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From: Andrew Augarde [REDACTED]
Sent: 31 May 2018 10:25
To: TRANSPORTANDWORKSACT
Subject: Rather Valley Railway Proposals

30th May 2018

Ref: Proposed Transport and Works Act Order, Rother Valley Railway

Secretary of State for Transport,
c/o Transport & Works Act Orders Unit
Department for Transport
1/18 Great Minster House
London
SW1P 4DR

I wish to register my strongest formal objection to the Transport and Works Act Order submitted to your department by Rother Valley Railway (RVR) to 'Construct, operate and maintain' a new railway between Bodiam and Robertsbridge. I have broken my objection into a number of relevant points.

Compulsory Purchase Orders- As I understand it these are measures, invoked only when the infrastructure project undertaken is considered to be in the wider public interest. Specifically regarding transport, this is a tourist attraction and not by any means an 'essential' transport link. The granting of such an order in a situation such as this sets a very dangerous precedent for the future. The Transport and Works Act Order sought by the Rother Valley Railway constitutes a morally unjust use of CPO: to detrimentally affect an already thriving business and its associated community seems completely at odds with the stated aims of RVR.

Flood Risk- As a homeowner in the topographically 'lower' band of Robertsbridge, I am acutely aware of the risks posed by any changes to the flood plain. The floods of 2000, undoubtedly caused by the building of the A21 bypass, caused devastating widespread damage and, whilst the flood defences offer a modicum of security, they are to date untested and I fear any more earthworks across the flood plain could completely jeopardise these efforts.

Level crossings- I am by no means an expert on traffic flow, congestion or level crossings, there are, i'm sure, far more well-minded individuals pondering the effects of such a scheme. However, the inherent dangers of putting a level crossing on such a major and dangerous trunk road do seem ridiculous. The A21 south of the Lamberhurst bypass is not, in itself, a dangerous road; the reason for the carriages dangerous moniker are the increased risks drivers take on a single carriageway to get past slow moving traffic given that they may still have 12 to 15 miles left to complete. Furthermore, it seems nonsensical to allow the completion of a level crossing across a road earmarked for future dualling as part of essential road improvements.

Parking- At present it seems that no consideration has been given by RVR and its supporters to the issues surrounding car parking. They repeatedly claim that all of their potential customers will travel to their attraction via train. This is patently absurd and RVR have to accept that a sizeable percentage will arrive by car, as in the case of other similar Heritage Railways in the vicinity. Robertsbridge is already a commuter village, its roads, streets and driveways already suffer from a daily deluge of cars belonging to people eager to catch the next train to London. This has become a real local problem and we simply do not have the available space to satisfy the parking requirements of daily London bound commuters, a tourist attraction and residents.

Business- Much has been made by RVR of the increased potential business that such a project would bring. This obviously sounds very attractive, but as a local business owner I stand foursquare behind many of the arguments to the contrary. This will certainly drive the economies of Tenterden and Bodiam Castle, but at what cost? Robertsbridge will become a transit village. I am prepared to believe that it will benefit a limited number of businesses, most notably RVR themselves, and could also lead to some increased opportunities within the local community, but Robertsbridge is an expanding village, already due some extra 150-180 houses, these opportunities would be available regardless of the railway!

Overall, RVR are supported by a national and international community of railway enthusiasts who do not have a geographical interest in the area. Unfortunately they are determined to change the local area to the detriment of residents both longstanding and new, to pursue a niche interest in the rebuilding of heritage railways. I think this is at the expense of the local community for the reasons described above.

At the very least, the issues I and others have raised demand a public enquiry, and I am requesting that this be undertaken.

Yours Sincerely

Andrew Augarde