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NetworkRail

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

Dear Secretary of State,

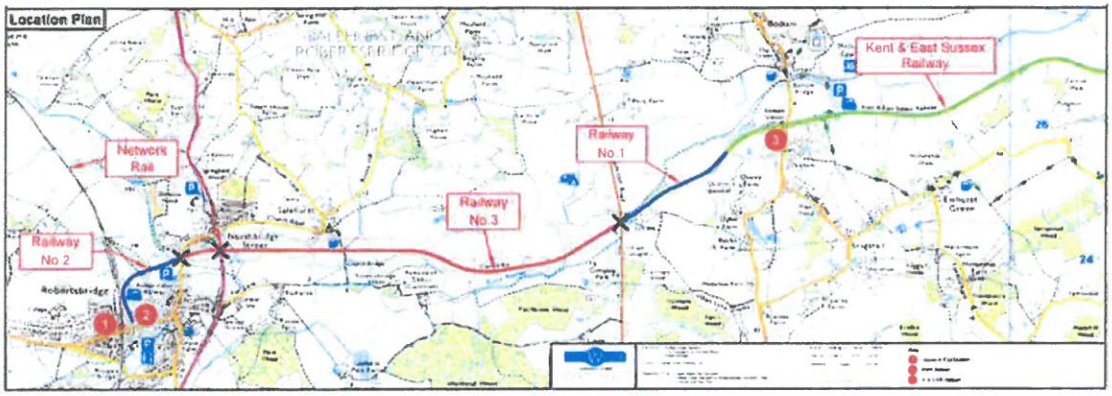
Rother Valley Railway Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction Order Transport & Works Act Order Application

Having previously written to the local planning authority Rother District Council in support of the successful application for planning approval to rebuild this last missing section of the line, I now write on behalf of Network Rail to further express our strong support for the reinstatement of the Rother Valley Railway by way of the proposed TWA Order application. The proposed Order would permit the construction of the last two missing miles of railway that will reconnect the Kent & East Sussex Heritage Railway with the mainline railway network at Robertsbridge Station.

In relation to the national rail network:

- The proposed line will work as one thirteen mile long tourist rail corridor by the Kent & East Sussex and so reconnect that existing operating line with the main line railway network at Robertsbridge.
- The reconnection of the whole Kent & East Sussex Railway with the national rail network via direct passenger interchange at Robertsbridge will provide both rail transport and environmental advantages encouraging visitors to travel to the area by way of mainline and heritage rail rather than road transport. At the moment the Kent & East Sussex Railway can only be reached by visitors using road transport. There will also be an economic benefit to Network Rail and the Train Operating Companies as tourists generally travel outside the peak periods when trains are relatively empty.
- Direct passenger access by mainline rail at Robertsbridge on the Hastings to London line and the wider network as a whole opens up the opportunity of all rail access to major tourist attractions in the Rother Valley including; Bodiam Castle, Great Dixter, Tenterden Town, Sissinghurst and others.
- RVR has already reconstructed ¾ mile of the missing rail link at the Bodiam end where the line connects with the existing Kent & East Sussex Railway as well as ½ mile at the Robertsbridge end - where in collaboration with Network Rail it has created a brand new interchange terminus station.

- Economic benefit to the area, not least to Rother District, East Sussex and Ashford, has been independently assessed by Steer Davies Gleave at up to £4.1m p.a. I found the video outlining those economic benefits most helpful in summarising the position and that can be found at: https://rvrailway.blogspot.co.uk/2018/05/economic-benefits-no6-movie.html
- There is also a social benefit by providing access to the countryside by all those who do not have cars.



In preparation for the completion of the 'missing link' between Robertsbridge and the current terminus of the Kent & East Sussex line at Bodiam I am pleased that five sections of the old trackbed have been acquired with new track already laid on four of those sections. As I understand it, if the project is to go ahead, the use of Compulsory Purchase under a TWA Order appears inevitable so as to enable the railway to acquire the last two remaining sections of the line if, as appears, the two remaining owners will not enter into voluntary negotiation. In the view of Network Rail the economic and wider public transport benefits that come for reconnecting the Kent & East Sussex Railway with the mainline network at Robertsbridge greatly outweigh any objection to the making of those necessary CPO Powers. I also note the Local Plan recognises that potential requirement to acquire land for the Railway by way of CPO. I urge the Department to include those powers within the proposed TWA Order.

Network Rail has been delighted to have worked with, and support, the Rother Valley Railway in what has already been achieved by this well-funded and well-managed organisation. We look forward to working with them further in the completion of the project once the proposed Order can be granted so that this important tourist transport line can again achieve direct passenger interchange with the national rail network.

Please do let me know if I can assist your Department further.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Sir Peter Hendy CBE
Chair, Network Rail