

05J / 765

From: Sarah Geldard [REDACTED]
Sent: 31 May 2018 16:26
To: TRANSPORTANDWORKSACT
Subject: Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order)

Dear Secretary of State

I am writing to you to lodge an objection to the plans relating to the Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge) order. I am a business owner in Robertsbridge (Owner of Browns Farm Shop) and my business is situated directly onto the A21 just before the Robertsbridge turn off on the Northbound side of the road.

The reason I am objecting are numerous with the main issues as I see it being as follows:

- **Level crossing on the A21 would be unsafe and would hamper any future dualling of the carriageway (which would improve congestion, safety and future capacity)** - The A21 is the main trunk road connecting London with key parts of Kent and East Sussex. This trunk road has become increasingly busy over the last 10 years. As my business is directly positioned on the A21 I can see first hand how this road has changed over time.

The amount of traffic has greatly increased with no let up in the traffic throughout the day at all. This is EVERY day of the week and this is not during the 'peak' times (before 9am and after 5pm) as the shop is closed at these times. As I understand it the traffic figures provided for the approval of the A21 level crossing are a number of years out of date, I would suggest that these figures are incorrect and need revision together with a study on projected figures over the next 50 years in order that a true assessment is made. The fact that there is still little or no public transport available which can be regularly relied upon, leads to people using their vehicles, unless a major change in public transport takes place this will only continue and increase. There has been proposed improvements to the road including making the road a dual carriageway which have been postponed, the creation of a new level crossing across the A21 would hamper any further discussion of a dual carriageway, I think there are very few examples of level crossings across dual carriageways in England and these tend to centre around disused railways lines or if a full traffic light system is installed (in this instance this would cause even more issues).

Although the level crossing will be sited in the 40 mph zone which needs to be extended to accommodate the crossing, both north and southbound the speed limit is the national speed limit (60mph). There are no speed cameras in these areas and drivers do drive to the limit and easily exceed this at times. The section of the A21 south of Flimwell to Robertsbridge and beyond was the most dangerous road in the south east outside of London. Serious crashes have increased in the section between Merriments Hurst Green and The Ridge West junction on the A21 between the survey periods of 2010-2012 to 2013-2015. With 25 crashes (3 fatal) being recorded during 2013-2015 on this stretch. The whole stretch of the southbound A21 from the junction of the A2100 to the Hastings A259 junction is noted as being in the top 10 high risk roads. Although this is not exactly where the level crossing will be it is a reflection of the type of road (single carriageway), the speed limits on these roads and the actual attitudes of the drivers. Drivers speed, do not take care and are exceptionally impatient along this whole stretch - I can only assume due to going from a dual carriageway on the much improved Pembury section and the Flimwell section to being completely single carriageway causing slow traffic and congestion. East Sussex Council have called for improvements to the road. On a very local level I know that in the last 2 years just in the very small stretch between the Robertsbridge junction with George Hill and Poppinghole Lane (Robertsbridge) all of less than half a mile there have been at least 5 crashes that I personally know of, (1 George Hill

junction, 2 at my Farm Shop entrance and 2 Poppinghole Lane entrance). Drivers will have to wait at the crossing for at least 1 minute 20 seconds at which it is likely that these drivers having been held up will then speed to catch up time and as the road will then turn into a national speed limit zone. Particularly on the southbound carriageway people turning in or out of each of the named lanes and junctions will have to dodge and contend with frustrated and impatient drivers. It is my opinion that more accidents will occur and safety will be compromised.

- **Level crossing at Northbridge Street added congestion and safety issues** - The Robertsbridge by pass was completed in around 1989 to alleviate the congestion and improve the safety of the village. By having a new level crossing at Northbridge Street at a point where the street is narrow road, highly residential with no parking restrictions is absolutely beyond comprehension. The street both on the north and southbound sides have no yellow lines restricting parking and residents do not have the parking facilities in a number of cases to park in set bays or on driveways. This leads to residents having to park on the street which is totally acceptable and necessary. The consequence is that this makes the street particularly north of the proposed level crossing into a single lane road from where the crossing has been proposed all the way up to the roundabout. Cars driving along here currently have to pull in and let others by etc. On the south side of the proposed crossing there is the recreation ground with car park and Ripleys forge with parking. Vehicles will park on the street in this area when the car park at the recreation is full and where residents further down the high street cannot park nearer to their homes (as I know too well having lived at 8 High Street for 8 years until last year). This invariably makes this section a single roadway in part. When the cricket or football matches / training are taking place in the recreation field there are immense problems with parking as the car park cannot accommodate everyone and roads and path ways are regularly blocked. Residents have made a number of complaints about the parking. This clearly causing congestion and becomes increasingly unsafe for pedestrians using the path ways and walking through the village in general due to the amount of traffic. Added to these issue will be the level crossing stopping the flow of traffic through the village and also delaying pedestrians. The pavements are very narrow and if there are people waiting for the crossing to open on both sides of Northbridge Street with children, dogs and buggies both trying to pass each other on a pavement only on ONE side of the street it is obvious that people will walk in the road. This is a major safety issue as you will also have vehicles going trying to pass each other on a SINGLE road section. This in my opinion is a MAJOR issue of safety and particularly when the railway will be running during school openign and closing times. The village prides itself in being a safe place for children and in the summer months you always see them going to the recreation park to play the older ones on their own and younger ones with adults. Children plus increased traffic congestion at this point in the village coupled with a level crossing and the obvious dangers of people crossing at the last minute etc is a recipe for disaster.

The level crossing is already affecting property prices and people's livelihoods along this section of the village. I know of at least one property which has been reduced in value and buyers have pulled out of the sale as a direct consequence of the crossing. Will the railway be compensating villagers for these long term financial losses?

In addition the whole feel and enjoyment of the village will be compromised with this crossing due to the increased congestion at the crossing area and the unknown traffic jams and issues this will cause. After drivers have been blocked by the crossing and then negotiated getting past other vehicles on the single stretch of road, there will be further blocks at the single section through the High Street and then with tempers frayed and impatience there is likely to be increased speed and safety issues.

The businesses in the village which rely on the local trade but also people coming to the village from the surrounding areas for their provisions are likely to see a decrease as people will by pass the village if the traffic gets worse.

- **Village congestion and infrastructure issues** - The village is already highly congested in the High Street / George Hill and Station Road with parked cars, commuters, people dropping / picking up school children and the school buses trying to negotiate around a small village. The neighbourhood plan requires I believe 155 houses to be built in the village with the majority earmarked for the Mill Site (next to the level crossing). The village cannot deal with any extra traffic from visitors to the railway. There has been little or no provision for parking for visitors as the plans are based on a huge percentage of visitors coming by train. This seems to be totally unrealistic. The plans state that the majority of visitors will come from South East London by train. It has been shown that it is quicker and cheaper to drive than take the main line railway. Where are the cars going to go!!! There is no infrastructure in place to accommodate additional cars and traffic in the village, again safety issues, residents quality of life and governance of the traffic are points to note.

It has been stated that between 50,000 and 150,000 visitors are expected to come to the village. From the station to the High Street there is only one pathway on one side of the road, this leads to a section with no pavement and the High Street has very narrow single size paths. There are only 2 public toilet places in the village with only 1 for disabled people. Litter bins are few and far between. How will the village manage with the number of proposed visitors? There has been no budget or support provided from RVR to deal with the visitor numbers within the village. The village only has in the region of 2,600 residents so to have these numbers of visitors to the village will require a huge investment in the roads ways, litter / rubbish clearance and general maintenance of the village in general. A small visit is purported to turn into a hub of visitors without the ability to deal with them.

Once further housing is created in the village this will only compound all these issues including the congestion, parking and general maintenance of the village.

- **Affect on business** - Added to all these concerns stated above as my business is on the A21 south of the crossing I believe this will greatly affect my business. As mentioned above it is likely that the road will get faster in the section the shop is situated due to drivers wanting 'to make time up' for the delay they have experienced. My customers will be concerned about trying to pull into my shop car park if the speed of other drivers puts them under pressure. Likewise trying to pull out of the shop with a line of traffic built up after the opening of the crossing will deter customers from coming to the shop. Likewise people may be less inclined to use Robertsbridge village due to inconvenience, congestion and difficulty parking. Having spoken to some of the other small businesses in the village it is not felt that the railway will add any value to their business. For my business there will be no gain at all. It is therefore likely that more small businesses will suffer as a result of the railway. I have never been asked about the effects on my business from RVR so why they have decided that the railway will be good for the village is unknown. They have a shop of their own and a cafe this is clearly encouraging visitors to spend money with them and not in the village.

I hope you have the time to consider all my points above. This is splitting the village and causing potentially deep seated divides in what is a fantastic village.

Yours

Sarah Geldard



This email has been scanned by the Symantec Email Security.cloud service.
For more information please visit <http://www.symanteccloud.com>
