



Department
for Transport

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From the Minister of State
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Our Ref: MC/312928

11 November 2020

Dear Sonia

Thank you for your email of 23 September 2020 in response to my letter of 7 August.

I am sorry that my previous response did not fully address your concerns.

Bridges that once formed part of the operational railway (i.e. where the underlying/overlying track has since been removed) form part of the Heritage Railways Estate (HRE), which is owned by the Secretary of State for Transport and managed by Highways England. The Secretary of State has a statutory responsibility to ensure that these structures are maintained to a standard that protects public safety.

The regime that governs the load-bearing standard to which an individual HRE bridge that carries a public highway must be maintained by the Secretary of State is complex, but the applicable standards are by reference to historic load bearing standards and historic traffic levels, rather than current ones. Thus, the standards are lower than those applicable to local highway authorities. The Secretary of State is only funded to deliver these lower standards.

There are additional cost and maintenance issues that arise where the public are to be permitted to use a currently disused track bed that passes beneath or across an HRE bridge and I have set these out below:

1. A bridge crossing a disused track bed would need to be maintained to a higher standard than at present. This is because small amounts of masonry can fall from the bridge onto the disused track bed, which is not an issue where the track bed is disused, but would clearly become an issue if the track bed was being used by the public.
2. Where a bridge crosses a road, the condition of the parapets would become an issue. In most instances the parapets on HRE bridges are

- too low for modern standards, which means there is a real risk of the public falling onto the road below should they be allowed to cross the bridge/ Therefore additional safety works would need to be undertaken.
3. New costs associated with temporarily closing (or diverting) a public right of way would be incurred each time it was necessary to inspect or maintain a structure. This would have an impact on existing programmes of work and planned road closures.

The Secretary of State is not funded to carry out additional works on bridges beyond his statutory obligations.

Yours sincerely,



Chris Heaton-Harris MP

Minister of State for Transport