

OBJ/177

R. J. Cross

20.5.2018

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP, Secretary of State for Transport
c/o Transport & Works Act Orders Unit
Department for Transport, Zone 1/18
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR



Subject - RVR (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order

Rother Valley Railway application to:

Department of Transport for a Transport and Works Act order to
'construct, operate and maintain' a new railway line from Bodiam to Robertsbridge.

Dear Secretary of State,

As a regular visitor to the Robertsbridge and Bexhill area for many years, I write to urge you not to grant this application. This is on two principle grounds, but many other issues also add to these concerns:

- 1) To implement this project, three new level crossings will be required, two on local roads and one on the A21, the main road to Hastings and the wider district. To operate the steam railway, the level crossings would have to close the road 16 times per day, during the busy periods of the day. This will result in traffic backing up on a very busy road, no doubt across the nearby roundabout (with knock-on effects) and back up the steep winding hill to the North. As well as being extremely dangerous and inconvenient to locals and through travellers alike, it seems perverse to introduce new impediments to traffic flow when the road scheme to remove the blockage South of the Pembury bypass, not many miles away, has just been completed at great expense.
- 2) RVR have served Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) on farmers whose land they would need to cross to achieve their desires. These farmers do not wish to sell their land and have maintained this stance for many years; it is their land and it should be their choice whether to sell to this type of project. CPOs should only be used for projects of national infrastructure or significance, not where a small number of wealthy individuals wish to indulge their hobby. In addition, their tactics in doing this can be described as nothing other than bullying. Further, I understand that they have incorrectly applied the procedure for a CPO.

Many other issues also call into question the wisdom of carrying out the proposed project to be enabled by this order:

- a) The local roads to be blocked by level crossings include North Bridge Street, a road already badly congested, so impairing daily life in Robertsbridge and diminishing the likelihood of any economic benefit;
- b) Any economic benefit to this immediate area is likely to be limited as there is to be minimal additional formal car parking at this end of the line, so very few visitors will use Robertsbridge as the base for their visit; rather, any informal parking is likely to be damaging to local businesses instead. Much of any additional income is more likely to be at the other end of the line, Tenterden – in another county, so not benefiting the local council or residents - but I understand the applicants' modelling of such benefits, including potential visitor numbers, is sketchy anyway.
- c) The likely holdups on the A21 could in fact be economically damaging to the area South of the crossings, eg Hastings, due to the impairment of traffic and trade flow, and inconvenience to visitors.
- d) As the situation is becoming better understood, local support for the project is dwindling, due to the disruption and limited benefit mentioned above, with many of the supporters of the project being from outside of the area.
- e) The project cannot be claimed to enable train users to get to work, linking two existing lines, ie to reduce road traffic, as, although the proposed station is only a short walk to the mainline station, the speed of RVR trains is limited to 25mph so it would add many hours to the round trip, plus the hours of operation would remove any chance of commuting.
- f) The river valley there is prone to flooding already. The project would involve the introduction of an embankment for the track and other unnatural edifices in support, all highly likely to increase flooding and, I understand, not covered by current flood risk assessments. It is probable that other factors causing flooding are exacerbated from the time when the old line was in operation, so to reduce the current flood plain area further would seem unwise, and potentially dangerous to the line and to local residents.
- g) While there was an embankment in place during the operation of the "proper" railway, that was many years ago and the embankment is very largely removed. In its place is a very tranquil and beautiful area, where much of the farming is in a very wildlife-friendly manner, with special eco-systems worthy of preservation not destruction.
- h) The farming that is practiced there would be severely disrupted, almost to the point of being uneconomic with modern equipment, significantly harming the livelihoods of the families involved, and impinging on their considerable contributions to the local community. This would be uncompensated by the Railway on an on-going basis; nor would the modest compensation under CPO provide a resource to fall back on.
- i) The farmers affected and their families are being put under massive prolonged strain as a result of the threat of this project and the tactics used by its promoters when they have maintained all along that they do not wish to sell. Surely a mechanism such as a Transport and Works Act order is not designed to allow one group of individuals to coerce another set of individuals into an action that they do not wish to do? At best this is inappropriate, at worst something that should be stamped out, not endorsed.

Therefore, on the basis of the inevitable disruption to the A21 and the inappropriate use of CPOs, as well as the other subsidiary issues, I repeat my call to you, Sir, to deny the application for this order.

Yours sincerely,

cc Huw Merriman, MP
cc Mrs Kemi Badenoch, MP