

Notes accompanying the joint statement by West Somerset Railway and Somerset County Council issued 7 June 2021

Notes

1. At Seaward Way, Minehead, the existing two-barrier automatic crossing will go, to be replaced by four barriers extending over the whole road, controlled from the signal box. This will require close circuit television, so that the signalman can see clearly up and down Seaward Way before closing the barriers. New road traffic lights, with low level lights to alert pedestrians, will be fitted, and the associated complex railway signalling is having to be completely rebuilt. Signals have to be electrically interlocked so that trains cannot go over the crossing until the barriers are fully closed.
2. Design was completed in late 2020, having already been delayed by the 2020 lockdown. Somerset County Council has provided £1.2m of funding for the project, while the equivalent of £100k has been provided by the WSR through specialist volunteer time, including the bulk of the design and signalling work. The design then had to be approved by both the government Rail Regulator (the ORR) and the Highways Authority. A detailed site meeting was held in November with representatives of each organisation and various minor modifications were made before formal submission according to a complex legal process. Approval for the design was given in February. We then entered the next period of lockdown.
3. Stage 1 of the project involved mainly railway signalling dismantling and preparing the signal box and track area for the complex changes. Very little of this can be seen from the road. This has now mostly been completed. A new switch room is shortly to be installed on the Dunster side of the crossing. This has necessitated a ground survey going down to 30 metres below ground, to make sure the concrete base is sufficient to take the weight of the new room. This switch room has been built by a contractor off site and is ready to be installed, in the next couple of weeks.
4. Stage 2 of the project involves the installation of the CCTV and the main installation of the barriers themselves. This does not need to wait for the end of Stage 1, but can begin alongside the completion of Stage 1, and has now commenced.
5. The construction also involves extensive purchasing of a wide range of specialist signal and level crossing engineering equipment, and this too has proved challenging at the present time. Most of the firms who would normally provide this equipment have also been impacted by the pandemic, and are used to operating a "just in time" supply chain, so waiting time for many parts has been very extended.

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