

05/1191

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

21<sup>st</sup> May 2018



Dear Mr Grayling

I am writing as a resident of Robertsbridge, to express my opposition to the proposed plans to extend the Rother Valley Railway from Robertsbridge across the water meadows to Bodiam. The proposed new railway will cross the A21, the route from London to Hastings, it is well documented that the A21 is one of the most dangerous and congested roads in the country.

My first concern is that the proposal includes two new level crossings, one on the A21 and one on the road known as The Clappers which leads out of the village and joins the A21, this would mean a total of three crossings within the village. It is well known that level crossings are dangerous, on the Network Rail website it states that from 2010 'they are working to reduce the number of level crossings to improve safety on the network'. Network Rail state that any new railways built today should not have any levels crossings and gives the example that HS2 does not have any. I know the proposed line by RVR is very much shorter than HS2 but surely the same safety factors apply to both.

Another concern about the three level crossings is if they were all down at the same time there would only be one route in and out of the village, this is not ideal in an emergency situation. Any emergency services coming from the direction of Hastings or Tunbridge Wells would have difficulty entering the village due to the stationary traffic and from Tunbridge Wells would not be able to gain access to the village as the A21 would be totally blocked and could not bypass the crossing and enter the village via the Clappers as this road would be blocked as well. RVR are claiming several different timings for the crossings to be closed, but in Station Road and on the A2100 to Battle the timings are around 3 minutes, which is a long time for emergency vehicles to wait.

Another point which needs to be considered is how the traffic flow will be affected during the construction of these level crossings. The holdups caused by the construction of a dual carriageway at Pembury/Tonbridge became very tiresome and added unwanted time to journeys, although at least at the end of it there was a big improvement in journey time. RVR's proposal would cause problems during construction and holdups when the work was completed to the A21.

Regarding the financial impact RVR claim the opening of the line would have on the village, this is doubtful as most railway users would arrive at the station, travel to Tenterden and spend their money there where there are many more shops and restaurants. Robertsbridge station is quite a distance from the hub of the village and most people would probably not want to walk down there for the limited facilities.

Parking is another concern, RVR claim that visitors will arrive at Robertsbridge Station having used the mainline train and then transfer to the RVR train. As a train traveller myself, I know how costly it is travelling by train and a family would find the cost of using this form of transport prohibitive and

would resort to using their car as it would be more economical. In the week many commuters park their cars in the roads around the station, ie Langham Road, Mill Rise, Willow Bank and some on George Hill to avoid paying the car park charges. I would imagine that some RVR travellers will not want to pay car park charges on top of the rail fare, so residents of these areas will have congestion and nuisance for seven days a week instead of five. There are only 54 parking spaces, 2 disabled, in Robertsbridge Station car park, this will not be adequate for the large number of visitors RVR claim will visit the village.

My biggest concern is for the farmland RVR are trying to compulsorily purchase. I am from a farming family and know how precious this land is to the farmers and how they are custodians of the land for future generations. I have always thought that compulsory purchase of land was for important uses, which will benefit many people, not for recreational use. I think the fact that RVR is supported by people and companies who have no connection with Robertsbridge and will not have to live with the consequences of the new railway should be taken into consideration.

Most of the farmland is water meadow which in the Winter soaks up the excess water which floods through the Rother Valley. It is a large safety valve for the countryside, a large catchment area for excess water from Rotherfield, Burwash through to Robertsbridge and onto Bodiam. The area around Robertsbridge is flat which is why the water collects here. Even now despite having a few hot days the ground is still very wet with areas of surface water. On Bank Holiday Monday the De Quincey family, who are threatened by the CPO, invited people from the village to visit these water meadows. Most of the gateways were very muddy and the only vehicles which could get through them were either tractors or a four wheel drive mule. This land is used only in the Summer for grazing sheep and cows, the animals are not put onto the land until it is drier so that they do not cause damage to the field by churning up the grass with their feet.

My house overlooks the water meadows between the Clappers and Robertsbridge bypass so I am very aware of how it works, it is surprising how little rain it takes for the river to fill up and large pools of water to appear in the field. Since the old line was discontinued the bypass has been built, this causes the water to back up in the field between the Clappers and the bypass as it acts like a dam. If a large embankment is built across this field it will cause more water to accumulate there and threaten Robertsbridge with flooding.

Apparently the plan is to build the train line across these water meadows and also a service road alongside, with a passing loop and shed. Imagine the damage to the land the construction of this would have, heavy machinery would need to be brought in encroaching on far more acreage than that which RVR are trying to obtain and damaging the land and flora and fauna of the area especially in the Winter.

Many people nowadays have lost sight of where their food comes from and do not appreciate how hard farmers work in often cold and wet conditions and antisocial hours. They forget that farmers provide the food they eat and need land to grow crops on, this is far more important than a recreational train line. If the line is built it will cut the Hoad's and De Quincey's farms in half, accesses which have been used crossing the old line route from one side of the farm to the other will be destroyed and some of the fields will become difficult to farm. Tractors and machinery have become much larger since the line was closed and trying to use large machinery in a small field will probably make the field unusable for growing crops.

A lot of money has been spent on flood defences for Robertsbridge, this gives the residents who were flooded out in the 2000 flood, and away from their homes for many months, some peace of mind. The construction of the railway and service road alongside would have a major impact and

completely alter the way the water meadows soak up the water. Future building further up the Rother Valley would also have an impact on how much water flowed down the valley.

Robertsbridge not only has the RVR planning application affecting the village, there are also controversial planning applications for a housing development on another farm site and the old Vicarage site, both these sites are in the heart of the village.

I hope that my view is taken into consideration.

Yours sincerely

Angela Tidmarsh

