

## **The Transport & Works Act 1992**

## **The Transport & Works (Application and Objections Procedure) (England & Wales Rules 2006)**

### **Proposed Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order.**

#### **Background of self**

Paul Edward Richard Smith,

I am a career railwayman of forty one years' experience. I moved to Robertsbridge with the intention of living near a heritage railway, which in later life I could pass on my railway experience to a new generation. I deliberately bought a property that overlooks the railway.

However, I have since changed my views on the Bodiam to Robertsbridge extension as I feel that the way the creation of this railway extension is being undertaken by the RVR is flawed and requires further investigation. This includes the purchase of land by compulsory purchase.

#### **Nature of Objection**

##### **The Creation of a new level crossing over the main London to Hastings Trunk Road (A21).**

- **A21 already classed as a dangerous road.**
- **Office of Road & Rail are in favour of closing level crossing not creating new ones.**
- **Advice from ORR and consultants reports now 7 years out of date.**
- **Highways Agency had deferred a decision on the creating of the level crossing to Rother District Council.**
- **No opinion from Highways England over the creation of a level crossing over the A21, within the RVR consultation pack.**
- **Operation of the level crossing entrusted to volunteers, who may well have the interest of the railway and not road users at heart and their inexperience at operating this type of crossing could cause an incident.**
- **A train service that runs through most of the week for five months and in August runs seven days a week which will have ramifications on traffic flows on the A21 and ensuing congestion especially at Bank Holidays which may lead to an incident due to pressure from motorist on crossing keepers.**
- **Collision or failure of crossing barriers over the A21 will impact on queuing times at the crossing.**

### **Grounds for objection:**

The background documentation for this objection comes from public sources including the ORR, RSSB, RSF & Draft consultation report on the RVR website.

### **The A21**

The A21 connects South East London with Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Well and then onto Hastings. The RVR will cross at a full barrier level crossing south of the Salehurst & Robertsbridge roundabout.

The Sussex Express on the 14.11.14 stated that the A21 is the most dangerous road in the UK. This was based upon research from the Road Safety Foundation. Furthermore research from the same body stated that there were 9 fatalities on the East Sussex section of A21 from 2009 through to 2014. There have been 2 severe injury accidents to the north of the roundabout.

With the above in mind should RVR be permitted to create a level crossing on this already dangerous road?

### **Statements & Facts: ORR & RSSB**

To quote Mr Ian Prosser Director of Railway Safety at the Office of Rail & Road taken from the ORR website 30.04.18:

*'Great Britain's Level crossings, although among the safest in Europe, still pose significant safety risk to the public. ORR wants the rail industry to close level crossings.'*

- It should also be noted that according to the Rail Safety & Standards Board report 2016/17 that since 2008 1,088 level crossings of all types have been closed.
- The RSSB also make the point that most incidents at Level Crossings are the fault of road users either pedestrian or motorists.
- The creation of a level crossing has been the subject of a traffic analysis report carried out by Mott Mac Donald consultants written in 2011, although forecasting up to 2018 is included I believe this report should be revisited to ensure the most up to date data is utilised before making a decision on the creation of a level crossing over the A21. *This report is in the planning application papers on the RVR website.*
- The ORR HM Inspector of Railways was consulted and this advice given :

From Ian Raxton HM Inspector of Railways 24.08.11 to RVR : *' In summary I hope you can be assured that whilst we do not welcome new level crossings, we would not object in principle to crossings being created in this case'.*

It is unclear in the letter as to the case for safety being made for the creation of this crossing over the A21. Also I think it would be wise if this decision by the ORR was reviewed as Mr Raxtons advice is now seven years old.

### ***Statements & Facts: Highways Agency***

The response of the Highways Agency to the creation of the level crossing over A21 seem very unclear in App 9 of the RVR Draft Consultation report an e mail dated from 27<sup>th</sup> March 2015 from Drewit of the Highways Agency to Tyrrel Curtis I presume of the Rother District Council makes the following points :

- Highways Agency did not want a level crossing on the A21, then goes onto say 'If you are minded (RDC) to grant permission for the reinstatement of the line we direct the attached conditions to be included,

However, the RVR has not indicated what these conditions are. Apart from that there is no information displayed by Highways England the successor to the Highways Agency on what their view of the level crossing. There may of course be documents that give permissions from Highways England but they are not included in the public consultation on the RVR website.

It is not clear from the documents posted that Highways England approves this application to create a level crossing on the A21 or not.

### **Operation of the Crossing**

Another issue that could be import additional risk once the crossing has been created is its operation. There is no detail as to how this will be done but it is known that a control centre will be built to operate the crossing.

It is presumed that like most of the other safety critical jobs on the Kent & East Sussex Railway (of which the RVR is associated with and who will operate the railway) will be undertaken by volunteers.

Having been a volunteer on a heritage railway the mantra is always 'the railway first' If this mantra was to be applied to the operation of the level crossing over the A21, the time the barriers are down could be longer than the ORR's worst case of 112 seconds, as the train is given priority over road traffic as it travels at twenty five miles per hour. Moreover, inexperience must be factored in, as volunteer Crossing Keepers not used to the job and rightly erring on the side of safety keep the barriers down over the A21 longer than may be neccasry.

## **Train Service**

There is no train service details published by the RVR as to its proposed operations once the line is built. However, an indication can be drawn from the current Kent & East Sussex Railway timetable.

In general there are Green & Red services necessitating the crossing being operated 10 times between 11.27 & 16.40 (Bodiam Times at present).

In April through to September a weekend and weekday service are provided

On Bank Holidays and on other occasions a Gold Service is in operation from 11.32 to 17.03 with the crossing used 16 times in that period.

The Bank Holidays are of interest in that the A21 will be at its busiest with visitors to Hastings and Rye. The Railway will be busy as well as it will want to take advantage of people wanting to travel by heritage train. Therefore there will be a potentially a possibility of higher risk of an incident at this time.

**Collision or failure of crossing barriers over the A21 will impact on queuing times at the crossing.**

It is not clear what recovery arrangement that the RVR will have in the event of:

- Collision by a road vehicle colliding into the barriers.
- The failure of barriers over the A21.

Network Rail have dedicated teams of Mobile Operations Managers and Signal & Telecommunications engineers to deal with the scenarios outlined above.

What would the RVR provide in the way of an emergency response team?

In view of the fact that this type of crossing is new to the RVR what mitigation is going to be put in place to ensure that traffic on the A21 does not build up due to collision with and failure of the barriers.

END