used by motorists from the wider area. It is a through route, so any restriction would be difficult to enforce.

Road bridge options

We recognise the importance of maintaining good connectivity in Bicester and we have looked at options to create a new vehicle crossing. We have considered two road bridge options:

- A new bridge adjacent to the existing level crossing. This would be a very large structure – twice as high as other structures in the vicinity – that would have a significant visual impact, especially for nearby residents and local businesses.

- A location at Gavray Drive, which is away from the crossing and would require demolition of several commercial premises on the retail park off Launton Road, Lidl and Wickes. It would also jeopardise the proposed development of 300 residential properties and may lead to increased traffic on less suitable residential roads.

We found that neither option provided a material time-saving to people's journeys compared to using alternative routes.

Existing road diversions

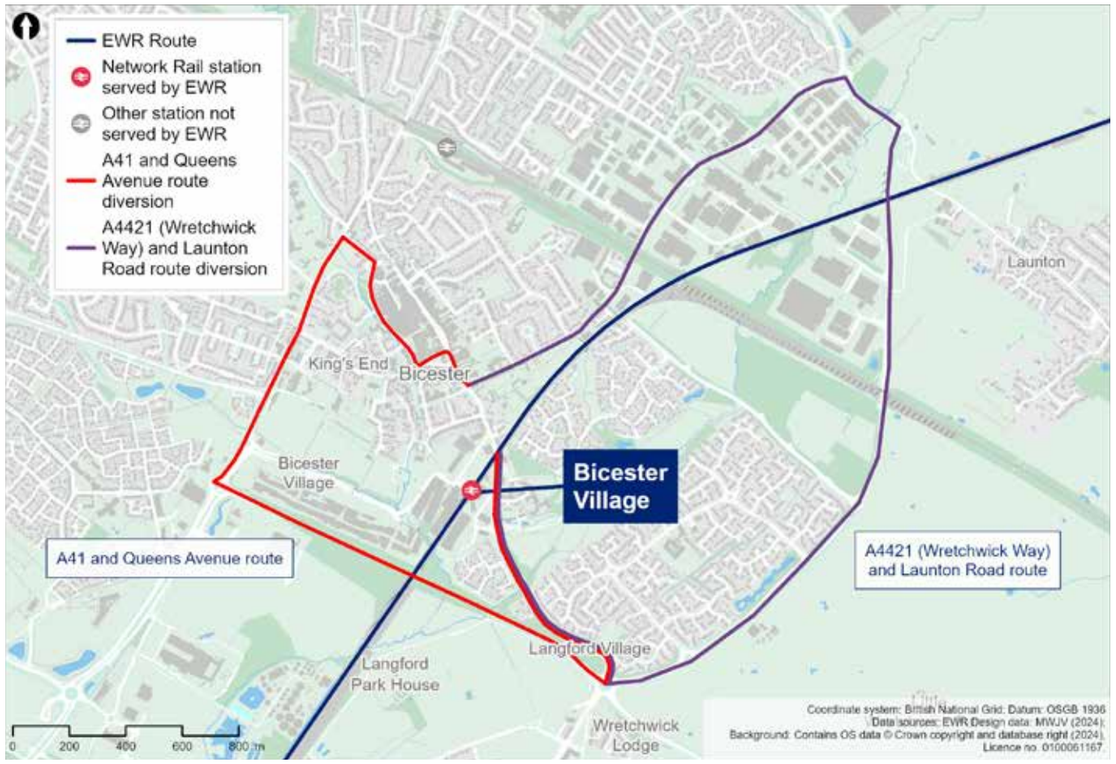
Our preferred solution is for traffic to be diverted using existing roads. Motorised traffic could feasibly be diverted onto existing roads without motorists incurring significant delays or disruption. There would be some additional waiting times at current road intersections, but these are not material enough to warrant the impact and costs of the two options for a new road bridge. For these reasons, our preference is to close the crossing and use existing and upgraded local road diversions.

More detail on the road bridge options and the diversions can be found in Chapter 6 of the **Technical Report**.

We are looking further at the alternative routes that drivers would take and are exploring opportunities to introduce upgrades to local roads, such as improvements to junctions and traffic calming measures. This would help to reduce journey times and prevent use of inappropriate roads.

We look forward to engaging with local communities, businesses and other stakeholders on how road upgrades could reduce the additional journey time for more people at lower cost.

Figure 12: Map showing the London Road level crossing motorised user diversions



Replacement crossing for pedestrians, cyclists and other non-motorised users

Whilst we propose that the level crossing should be closed, we are considering two options to provide an accessible replacement crossing at London Road for pedestrians, cyclists and other users of the crossing. The replacement crossing would either be a footbridge (Option 1a) or an underpass (Option 1b).

Option 1a (footbridge)

The footbridge option would provide both stairs and ramps on each side of the railway. The design would be inclusive so that the footbridge is accessible for everyone.

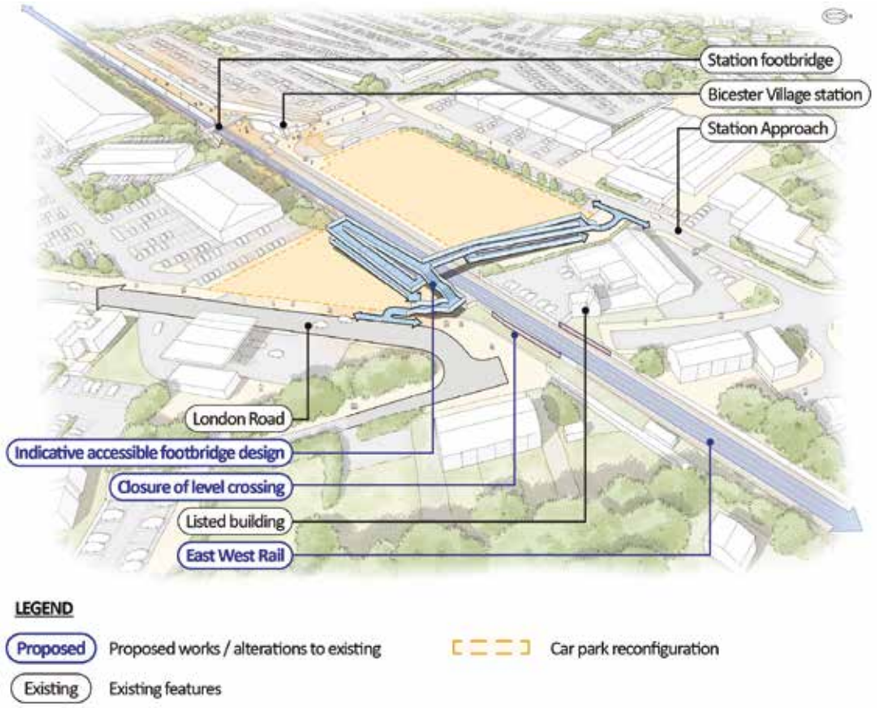
The advantages of a footbridge would be:

- The footbridge would be cheaper to build than the underpass and relatively simple to install.
- The railway would only need to be closed on a small number of occasions to install the footbridge, meaning less disruption to the public.
- People using a footbridge typically feel safer than using an underpass as you are out in the open.

These would need to be considered against the disadvantages:

- The footbridge would take longer for people to use than the underpass when making use of the ramp.
- There would be a significant visual impact on the local surroundings.

Figure 13: Indicative illustration of Option 1a: Traffic diversion and accessible footbridge for pedestrians, cyclists and other users at London Road



Option 1b (underpass)

The underpass option would be located at the site of the existing level crossing with shallow gradients from its lowest point beneath the railway, up to street level on both sides of the railway. The design would be inclusive so that the underpass is accessible for everyone.

The advantages would be:

- The underpass would be quicker for people who would need to use the ramp.
- People using the underpass would be partially protected from adverse weather conditions.
- This option presents less visual impact on the local surroundings.

The disadvantages would be:

- The underpass may create safety concerns for members of the public due to its enclosed nature.
- The construction work to install the underpass would require the railway being closed for longer than if a footbridge is constructed.
- It would be more expensive to construct and maintain.

Figure 14: Indicative illustration of Option 1b: Traffic diversion and an accessible underpass for pedestrians, cyclists and other users at London Road