



Department for
Transport

From the Parliamentary
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Dear Dominic

Thank you for your letter of 12 July to Alistair Darling, about the demolition of Dog Kennel Bridge as part of the Crossrail works. I am replying as Minister responsible for rail.

In your letter you refer to the recent decision to preserve four of the nine bridges over the Great Western Mainline (GWML) that were originally proposed for demolition in the Crossrail Bill. This work was necessary in order to provide the extra space needed for overhead line electrification equipment to be installed between Airport Junction and Maidenhead, so that the Crossrail trains can operate.

When the Bill was being prepared the option of preserving the bridges by lowering the tracks was examined as an alternative to alteration/demolition. At that stage, it appeared that in all cases, lowering the tracks would be considerably more expensive. This was partly based on the presumption that new track and sleepers would need to be provided over the length of track to be lowered.

However, Network Rail has recently announced that it intends to renew all the track and sleepers on this section of the GWML over the next few years. This means that the track will be nearly new when Crossrail is being constructed and can be re-used. This has a significant effect on the balance of cost between the options and means that in some cases preservation of the bridges by lowering the tracks has become a realistic option.

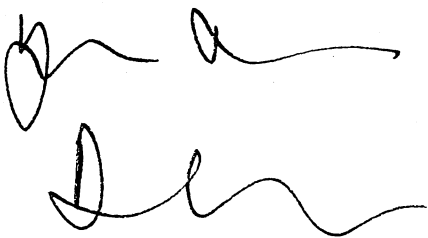
In light of this, the decision was taken to re-examine the proposed demolition of the bridges. This was done on a case-by-case basis with the merits and circumstances of each bridge being considered individually, and bridges being retained where it is financially and operationally sensible to do so. Four bridges are now being retained.

Unlike the bridges for which track lowering avoids the need for major impacts on the structures, Dog Kennel Bridge would still require substantial alteration even if the track underneath it were to be lowered. This is because an additional track is needed at this location to facilitate freight operation, which would require an additional span to be added to the bridge. The estimated cost is approximately £4.5 million more than the removal of the bridge. Moreover the bridge has no functional use. It is not a public right of way and surveys carried out over two weekends in June registered no use at all.

English Heritage and local authorities petitioned against the Bill, but in the light of the Promoter's decision to lower the track under four bridges none of them pressed their objections to the Select Committee. They considered it to be an acceptable overall solution. English Heritage are also reviewing their listing decision on the bridges affected by Crossrail, which was taken before the decision on retaining four bridges had been reached.

I cannot accept the argument that a saving in a future cost of retaining some bridges can in some way be available for spending on retaining and altering Dog Kennel Bridge. Finance still has to be raised for the Crossrail project and £4.5 million to retain Dog Kennel Bridge has to be judged against other uses for £4.5m. That would be a large sum to be spent on a Grade I listed building, let alone a vernacular bridge that would have to be altered in any case and of a type with many other examples. Overall, of the nine bridges affected by Crossrail four are now being retained unaltered and only one lost completely.

I have set this out at some length because considerable time and effort has been spent on the issue of the Brunel bridges and finding an overall solution with which the heritage bodies were sufficiently comfortable not to press the issue in Select Committee.



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