



Richard Bacon M.P.

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR SOUTH NORFOLK

The Rt Hon Douglas Alexander MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Great Minster House
76 Marsham Street
LONDON SW1P 4DR

1 March 2007

Dear Secretary of State

FATAL INCIDENT AT SWAINSTHORPE LEVEL CROSSING

You will no doubt be aware of the fatal incident that occurred on the Norwich to London railway line this morning at Swainsthorpe in my constituency.

Early reports indicate that a car was struck by a Norwich-bound train travelling at 100mph (161 km/h) at the Swainsthorpe level crossing. Thankfully the train did not derail and no-one on the train appears to have been hurt, although very sadly there was one fatality in the car.

This is the *third* fatal incident to occur at the Swainsthorpe level crossing within the last 18 months.

I am sure you will agree that three fatalities in such a short period of time is very worrying. The crossing at Swainsthorpe is an Automatic Half Barrier Crossing (AHBC) and I am concerned that the design and layout of AHBCs may represent too great an opportunity for misuse, either by motorists who believe they can outrun an oncoming train, or by those who would seek to use such crossings in suicide attempts, as was the case in the previous two incidents at the Swainsthorpe crossing, one of which involved a motor car.

According to the Office of Rail Regulation in a policy statement published just yesterday, Britain's 7,700 level crossings represent the greatest risk of a fatal rail accident on the rail network. The risk of a fatality in a road/rail collision is some 40 to 45 per cent greater than in a road traffic accident.

I would be most grateful if you could consider reviewing whether Automatic Half Barrier Crossings provide adequate protection to the travelling public, both motorists and rail passengers and whether changes need to be made to current policy.

I look forward to hearing from you.

RICHARD BACON MP