

Summary Proof of Evidence of Tom Higbee

TRANSPORT AND WORKS ACT 1992

THE TRANSPORT AND WORKS (INQUIRIES PROCEDURE) RULES 2004

THE PROPOSED ROTHER VALLEY RAILWAY (BODIAM TO ROBERTSBRIDGE JUNCTION) ORDER



RVR
Our ref:
Client ref:

Summary Proof of Evidence of Tom Higbee

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1 Summary Evidence

Background

- 1.1 My name is Thomas Higbee. I hold an MSc in Transport Planning and Engineering from the University of Leeds (1996), and a BSc (Hons) in Geography from the University of Wales, Swansea (1994). I am a Transport Consultant, practicing for 24 years, at Steer Davies & Gleave Ltd (trading as Steer), a leading transport and infrastructure consultancy. Since 2014, I have directed Steer's work assessing the local economic impacts of the proposed re-instatement of the Rother Valley Railway.
- 1.2 I am an experienced transport planner and economist, with a focus on business case development, economic appraisal and developing the case for infrastructure projects. I have directed business cases for schemes at all stages of development, across different transport modes and scales. These business cases have helped secure powers, consents and capital investment for over £2bn of investment in major transport projects, including the Northern Line Extension, Barking Riverside Extension and Edinburgh Tram extension to Newhaven.

Summary Evidence

- 1.3 The Rother Valley Railway (RVR) proposal is to restore a former railway line, connecting the Kent and East Sussex (KESR) heritage railway to Robertsbridge, where interchange is available with mainline Southeastern rail services to London, Sevenoaks and Hastings. This will improve the accessibility of the KESR, by both rail and road, to potential visitors.
- 1.4 In my evidence I address the economic and transport benefits that the project would deliver, including the following key matters relating to the project:
- i. anticipated socio-economic benefits;
 - ii. anticipated transportation benefits, including impacts from road crossings;
 - iii. alignment of the RVR with local, regional and national policy.
 - iv. the justification for powers of compulsory acquisition.

Economic Benefits

- 1.5 The project is anticipated to deliver over £1m of benefits per annum to the local economy. These benefits accrue as a result of the additional visitors and local expenditure impacts as a result of the RVR.
- 1.6 The RVR will open up the KESR to a currently untapped rail access market which includes London and the South Coast. Steer has estimated that 4.3 million people – predominately in London – would be able to access the KESR by rail within 1½ hours journey time. The opening up of this market would be facilitated by a marketing, branding and ticketing initiatives, to maximise the overall demand.
- 1.7 In addition to a new rail catchment, the Rother Valley Railway will expand the existing road catchment to the railway, particularly for those who are only prepared to drive for a relatively

short period (less than 30 minutes) to access the railway, as the new station at Robertsbridge would provide an alternative access point for visitors.

- 1.8 Our central demand assumptions are based on an additional annual visitors of 22,000. This comprises a 15% increase on existing KESR demand (13,300 trips per annum above the baseline KESR demand of 88,400), and a 5% increase in overall demand to Bodiam Castle (8,800 additional trips above Bodiam Castle demand of 176,000 visitors per year¹.
- 1.9 The economic impact has been estimated based on the additional number of visitors; the direct spend associated with additional visitors (average £42.55 per visitor); a spend 'multiplier' of 1.22, to reflect the second order effects of initial visitor spend e.g. on local supply chains; and an apportionment of the total economic benefits that accrue to the local area.
- 1.10 My evidence also presents economic benefits under 'high' and 'low' forecasts based on a +/- 30% change in visitor demand around the 'central case', reflecting the inherent uncertainty in forecasting future KESR demand, as summarised in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Economic Impact of the Rother Valley Railway (2018 prices)

	Low	Central	High	Notes
Additional KESR Trips	15,400	22,000	28,600	
Additional direct effect £ p.a.	£656,400	£937,700	£1,220,000	Based on £42.55 per visitor
Total economic impact £ p.a.	£803,900	£1,148,400	£1,493,000	Based on multiplier of 1.22
Total economic effect – local area £ p.a.	£742,700	£1,061,000	£1,379,300	92% of total

- 1.11 I estimate the total annual economic effect of additional visitor trips to Rother is therefore forecast to be within the range of £740,000 to £1.38 million per annum, with a central estimate of £1.06 million (all 2018 prices) for the initial years after the link is completed. The additional visitor spend will also support approximately 20 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs when operational.
- 1.12 The RVR will also deliver approximately £6.5 million of additional local economic impacts during the construction phase, supporting circa 34 jobs over the 18 – 24-month construction period.

Transport Benefits and Impacts

- 1.13 My evidence sets out the valuation of transport impacts, assessed in line with Department for Transport TAG guidance.²
- 1.14 The disbenefit to users of the A21, associated with the level crossing impacts are valued at between £2,900 to £6,300 per year, based on an average closure time of 51 and 112 seconds

¹ Association of Leading Visitor Attractions, 2017 Visitor Figures. 'Visits made in 2017 to Visitor Attractions in membership with Alva'. Accessed online at <http://www.alva.org.uk/> on 03 June 2020

² UK Department for Transport Transport Appraisal Guidance (TAG), which provides guidance on the approach to the modelling and appraisal of transport projects, for which projects that require Government approval and consents are expected to follow.

respectively. A figure of 72 seconds has since been agreed with Highways England and its consultants as the basis for the detailed technical assessments carried out as part of ongoing engagement, which suggests the actual disbenefit will be towards the lower end of this range.

- 1.15 However, the transport disbenefit to A21 users will be more than offset by time savings to visitors who access KESR via Robertsbridge rather than Tenterden (£18,600), and from modal shift from car to rail (£5,800). Overall, this suggests that, from a highway congestion impact, the benefits from the improved accessibility of RVR would out-weigh the costs of delay associated with the level-crossings, and the overall efficiency of the highway network would improve.
- 1.16 Additional rail revenues of approximately £355,000 per annum are also expected to accrue to the mainline rail operator, as a result of additional rail trips to/from the RVR from the National Rail network.

Alignment with Policy

- 1.17 My evidence concludes that the project aligns with policy at a local, regional and national level.
- 1.18 The project supports local policies set out within the **Rother District Core Strategy** (adopted September 2014) and the **Salehurst and Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Development Plan**. These policy documents recognise the importance of the tourism sector to the local economy and include policies to encourage the development of the tourism sector and encouraging more sustainable access to tourist attractions. At a county and regional level, the Project is consistent with the policies within the 2019/20 East Sussex County Council Plan, and the South East LEPs Strategic Economic Plan.
- 1.19 At a national level, the Project is consistent with the **National Planning Policy Framework**, and the **Tourism Sector Deal** as part of the **UK's Industrial Strategy**. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government has provided targeted support to a number of heritage railways, including the KESR, through the £1.5bn Culture Recovery Fund (CRF) (**RVR/W2/2-1**). The criteria for funding support include that were 'culturally significant'; or were essential to the cultural fabric of a place or supported the government's wider 'levelling-up' agenda" (**RVR/W2/2-2**). The award of over £552,200 of funding to the KESR (£301,500 in CRF Round 1 and £250,700 in Round 2) provides de-facto Government recognition of the heritage value of the KESR, its role in the cultural fabric of the areas and of its economic importance.

Justification for compulsory powers

- 1.20 My evidence on the topics set out above demonstrates the public interest case for the grant of the compulsory powers necessary to implement the railway.

Overall Conclusion

- 1.21 I conclude that the economic impact of the RVR will deliver £6.5m of benefits during the construction phase and £1.06m benefits per year once operational. The net transport benefits are also forecast to be positive, though small in scale compared to the economic benefits.
- 1.22 The scale of economic benefits underscores the positive impact and RVR would have in supporting local and national policy, and supports the public interest case for compulsory powers.

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