

Northern Approach Road phase 3 project

Northern Approach Road diversion route

September - November 2014

Statement of Reasons

Closure Details

The Northern Approach Road (NAR), northern section between Mill Road and Boxted Road / Fords Lane Roundabout, is scheduled to be closed for a period of six weeks, from Monday 22nd September.

The closure is required to facilitate the connection to the new Northern Approach Road phase 3 (NAR3), linking Axial Way and the A12 to the existing Northern Approach Road to the south. The new road will assist the release of the Severalls Hospital residential redevelopment site and its associated school site, and also facilitate the efficient operation of the new Park & Ride facility being constructed north of Colchester. During the road closure sections of the existing road will be removed or overlaid to accommodate the new design, which includes the installation of lighting and traffic signals, as well as requiring new surface water drainage.

The proposed diversion route will redirect traffic via A134 Nayland Road, Ivy Lodge Road, Horkesley Road, Straight Road, Langham Road, Severalls Lane, Mill Road and vice versa.

Before selecting the diversion route there were a number of options considered to ensure that the most suitable route was chosen.

Need for Closure

The need for the closure was rigorously questioned. Essex County Council (ECC) requested that the Contractor explore every available option to consider whether the road closure could be avoided; however, the Contractor advised that due to the level differences and the relative narrow width of the road, there were no other options available other than to close the road. The picture below highlights the difference in level from the existing road to the new; the van shown to the left of the picture is 14" / 350mm below the finished carriageway level of the new road.



Diversion Route options considered

1. Nayland Road – Mill Road (west)

Initial suggestions were to use the west section of Mill Road and the northern end of Nayland Road, with the suspension of the existing bus gate on this route. However, upon detailed inspection, concerns were raised regarding the general character of the roads which would be used.

Although Nayland Road was utilised by all traffic prior to the original NAR's completion, there are limited passing places for larger vehicles due to the residential parking on both sides of the carriageway, which would have to be suspended.

Navigating this route as part of a diversion would also require vehicles, potentially including articulated lorries, to negotiate the tight junction with Mill Road. In addition, traffic would be tempted to shortcut through the residential street, Defoe Crescent.

Perhaps most importantly, this diversion would place additional traffic on Mill Road (west) at peak times when school traffic would be accessing Myland Primary School. The convergence of these two demands on road space would undoubtedly lead to congestion and delays on journey times, and make access to the school for vehicles and pupils difficult and unpleasant.

Additionally, there are health and safety concerns for pupils accessing the school within a queued highway, as well as for pedestrians and cyclists that are being redirected from the NAR to Nayland Road. Placing additional traffic on a road where increased numbers of vulnerable road users (particularly school children) are expected is a key concern regarding this route as a diversion option.

The congestion mentioned above could also impact on emergency services that utilise this route to serve Colchester Hospital. Retention of the existing Bus Gate would allow the emergency services to utilise Nayland Road and Mill Road with no interference from additional traffic/congestion. However, if a diversion through Nayland Road was implemented for all traffic, the impact on emergency services during peak hours could be significant.

The impact on the buses that utilise the Bus Gate would also be substantial, and to allow all vehicles to utilise it as part of a diversion route would mean Traffic Regulation Orders would need to be revoked or suspended. Additional vehicles utilising this route and consequently causing bus journey times to be longer and/or unreliable could potentially result in bus operators seeking compensation for loss of patronage.

2. Community Stadium Bus Gate

Another option considered was the use of the currently-gated Stadium Way, close to the Community Stadium.

Unfortunately, however, the existing road layout consists of a raised table crossing and a kerb build-out close to the gate, which does not meet ECC network standards for a junction designed to cater for the likely traffic flows were it to be opened up. Equally, the streetlighting in place would not meet the required lighting standards for a junction with such levels of traffic. These considerations would make this junction difficult to navigate, and if road traffic accidents were to occur in this area during the closure and diversion of the NAR3, questions would be asked of ECC's decision to use this facility as a diversion route.

3. North of Colchester Diversion Route – the selected route

The only other alternative diversion option was to send traffic north of Colchester. Although this is the longest of all the routes considered, this route does not pose the same problems and concerns that are apparent in the options described above.

As with the other options looked at, though, there were some concerns requiring consideration with this diversion route.

Queuing can occur on Mill Road, mainly between the NAR junction and Brinkley Grove roundabout, and particularly at peak times, but this traffic does continue to move. Traffic surveys demonstrate that by altering the traffic signals, greater priority can be given to this diversion route's traffic movements through the NAR / Mill Road junction in order to reduce the impacts of the diversion. Although it is expected that traffic queues will increase to some extent, and drivers should plan for this accordingly, overall increases in journey times for the majority of users will be minimised as far as practicable.

The turning from Straight Road into Langham Road was also noted as potentially being tight for larger vehicles; however, there are no parked vehicles and few pedestrian and cyclist movements in this area likely to result in any major difficulties arising for professional HGV drivers.

Conclusion

Although a diversion can cause inconvenience, the selected route offers the safest route with the least potential problems in comparison with the options considered. The potential negative impacts of the shorter diversion route options considered on local residents, bus operations, the emergency services and the safety of vulnerable road users must be weighed against the potential increases in journey times and inconvenience for drivers whose usual routes are subject to the diversion.

It is intended that these works are completed in less than six weeks; however, this length of closure has been booked to ensure there is adequate time to allow for any issues which may be encountered during the works, and the route will be re-opened at the earliest possible opportunity.

While the closure of the NAR will undoubtedly have short term, temporary impacts, it enables the long term benefits of the completion of the link to the A12 Junction 28 and the adjacent Park and Ride site to be realised quickly and efficiently and earlier than would otherwise be the case were part-time closures possible.

Summary of key points:

- Northern Approach Road phase 3 project (NAR3) will enable the release of the Severalls Hospital site for residential development, bringing significant benefits and contributing to the economic generation the Northern Approach Road Phase 3 is expected to realise.
- NAR3 will link the A12 Junction 28 and the forthcoming Park and Ride site to the existing Northern Approach Road (NAR), and provide priority bus lanes.
- Closure of the existing NAR is required to create the link to the new NAR3.
- Closure is required due to the significant level differences between the existing and the new road.

- NAR closure is scheduled for six weeks from 22nd September 2014.
- NAR closure is between Mill Road and Fords Lane / Boxted Rd roundabout.
- A diversion via Mill Road / Nayland Road Bus Gate is unsuitable due to safety reasons.
- A diversion via United Way Bus Gate is unsuitable due to safety reasons.
- The designated diversion route utilises the following roads:
 - A134 Nayland Road,
 - Ivy Lodge Road,
 - Horkesley Road,
 - Straight Road,
 - Langham Road,
 - Severalls Lane,
 - Mill Road.
- The diversion route has been chosen for a number of reasons:
 - Safety concerns of other routes – junction visibility, junction layouts, large vehicle movements, vulnerable road user safety (pedestrians, cyclists and children)
 - Congestion issues with other routes – impacts on emergency services, bus operations
 - Traffic signals will be revised to enhance traffic flow along the Mill Road / NAR diversion route.
- Heavy Goods Vehicles will be diverted along a slightly different route to avoid the use of Ivy Lodge Road.
- Pedestrians, cyclists, buses, taxis, motorcycles and permitted vehicles, such as the emergency services, can continue to use the Mill Road – Nayland Road – Nayland Road Bus Gate route.

- The NAR is to be re-opened at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Drivers should allow extra time for journeys.
- The closure will create short term disruption to deliver long term benefits.
- Safety must be a key consideration for any diversion route.