



Department
for Transport

Department for Transport
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Our Ref: 396349
Your Ref:

April 2022

Cllr Steve Darling
Leader of the Council
Torbay Council
Torquay Town Hall
Torquay
TQ1 3DS

Dear Cllr Darling,

Thank you for your letter of 25 March 2022 to the Secretary of State for Transport setting out your understandable concerns regarding the delays to Network Rail's bridge works in Torbay, which has been passed to me for a response.

The Department for Transport has taken up the matter with Network Rail in parallel with your own engagement with them, in order to understand how the current situation has been reached and, more importantly, what can be done to expedite it.

We are disappointed that this bridge replacement is taking far longer than anticipated and fully appreciate the impact that this delay will have on the local community and economy, particularly at the start of the important tourism season over Easter and the May Bank Holiday. On behalf of Network Rail and its contractor, we sincerely apologise to local residents, businesses and road users for the delay in the completion of this work.

Network Rail has explained to us that on this occasion it faced a number of unforeseen challenges which resulted in two significant delays.

Firstly, we understand that there have been some engineering challenges with installation of the beams that will ultimately hold the road surface. These primarily centre on the presence of a BT cable which, although identified before work began, was not dealt with adequately. This hindered work to demolish and subsequently reconstruct the bridge, so as to avoid damaging it and cut off connectivity for many local properties.

Separate to this, the whole railway network was affected by the series of severe storms in February. We are informed that these set the project back

significantly. Two major parts of the work that were due to be carried out over extended periods while trains were not running were lost due to the poor weather. Contractors are now carrying this work out during shorter windows of opportunity such as night shifts. This is less efficient and inevitably means the work is spread out over a longer period of time.

In terms of mitigation and relieving some of the pressures on the road system, we understand that the meeting between Torbay Council and Network Rail on 31 March was productive. Network Rail is now actively working towards opening a route for pedestrians and cyclists by 8 May followed by a single lane of traffic ahead of the final completion date on 23 May. Trains will continue to serve the region and enable people to visit Torbay and the surrounding area.

Network Rail assure us that their team will be working closely with the contractor to ensure there are no further delays. I know this is of little consolation but please be assured that the Department will continue to monitor this situation closely and expect the dates they have given to be met in order that Torbay can get back to normal as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Ed Vokes