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Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP,
Department for Transport,
Great Minster House,
33 Horseferry Road,
London,
SW1P 4DR

8 May 2018

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you regarding the proposal by Rother Valley Railway (RVR) to extend a hobby railway through the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty where I live in East Sussex. My objections are numerous and listed below, but in summary it is simply inconceivable to allow this abomination to go through. To put a level crossing on one of the country's most dangerous roads is lunacy, not to mention the traffic disruption and pollution it will cause, the use of CPOs for a hobby railway is unjustifiable and goes against the government's definition of their use, and the impact this will have to the countryside in an AONB is unforgiveable.

RVR

RVR have already admitted that there will be no economic benefit to Robertsbridge; we have nothing here other than a few shops, certainly nothing to entice a passenger from the RVR station in to the village itself to spend money. With an estimated 14 crossings per day the peace that Robertsbridge has enjoyed since the village was bypassed will be lost. Simply getting from one side of the village to the other, to schools, doctors, the mainline station etc. will take longer.

The traffic flow data supplied by RVR is from 2010 with projections to 2016 which does not take into account the additional 155 houses earmarked for Robertsbridge; in fact the favoured site is adjacent to the proposed level crossing at Northbridge Street.

There will be a significant increase in the number of cars parked in the village to use the railway; RVR have made no provision for additional parking.

The common perception is that this is a steam railway, but RVR's timetable clearly shows the increased use of diesel trains, which along with additional pollution from traffic idling at the level crossings will pollute our countryside.

The train currently runs from Tenterden to Bodiam; Tenterden has a plethora of shops and restaurants, and is a thriving market town, Bodiam has the castle, one of the National Trust's most popular attractions. This is currently very successful; there is no need to extend the railway any further.

Popular footpaths and bridleways will be impacted by the railway, not only through suspension during the construction of the embankment and track, but consistently during the day when the trains run.

A21

The A21 is often described as one of the most dangerous roads in the country, at a time when the government is trying to reduce the number of level crossings, it does not make any sense, and goes against policy to create three new ones.

There has been no consultation or information provided to the many businesses who use the A21 such as Jempson's Hauliers, Hams coaches and British Gypsum. These and many more businesses rely on the A21 and the closing of the road for construction of the level crossing along with the continual closing of the road to allow trains to cross, will inevitably impact these businesses.

There were roadworks on the A21 earlier this year by Poppinghole Lane; the impact of the temporary traffic lights was a tailback of traffic to the roundabout.

CPO

The purpose of a CPO is for 'essential infrastructure which benefits the community', the relevant authority must 'demonstrate that the taking of land is necessary' and there is a 'compelling case in the public interest' – there is no benefit to the community or compelling case here. It cannot be just, right or fair to force these farmers to give up land which has been in their families for generations, for a non-essential hobby railway. The proposed CPO takes land away from two farming families who derive income from that land.

Facilitating a small group of wealthy people to take land they want through CPO sets a worrying precedent – private land being taken for a hobby, where will that end.

AONB

We live in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the implementation of an embankment in excess of 2m to raise the railway tracks to a level to get over the A21 can only be described as a blot on the (beautiful) landscape. An AONB is designated by the government as having natural features of exceptional beauty and therefore it is given protected status; this valley is now and always should be protected; running trains across it goes against this.

Environment

Building an embankment across a flood plain will mean the current flood/recede that occurs after heavy rain will not happen; the water will simply be prevented from its natural course by the railway embankment.

Millions have been spent on flood defences in Robertsbridge which will be under threat to flooding again if there is an embankment in place.

Farmland which is currently utilised will become waterlogged and in some cases inaccessible due to the railway splitting fields in two.

The proposal includes cutting down trees along the entirety of the track as well as along the A21 to allow for visibility; this will impact our landscape, flora and fauna irreparably.

According to the DfT website your remit is:

'We work with our agencies and partners to support the transport network that helps the UK's businesses and gets people and goods travelling around the country. We plan and invest in transport infrastructure to keep the UK on the move.'

If you stand by this, you cannot allow this railway extension to go ahead.

Yours faithfully,

Rachel Webster
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