

Angela Foster

Obj 1710.

From: Izzy Crouch [REDACTED]
Sent: 30 May 2018 16:24
To: TRANSPORTANDWORKSACT
Subject: Objection to Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order

Dear Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP,

I am writing in objection to Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order.

There are several reasons for my objection to this order, that I have detailed below.

The proposed level crossings and impact on the A21

I am the director of two limited companies and run one sole trader business and live in Hastings. I need to travel regularly for work. The A21 is the main artery into Hastings and connects the town to the M25 and London. As a business owner I do not welcome the idea of more delays.

The A21 south of Tunbridge Wells is already woefully inadequate with regular hold ups. Hastings is a town with pockets of severe deprivation and is in need of some serious investment and the infrastructure is currently holding it back. If you compare the A21 to the A23 to Brighton, you will see stark differences. Further delays on the A21 will hinder investment into the town.

There have been many millions spent on improving the road north of Tunbridge Wells and this has made a big difference to overall journey times, we should look to do the same towards Hastings, not to hold it up further.

I also have concerns about safety. Hastings is very popular with day trippers and on a sunny bank holiday, when RVR intend to run a full timetable, many thousands of people travel down the A21, including 40 000 motorbikes on May Day. Many of these people are in "holiday mode" and will be unfamiliar with the road. As you are aware, there is a nationwide push to reduce the number of level crossings, not increase them.

I would urge you to conduct your own enquiry into the impact on traffic on the A21, using up-to-date figures. Since planning was originally granted, RVR have increased the barrier time to 112 seconds. Taking up-to-date reports from the traffic count cameras, it would appear that on most days there would be queues up to the roundabout in Robertsbridge, presenting further hold ups and safety concerns.

The impact on the village of Robertsbridge

Although I now live in Hastings, I grew up in Etchingham, just one stop away from Robertsbridge and I am very familiar with the village. It is not a town with many attractions that will benefit from increased footfall. Instead it is a functioning Sussex village that serves its residents and those in surrounding rural areas.

There are no plans for extra parking for the proposed line extension. This will impact on residents of Robertsbridge, but also on those who use the village for the local shop and vital services such as the GP and pharmacy.

Mr Trevor Streeter admitted in a Parish Council meeting that Robertsbridge would not benefit from the extension. It is likely that visitors will park their cars, board the train and travel to Tenterden, a larger town, to spend their money, before returning to Robertsbridge and driving home.

Obviously, RVR wish to link the heritage line to the main line and have spoken about the benefits of attracting visitors from London. However, there are other heritage lines closer to London, such as the Bluebell Railway. It is approximately 1.5 hours from London to Robertsbridge and as the parent of a train-mad 5 year old, I can say with confidence that a 3 hour round trip on a train to sit on another train would be too much to consider for a day out.

It would have no benefit south of the line either, to link it to the heritage and main lines, as there are already several buses a day from Hastings to Bodiam.

The compulsory purchase orders and attitude of RVR and their supporters

In order to build the line RVR want to use the power of compulsory purchase against 2 families. The farms in question are very contrasting. On one farm the route has been re-wilded since the original purchase from British Rail, and is home to a variety of bats, owls, insects, small mammals and there have even been otter sightings.

The route across the other farm would cut their productive land in half, which considering modern farming methods, would devalue the entire field. There are also inadequate crossings being proposed. It is a modern, working farm that employs several people, compared to the heritage line which is operated by volunteers.

I believe compulsory purchase is wrong for a tourist attraction. This is not essential infrastructure - it is one organisation wanting to take land from another for the sake of their hobbies.

RVR have employed some of the best lawyers in the land in order to try and force two families to give up what is rightfully theirs. As someone involved in campaigning against the plans, I have seen first hand the unacceptable vitriol that is being directed at the families.

It seems unacceptable in modern Britain that compulsory purchase can be issued for a non-essential project.

I trust that you will look carefully at the plans and to consider whether it is fair that one village and the surrounding area should suffer for a small extension to an already existing tourist destination and to hold a Public Enquiry into this matter.

Yours Faithfully

Isabel Crouch



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