KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

REGULATION COMMITTEE MEMBER PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Regulation Committee Member Panel held in the Medway Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 4 December 2025.

PRESENT: Mrs B Porter, Mr A Ricketts and Mr T L Shonk

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr G Rusling (Head of Public Rights of Way & Access), Ms M McLauchlan (Definition Officer) and Ms H Savage (Democratic Services Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Declarations of Interest in items on the agenda for this meeting
(Item 1)

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Application to divert part of Public Footpaths AU22 and AU17 from the foot crossings known as Cradle Brdge (AU22) and Bolleaux (AU17) at Kennington in the Borough of Ashford
(Item 2)

Mr Alan Cooper (Kennington Community Council), Mr Nathan Whitington (Network Rail), Ms Leyla Amir-Alikhani (Network Rail), and Mr Colin Sefton (Kent Ramblers) were in attendance virtually. Mr Simon Cole (Assistant Director of Planning and Development at Ashford Borough Council) attended in person.

1. Ms Maria McLauchlan (Definitive Map Officer) introduced the addendum to the report. She explained that the original reports from the meeting on 6 October remained valid and the addendum included the information, provided by Network Rail, that had been requested at that meeting. Ms McLauchlan noted that there was broad consensus that the footpath was unsafe, with the main point of contention being the stepped design of the bridge.

2. The Applicant, Mr Nathan Whitington on behalf of Network Rail, introduced and explained the financial breakdown of costs relating to each type of bridge (Appendix C of the report). He clarified the meaning of indirect construction costs and employer's indirect costs and gave examples. He said that risk allowances covered potential liabilities if something went wrong and inflation was applied using Consumer Price Inflation (CPI).

3. Mr Whitington responded to questions from the Panel Members including:

- How long the railway would be closed to which Mr Whitington explained this would be approximately one weekend.
- Regarding the costs associated to the Industry Risk Fee & Network Rail Fund Fee, Mr Whitington explained that the stepped footbridge required approximately 125m² to build, whereas a ramped bridge required around 578m². The larger scale of the ramped option meant more land, setup, and time, making it a significantly bigger project.

4. Mr Alan Cooper, on behalf of Kennington Community Council, addressed the Panel. He noted that Kennington Community Council had no objection to closing the crossings but raised concerns about costs for a stepped bridge increasing from £1.5m (a figure discussed at the meeting on 6 October) to £3m (the figure included in Appendix C). He referenced a bridge with lifts being built in East Anglia for £5.5m, compared to £3m here without ramps or lifts. He also stressed that the Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) considered only one side of the crossing and did not account for Kennington. He said that the bridge would stand for decades but the DIA did not include speculative growth. Mr Cooper emphasised that failure to provide ramped access would lead to unnecessary vehicular movement and reduced integration between housing estates. He urged the Panel to consider the long-term community impact.

5. Mr Simon Cole, Assistant Director for Planning Development at Ashford Borough Council confirmed that approximately £5.17m was available for the bridge, with £200,000 to be repaid to the developer. Based on current estimates, a stepped bridge at £3m could be delivered within this budget, while a ramped bridge at £6.3m was unaffordable. He stated that the choice was between a stepped bridge or no bridge at all, given the funds available. He reiterated that Network Rail intended to close the crossing on safety grounds, making the bridge necessary. While ramps could be considered in the future if funds allowed, the stepped option was currently the only deliverable solution.

6. Mr Whitington confirmed that the bridge would be modular, allowing ramps to be added later. He addressed concerns about Schedule 4 costs, noting these accounted for potential issues for train operators where they had been impacted by planned disruption. He also clarified that the DIA was based on objective data at the time and could not include speculative growth.

7. Mr Shonk stressed the importance of getting the design right for the community and asked about alternative routes for passengers during closures to which Mr Whitington confirmed buses would be provided.

8. Mr Ricketts asked about the inclusion of ramps for bikes. Mr Cole responded that consent from the borough council required Network Rail to include a wheel channel alongside the steps.

9. Mr Colin Sefton, on behalf of Kent Ramblers and speaking from a rambler's viewpoint, was satisfied with the proposal.

10. The Chair put the recommendation in the report, that the applicant be informed that an Order to divert part of Public Footpaths AU22 and AU17 from the foot crossings, known as Cradle Bridge (AU22) and Bolleaux (AU17), at Kennington in the Borough of Ashford, as shown on the plan at Appendix A to this report, be made on the grounds that it is expedient to divert the path on the grounds of safety of the public, to the vote and it was agreed unanimously.

11. Mr Graham Rusling, Head of Public Rights of Way and Access Service, clarified that the next stage in the process was the making of the Order, and if objections were received, the Secretary of State would determine the final decision.

12. RESOLVED that the applicant be informed that an Order to divert part of Public Footpaths AU22 and AU17 from the foot crossings, known as Cradle Bridge (AU22) and Bolleaux (AU17), at Kennington in the Borough of Ashford, as shown on the plan at Appendix A to this report, be made on the grounds that it is expedient to divert the path on the grounds of safety of the public.