

From: David Webster
Sent: 14 May 2018 12:54
To: TRANSPORTANDWORKSACT
Subject: Objection to Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order

RE: The Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order made under the Transport and Works Act 1992 (TWA)

Dear Mr Grayling,

I am writing to object to the application to construct, operate and maintain a new railway and to operate and maintain 2 existing railways between a junction at Bodiam and a terminus at Robertsbridge, all in the County of East Sussex, District of Rother. The applicant being Rother Valley Railways Limited via Winckworth.

My primary objection being that the applicant has not made any meaningful attempt to negotiate with the land owners affected, and is instead relying upon the powers of the Transport and Works Act to acquire the rights to compulsory purchase the land. Further, the applicants have been unable to provide any documentary evidence of communications with the land owners.

Given that the proposed works relate to a **non-essential** extension of an existing heritage railway (at Bodiam), I also have several additional concerns:

1. The introduction of 3no. level crossings over the A21, Junction Road and Northbridge Street. Given that Amber Rudd MP and Huw Merriman MP recently (March 2018) led a delegation of 16 local representatives to meet Roads Minister Jesse Norman MP to request urgent safety improvements to the A21, the introduction of a level crossing to the A21 would appear to conflict with this effort and indeed conflicts with Network Rail's own landmark level crossing reduction programme, whose 'Reducing risk at level crossings' webpage states: *"If you were to build a railway today it would not have any level crossings"*.
2. Lack of transparency about predicted economic benefits. The applicant repeatedly and publicly references a report (by Steer Davies Gleave) on possible economic benefits of the rail extension but refuses to publish the report. This has not allowed any form of independent scrutiny or interrogation of the report.
3. Car parking at Robertsbridge. The planning application for the railway extension (RR/2014/1608/P) is virtually silent on the matter of additional car parking for RVR visitors. The absence of this information should have been identified and explored by the planning committee, and their failing should be properly reviewed by a planning inspector at public enquiry.
4. Potential impacts to the Rother Valley flood plain. A third-party expert should be invited to perform an independent risk appraisal of the current embankment proposals that will cross the Rother Valley floodplain. The risk of the existing flood defences to Robertsbridge being breached must be fully understood by all parties.
5. Ecological impacts through installation of a new railway line. The applicant's own Environmental Statement acknowledges that the proposed route of the new railway currently forms a bat corridor through the existing trees, and the surrounding habitat is likely to support populations of other protected species including dormouse, badger and great-crested newt. Detailed ecological and species surveys must be undertaken to fully understand the scale of environmental impact. In addition, the proposals will require the felling of large numbers of deciduous trees, which should be reviewed in light of Jo Johnson MP's proposed review into the felling of trees beside railway tracks.
6. Landscape and visual impacts through the installation of a new railway line. The Environmental Statement includes a limited visual assessment, but given the potential impact of the railway embankment a fully **verified** LVIA should be completed to assess the visual impacts. In addition, the High Weald AONB Unit note

that the original planning application does not make any analysis of how the proposals will directly or indirectly affect the five key landscape character components outlined in the AONB Management Plan. Further they state: *"Without a full appraisal against the AONB Management Plan, I am not yet in a position to assess and then advise you whether the proposed development either supports or is in conflict with the objectives of the AONB Management Plan..."* . This work must be fully completed and presented at public enquiry.

On the basis of the above, I strongly encourage you to recommend that a **public enquiry** take place to fully understand and consider the pros and cons of this application in a fully transparent manner. This will allow for the clarity of perspective required to heal the significant local rift caused by this contentious and non-essential proposal.

Kind regards,

David Webster

Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI)



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