

# 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





# Proof of Evidence of Tom Higbee

---

Prepared by:

Steer  
28-32 Upper Ground  
London SE1 9PD

+44 20 7910 5000  
[www.steergroup.com](http://www.steergroup.com)

Prepared for:

RVR

Client ref:  
Our ref:

## Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
	Background.....	1
	Work done on behalf of Rother Valley Railway .....	2
<b>2</b>	<b>Summary Evidence.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Main Evidence .....</b>	<b>6</b>
	Tourism and the local economy .....	6
	Fit with Local Policy .....	7
	Role of KESR in unlocking sustainable tourism growth .....	10
	Economic Impacts of the KESR .....	13
	Transport Impacts .....	18
	Impact of Covid-19 on Economic Impacts .....	22
<b>4</b>	<b>Themes from Objections .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Appendices and Reference Information .....</b>	<b>27</b>

## Tables

Table 2.1: Economic Impact of the Rother Valley Railway (2018 prices) .....	4
Table 3-1: Summary of Additional Visitor Demand arising from the Rother Valley Railway .....	14
Table 3.2: Economic Impact of the Rother Valley Railway (2018 prices) .....	16
Table 5.1: Summary of Appendices and relevant core documents.....	27

# 1 Introduction

## 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.

## Scope of Evidence

- 1.3 My evidence sets out the broad economic case for the Rother Valley Railway, and covers the following areas in relation to the Secretary of State's Statement of Matters:
- Statement of Matters Item 1. The anticipated socio-economic benefits of the project. This is covered from paragraph 3.33.
  - Statement of Matters Item 1. The anticipated transportation benefits of the project. This is covered from paragraph 3.72 and is summarised from paragraph 3.91.
  - Statement of Matters Item 3(a) - the impact of the three new level crossings on congestion. This is covered within the transport section of my evidence (from paragraph 3.72), with the congestion impact from the level crossing set out from paragraph 3.84.
  - Statement of Matters Item 5 - The extent to which the proposals in the TWA Order are consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework, national transport policy, and local transport, environmental and planning policies. This is covered from paragraph 3.7, with consistency with local and regional policy set out from paragraph 3.8, and national policy from paragraph 3.22.
  - Statement of Matters Item 9(c) – justification for Compulsory Purchase Order based on a compelling public interest case. My evidence on the preceding matters forms, in part, the basis for public interest case for the project.
- 1.4 The evidence I shall give is true, given in good faith and represents my professional opinion regarding the benefits of the Rother Valley Railway.

## Work done on behalf of Rother Valley Railway

- 1.5 Steer was commissioned by the Rother Valley Railway (RYR) to develop an Economic Impact Report for the re-instatement of the railway from the current terminus of the Kent and East Sussex Railway (KESR) at Bodiam to Robertsbridge. Dated September 2018, this report (RVR 09) demonstrates the overall case for the scheme, including the benefits the railway will bring to the local area by supporting tourism and the wider economy. That report forms the technical evidence that supports this Proof of Evidence. This proof includes updated information on the policy context to the scheme, and additional commentary on the potential implications of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.6 Steer's work built upon a previous (2013) Local Economic Impact Study for the Rother Valley Railway by the International Tourism Centre of Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU). Although elements of the MMU report are now outdated, it broadly demonstrated both the ability of the Rother Valley Railway to significantly increase visitor numbers on the KESR, and how this could in turn benefit the local economy.

## 2 Summary Evidence

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 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**

- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 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 year<sup>1</sup>).
- 2.7 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

- 2.8 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 2.1.

**Table 2.1: 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
<b>Total economic effect – local area £ p.a.</b>	<b>£742,700</b>	<b>£1,061,000</b>	<b>£1,379,300</b>	<b>92% of total</b>

- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 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**
- 2.11 My evidence sets out the valuation of transport impacts, assessed in line with Department for Transport TAG guidance.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.12 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 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.
- 2.13 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.
- 2.14 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.

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

### **Alignment with Policy**

- 2.15 My evidence concludes that the project aligns with policy at a local, regional and national level.
- 2.16 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.
- 2.17 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) (see **RVR/W2/2-1**).
- 2.18 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**

- 2.19 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**

- 2.20 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.
- 2.21 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.

## 3 Main Evidence

### Tourism and the local economy

- 3.1 The Rother Valley Railway (RVR) proposal is to restore a 2.2-mile ‘missing link’ of former railway line, connecting the existing 10¼ mile 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.
- 3.2 The RVR is located within Rother District within East Sussex, with the majority of the KESR located within Ashford borough in Kent, in a predominately rural area with a high reliance on tourism. Both ‘1066 Country’ – the area stretching across Rother, Hastings, Bexhill and Rye – and the towns and villages immediately adjacent to the RVR / KESR are home to a range of popular tourist attractions, including four galleries, six castles, 15 museums and hundreds of cafes, restaurants and local hotels and B&Bs.
- 3.3 The RVR/KESR is also located within the outstanding landscape of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Nature Beauty (AONB), and less than half an hours’ drive from the English Channel coast, including the popular beaches at Winchelsea and Camber Sands.
- 3.4 The importance of tourism is recognised in policy, the Rother District Core Strategy (2014) stating that:  
  
*“Tourism is an important component of the rural economy and benefits local services. Several Rother villages are popular tourist destinations due to the presence of cultural attractions, such as Bodiam Castle, Batemans at Burwash, the Kent and East Sussex Railway and the medieval town of Winchelsea.”*
- 3.5 Tenterden, nicknamed ‘Jewel of the Weald’ is a major visitor destination in its own right; Bodiam Castle, owned by the National Trust, attracts more than 175,000 visitors a year.<sup>3</sup> Both are served directly by the KESR. Other attractions in the area include Great Dixter and Sissinghurst Castle, the 1066 Battlefield and Battle Abbey, and towns of Rye, Battle and Hastings. Tourism within ‘1066 Country’ was valued at £665 million (in 2018), supporting an estimated 15,000 jobs – a 7% increase since 2017 (**RVR/W2/2-3**).
- 3.6 The importance of tourism to the local area is reinforced by the fact that there are areas of relatively high deprivation and that Gross Value Added (GVA) for East Sussex was £18,866 in GVA per head in 2016, which was 72% of the UK average value and 66% of the South-East region value. In addition, average earnings across the county are below the regional and national average. Tourism represents a sector with relatively low ‘barriers to entry’ with

---

<sup>3</sup> 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.

significant growth opportunities from additional visitor numbers and spend. Expanding the tourist 'offer' to support local economic growth is hence a key local priority.

### Fit with Local Policy

- 3.7 Both the strength of the local 'visitor economy', and continued support and growth for the tourist sector, is reflected in key local and regional policy.

#### Local Policy

- 3.8 The **Rother District Core Strategy**, adopted in September 2014, sets out the overall vision for future land-use within Rother and provides the framework for the scale and distribution of development up to 2028. The Strategic Objective for the economy is *"to secure sustainable economic growth for existing and future residents and provide greater prosperity and job opportunities for all."* Supporting tourism, as a key economic sector, is explicitly identified, with a key economic objective being *"to develop key existing sectors, including tourism"*.

- 3.9 Policy EC6 sets out the support for the districts' tourist economy in more detail:

*"Proposals relating to tourism activities and facilities will be encouraged where they accord with the following considerations, as appropriate:*

- i) It provides for the enhancement of existing attractions or accommodation to meet customer expectations; "*

- 3.10 While the strategy recognises *"that there can be tensions between tourism and local community, life and/or environmental objectives"*, it notes that *"tourism development can often also provide local amenities and improve the range of leisure facilities, thereby integrating such developments into local communities"*. Several opportunities to support tourism are identified in the Core Strategy, including *"the extension of the Kent and Sussex Steam Railway"* (page 141 Core Strategy).

- 3.11 Additionally, supporting tourism within rural areas is explicitly identified within Policy RA2: General Strategy for the Countryside, which states:

*"The overarching strategy for the Countryside is to ...*

- vi) Support enjoyment of the countryside and coast through improving access and supporting recreational and leisure facilities that cannot reasonably be located within development boundaries, such as equestrian facilities, compatible with the rural character of the area;*
- vii) Support tourism facilities, including touring caravan and camp sites, which respond to identified local needs and are of a scale and location in keeping with the rural character of the countryside; "*

- 3.12 Suitable development opportunities within the countryside are also supported through Policy RA3: *"Proposals for development in the countryside will be determined on the basis of:*

- ii) Supporting suitable employment and tourism opportunities in the countryside, [including by the conversion, for employment use, of farm buildings generally in keeping with the rural character], and by the sensitive, normally small-scale growth of existing business sites and premises; "*

- 3.13 While the Rother Valley Railway is not, primarily, being delivered for transport purposes, it should be recognised it will provide a key transport function for enabling visitors without a car

to access Tenterden and Bodiam through the use of the rail network via interchange at Robertsbridge. This is therefore consistent with the Core Strategy's transport objectives to:

- v. *“improve connectivity between Rother and the wider South East region, both along the coast and towards London*
- vi. *achieve a re-balancing of the transport system in favour of sustainable modes as a means of access to employment, health services, recreation and community facilities; and*
- vii. *maximise transport choice and otherwise provide for efficient and safe movement, in both urban and rural areas”*

- 3.14 The re-instatement of the ‘missing link’ of the Rother Valley Railway, from its current extent at Northbridge Street in Robertsbridge to Junction Road, Bodiam (planning reference RR/2014/1608/P), received conditional planning approval from Rother District Council in March 2017. This approval demonstrates that re-instatement of the railway is considered by the District Council to be compliant with local planning policy.

*Salehurst and Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Plan*

- 3.15 While the Rother Valley Railway is not included within the **Salehurst and Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Development Plan**, since at the time it was subject to the aforementioned planning application, the Plan does include an objective to *“foster a sustainable community that promotes employment creation, across commercial, retail, and industrial sites”*. Policy EC5 regarding tourism sets out that:

*“Tourism development which includes any business activities that facilitate tourism and leisure related activities will be permitted where they:*

1. *any new building(s) make appropriate use of materials, scale, height, form and signage; and;*
2. *are in keeping with the rural character of the AONB countryside and its settlements. “*

*Local tourism policy*

- 3.16 Reflecting the importance of tourism to the local economy, ‘1066 Country’ is a public and private sector partnership to promote and market tourism in the local area. It brings together Hastings Borough Council, Rother District Council, Wealden District Council, Tourism South East, National Trust and English Heritage, together with a range of small businesses.
- 3.17 The key focus of ‘1066 Country’ is promoting the area as a high-quality, all-year-round destination to both day and staying visitors. They target visitor trips from both the south-east of England, within a three-hour drive, and key overseas markets including Northern Europe, China and the USA. ‘1066 Country’ noted that visitors would now be able to access attractions in Bodiam, Northiam and Tenterden by public transport in their letter of support for the RVR (RVR 19 Appendix 6), and Kent County Council, East Sussex County Council and Rother District Council all note the tourism benefits of the RVR to the local area within their letters of support of the project (RVR 19 Appendices 10 – 12).
- 3.18 Overseas visitors account for 20% of local tourism business value, with ‘1066 Country’ promoted in more than 10 countries abroad (**RVR/W2/2-4**), demonstrating the ability of tourism – and an improved tourist offer – to appeal outside the UK. Visitor spend by overseas visitors is ‘net additional’ to the UK economy.

### Regional Policy

- 3.19 The strength of the visitor economy, and its importance to the regional economy, is also recognised both within both East Sussex, and the wider geography of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP).
- 3.20 The 2019/20 **East Sussex County Council Plan** includes “driving sustainable economic growth” as one of four key priorities, with the intention to continue to build on the county’s existing strength in culture and tourism. The Plan includes the key outcome of “grow[ing] the visitor economy by raising the visibility of East Sussex, enhancing perceptions, increasing the number of visitors to the coast, and increasing length of stay and spend” by 2022 within its performance measures and targets. The project has the support of Kent County Council, East Sussex County Council and Rother District Council (RVR 19 Appendices 10 – 12), Ashford Borough Council (RVR 19 Appendix 14) and Tenterden Town Council (SUPP/113).
- 3.21 South East LEPs **Strategic Economic Plan**, which sets out the wider region’s economic assets and the case to Government for Local Growth Fund investment. It highlights the importance of the tourism sector in the South East, which currently accounts for 6.6% of total employment, 2.7% of total economic output, and total employment of 96,000 people – with the visitor economy particularly important within rural and coastal areas. ‘Creative, cultural and media, and the visitor economy’ is explicitly identified as one of five priority sectors, each of which have high growth potential, align closely with the Government’s National Industrial Strategy, and through which LEP-wide support for innovation and growth can be effectively targeted.

### National Policy

- 3.22 The role of the tourist sector to the national economy – and its potential to deliver increased productivity and investment, benefiting local economies across the country – is documented within the **Tourism Sector Deal** of the **UK’s Industrial Strategy**. This sets out how the Government and industry will work in partnership to boost productivity, develop the skills of the UK workforce and support destinations to enhance their visitor offer.
- 3.23 It sets out how the Government will expect industry to “*continue to invest in tourism attractions and innovative products, to remain a global leader in the experiences the UK offers visitors*” – of which investment in the Rother Valley Railway forms one example – supported by Government action on people, places and infrastructure.
- 3.24 The Deal also identifies the essential need for visitors to move around the country easily, particularly by a range of public transport options, since “*46 per cent of international visitors are nervous about driving here, in particular because we drive on the left-hand side*”. As set out later, investment in the Rother Valley Railway will form a key element in opening up Tenterden and the rural north of ‘1066 Country’ to new markets by providing direct connectivity to the National Rail network.
- 3.25 Supporting a prosperous rural economy, including through enabling sustainable tourism, is also explicitly supported within national planning policy. Paragraph 83 of the National Planning Policy Framework sets out how:

*“Planning policies and decisions should enable:*

- (a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*

- (b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*
- (c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside”*

- 3.26 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 organisations were “financially viable before COVID-19; had exhausted all other funding options; 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).
- 3.27 The award of over £552,200 of funding to the KESR (£301,500 in CRF Round 1 and £250,700 in Round 2) therefore 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. The wider implications of covid-19 are discussed later within this evidence.

### **Role of KESR in unlocking sustainable tourism growth**

- 3.28 Delivery of the KESR therefore has a strong fit with local policy, in terms of both broadening the range of tourism attractions, and improving transport to Tenterden and ‘1066 Country’ for those who lack access to a car. By broadening the market of the RVR, and attracting a wider range of tourists to Rother and ‘1066 Country’, including from overseas, it will help to increase the overall size of the visitor economy.

#### **Background to the KESR**

- 3.29 The KESR is a major attraction within Rother and ‘1066 Country’, with annual patronage of between 80,000 and 90,000 visitors per year prior to the disruption caused by COVID-19 in 2020. Heritage rail services vary on a seasonal basis, with five to eight services a day between April and October. Services are most frequent on summer bank holiday weekends, and at special events such as Christmas services and ‘Santa Specials’. The free-to-enter Colonel Stephens Railway Museum at Tenterden also provides an additional attraction into the history of the light railway.
- 3.30 Access to the railway is currently overwhelmingly by private car via Tenterden, with a small proportion arriving via private coach tours. Public transport to the KESR, Bodiam and Tenterden is limited, acting as a major barrier to visiting the area for those who lack access to a car. Tenterden has a half-hourly (hourly at weekends) bus service to Maidstone (journey time 63 minutes) (RVR/W2/2-5) and an hourly bus service to Ashford (journey circa 45 minutes), with occasional services to Hastings (RVR/W2/2-6). Bodiam (including Bodiam Castle) has six buses a day to/from Hastings (RVR/W2/2-7).
- 3.31 Links to the National Rail network are irregular and indirect, making public transport access to/from London or major international gateways (for foreign tourists) extremely challenging, and reducing the overall attractiveness of the area as a place to visit.
- 3.32 This geography is, in part, reflected in the current origin profile of those who visit the KESR, of which the majority travel from within a 30-minute drive of Tenterden. Overall, 77% travel from within the South East (excluding London), 15% of visitors from Greater London (particularly boroughs in South East London) and 7% of visitors travel from further afield, predominantly the East of England.

### Potential for Growth

3.33 Delivery of the Rother Valley Railway to Robertsbridge has the ability to significantly increase access to the KESR, and to Rother and '1066 Country' more broadly, for those without a car. The siting of Robertsbridge, directly on the National Rail network with frequent hourly services to London, effectively opens up a new potential market of people who could access the KESR by rail. Based on the 2018 National Rail timetable, 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.

#### *'London' rail market*

3.34 The potential scale of the London 'day trip' market is highly significant, reflecting:

- The overall size of the London market (currently 15% of visitors to the KESR are from Greater London);
- Favourable demographics where significant numbers of people do not own a car, but have comparably high disposable incomes and likely propensity to visit tourism attractions elsewhere, but for whom visiting KESR is not currently a viable option;
- The relative attractiveness of rail compared to private car. For many travelling from or via London, rail would be a more attraction option, due to severe traffic congestion within London and an unwillingness to travel long distances by car, particularly for likely visitors such as families with children or retirees.

3.35 London represents the key rail access market. London has a population of around 8 million peoples and the South East London boroughs of Croydon, Bromley, Southwark, Lewisham, Greenwich, and Bexley, which collectively have a population of 1.86 million people. Census data indicates that 41% of households within these boroughs do not own a car, which means that the new rail catchment of potential KESR visitors is around 762,000 for non-car owners within these six London boroughs alone.

3.36 Rail fares for likely visitors (families with children, retirees, off-peak travel) can have a significant discount to standard rail fares, with further discounts likely with joint marketing initiatives between, for example, KESR, Bodiam Castle and Southeastern.

#### *'South Coast' rail market*

3.37 The other key potential rail market is from the south, from the Hastings end of the route. The KESR would be directly accessible by rail from Hastings and Battle and, via interchange, to locations such as Brighton and Eastbourne on the South Coast. For visitors to Hastings and Battle who travel by train, the KESR and Bodiam Castle become viable and easily accessible (by rail) visitor attractions.

3.38 The rail market south of Robertsbridge also has significant potential. Hastings and Battle are major visitor destinations in their own right, and rail link to Robertsbridge brings KESR, Bodiam Castle and Tenterden within easy 'day trip' reach. Additionally, the RVR will be accessible to the resident population of Hastings, where a combination of relatively low car ownership (in parts) and high proportion of retirees provide opportunities for accessing RVR that would not otherwise be available.

#### *KESR and rail industry initiatives*

3.39 KESR has several plans and proposals to maximise the potential for growth, and the wider benefits to the visitor economy. The connection of the Rother Valley Railway to the National

Rail network, and the enhanced connectivity it provides to a range of tourist destinations, creates opportunities to promote the KESR and maximise the overall demand potential of the Rother Valley Railway. These include:

- Area-wide branding (e.g. as part of '1066 Country');
- Specific integrated/combined offer with other local attractions;
- Marketing and ticketing initiatives with Southeastern (the London-Hastings line rail operator);
- Expanding presence on social media platforms and online bookings.

3.40 Joint ticketing and 'bundling' offers are already provided by other heritage railways, which have actively collaborated with local attractions, businesses and train operating companies to market the railway and the local area. For example,

- The Bodmin and Wenford Railway operate a combined ticket deal with Great Western Railway, where passengers can travel from any station in Cornwall or Plymouth through to Bodmin General and Boscarne Junction for a fixed price;
- The Spa Valley Railway offer a joint discounted ticket combining travel on the railway with entry to Groombridge Place, a historic garden and country estate;
- The Bluebell Railway offer three hotel packages in conjunction with businesses along the route, typically include a night's Bed and Breakfast, two days unlimited travel on the railway, and admission to one or more local attractions.

3.41 Delivery of the RVR would allow KESR to maximise the opportunities from such initiatives. For example, there would be a clear opportunity to market KESR and the local area to a 'London market' of both residents and national and international tourists, such as through a 'bundled' ticket offer of travel on the KESR, return rail tickets to London and to Bodiam Castle (National Trust) for a classic 'English countryside' experience. The flexibility of KESR operations would also allow the railway to timetable its services to connect with those to/from London, as currently undertaken on the Bluebell Railway, allowing it to maximise the convenience of travelling to the KESR by rail. The National Trust also support the reinstatement of the 'Missing Link' and propose to promote the accessibility provided by the link to the national rail network in its marketing of Bodiam Castle (RVR 19 Appendix 5 and RVR 51).

3.42 The ability for the KESR to access the national rail network at Robertsbridge will also support the marketing and awareness of the KESR from the wider rail industry. Both the Bluebell and Spa Valley railways in Sussex, and numerous others, are included on the London & the South East network map (RVR/W2/2-8) as they directly connect to the National Rail network and offer additional journey opportunities. Both railways are also included of the South East Community Rail Partnership's mapping and advertising (RVR/W2/2-9). Direct connectivity to the rail network would enable the KESR to be included on such maps, advertising the KESR to a broader audience of potential visitors.

#### *Expanded highway market*

3.43 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.

3.44 While Tenterden – the access point for 90% of visitors to the KESR – has good parking provision, local road access between East Sussex, West Kent and the wider strategic highway network is poor. The new station at Robertsbridge would provide an alternative access point

for a number of visitors, particularly those coming from the west of the KESR. This easier access will reduce the need for those travelling from west of Robertsbridge to drive all the way to Tenterden.

#### *KESR Operations*

- 3.45 The current KESR infrastructure, and typical operations of four or five return services per day (and up to eight on a few 'special event' days each year), allows service provision and capacity to be increased to accommodate additional passenger demand on the railway. Each of the five stations has passing loop facilities; while the signalling system – with four signal boxes at Tenterden Town, Rolvenden, Wittersham Road and Northiam – theoretically permits the operation of four trains simultaneously, although in practice the normal train service uses two or three trains.

### **Economic Impacts of the KESR**

- 3.46 Based on the improved accessibility of the KESR, and the complementary initiatives under development, we expect visitor numbers on the KESR to increase, in turn increasing local visitor numbers and supporting the 'visitor economy'.

#### **Visitor Numbers**

##### *Base KESR Demand*

We have made a 'central' estimate that the introduction of the RVR would result in an overall increase of 15% in KESR demand, from a combination of opening up the new rail market and providing an expanded catchment area for potential trips accessing by car. Reflecting the uncertainty in forecasting future KESR demand, we then apply +/-30% range estimate to this 'central case' assumption to prepare forecasts for the local economic impacts of the RVR.

- 3.47 While it is difficult to accurately forecast the precise initial increase in patronage, in the absence of specific, difficult-to-obtain information regarding individuals' propensity to travel by rail to access heritage rail, the access to a wholly untapped rail market and increased road catchment with the RVR will undoubtedly open up KESR to potential visitors who would not visit (or would visit less often) without the scheme. Hence, the 15% figure is designed to be a prudent and reasonable estimate, based on our judgement and informed by the increase in the population catchment of the KESR.
- 3.48 The assumed 15% uplift equates to 13,300 trips per annum above the baseline KESR demand of 88,400. We have made a secondary assumption that the proportion of the 15% uplift accessing via rail would be 85%, with the remaining 15% by car. This assumption does not affect our assessment of local visitor spend impacts, but does affect the assessment of transport impacts through a reduction in highway trips.

##### *Additional Bodiam Castle Demand*

- 3.49 Bodiam Castle is a major tourist attraction and attracts 176,000 visitors per year,<sup>4</sup> almost double that of the KESR. Delivery of the Rother Valley Railway 'missing link' will also connect Bodiam to the National Rail network, expanding the effective catchment of the attraction in the same manner as described above for the KESR. The National Trust support the

---

<sup>4</sup> 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.

reinstatement of the RVR (RVR 19 Appendix 5 and RVR 51) and note that the connection will serve as an opportunity to market all-inclusive public transport and entrance arrangements, which will be substantial economic boost to the area.

- 3.50 While there would be a time and cost impact associated with using the Rother Valley Railway/KESR to access Bodiam that may deter some (for example whose primary purpose is to visit Bodiam), for others the ability to access a historic site via a heritage railway would increase the attractiveness of the experience at Bodiam. We have hence assumed a 'central case' uplift of 5% in Bodiam Castle annual demand, based on the significantly improved accessibility of Bodiam for those without access to a car, representing 8,800 additional trips per annum.
- 3.51 In addition to attracting additional demand, the Rother Valley Railway could also encourage some existing users to transfer from car (the predominant access mode at present) to rail. This does not affect the overall number of visitors to the area, and hence the economic benefits of the RVR, but does affect the transport impacts.

#### *Demand Summary*

- 3.52 A summary of our estimated increase in local visitor demand is presented in the table below. Our central case forecast is for an increase in visitor numbers to the local area of 22,000 as a result of the Rother Valley Railway 'missing link', representing an overall increase of 25% above current KESR demand. The majority of this arises from the new rail-based market that is created from the new connection at Robertsbridge. This forecast is used to assess the local economic impacts in the remainder of this chapter.

**Table 3-1: Summary of Additional Visitor Demand arising from the Rother Valley Railway**

Demand Estimate	Assumption	Value (Visitors per annum)
<b>Base Demand</b>		
Base demand on KESR	Total KESR demand in 2017	88,400
<b>Additional Demand</b>		
Increased KESR demand from delivery of RVR	+ 15% of base KESR demand, due to new rail market and expanded highway catchment.	13,300
Increase in Bodiam Castle trips	+5% in overall trips to Bodiam Castle	8,800
<b>Total additional demand on KESR (central case)</b>		<b>22,000</b>

#### **Visitor Spend**

##### *Direct expenditure*

- 3.53 Each of these additional trips on the KESR, and to the local area, will generate additional expenditure in the local economy, both through the fare paid to visit the railway itself and that spent on local facilities and attractions (such as Bodiam Castle and/or local pubs and

restaurants). This has been estimated based on the assumed additional number of visitors to the area, and the typical 'spend per day' for visitors.

3.54 The 2016 Visit Britain GB Day Visitor and Tourism Survey provides an evidence base of the typical 'spent per trip' for both day and overnight trips to Rother, South East England and England. Based on this data, we have estimated the overall spend per trip to be £42.55 (2018 prices),<sup>5</sup> based on:

- An average spend per person of £30.00 (2016 prices) for day trip visitors;
- An average spend per person of £174.89 (2016 prices) for overnight visits;
- 93% of domestic visitors being 'day trip' visits and 7% being overnight;

3.55 Based on these figures, and 22,000 additional trips, this represents a direct economic impact of £937,700 per year to the local area.

*Induced expenditure and economic 'multipliers'*

3.56 In practice, the total economic impact of the Rother Valley Railway will be significantly greater than the direct expenditure effect, as visitor spend is recycled and re-invested through the economy. Extensive research has been previously undertaken assessing the magnitude of these 'multiplier' effects from tourism expenditure on local economies.

3.57 Tourism South East previously employed an economic model to forecast the economic impacts of tourism in Rother in 2015,<sup>6</sup> which estimated the direct, indirect and induced impacts of tourist expenditure. This identified an economic multiplier rate of 1.22, broadly consistent with analysis of the impact of tourism across England as a whole, but more conservative than similar elasticities estimated for the Heritage Lottery Fund (**RVR/W2/2-10**) and the Homes and Communities Agency.<sup>7</sup>

3.58 Based on applying the Tourism South East multiplier, including the 'induced expenditure' impact increases the total annual economic impacts to £1,148,400. Since a small proportion – estimated from the tourist model of 8% - represents expenditure incurred outside of the local area (e.g. fuel costs, train fares), we estimate that £1,061,000 of this (92%) accrues to the local area. The local area includes both the immediate area where tourist trips are made 'to', but also those areas where this tourist income cycles through the local economy, including through the wages of those who work in the tourist sector and the local suppliers of tourism-related businesses.

3.59 While a proportion of this spend will be redistributed from other areas in the UK, it should be noted that:

- the RVR will help generate 'additional' spending by encouraging existing visitors to spend more, or visit additional attractions, on each trip, rather than simply encouraging visitors to visit '1066 Country' rather than somewhere else in the UK. It will help to diversify the overall tourist offer, with the unique nature of the heritage railway complementing other attractions within Rother, Hastings and wider '1066 Country'; and

---

<sup>5</sup> Data sources for the visitor spent assumption are in 2016 prices. This figure has been uplifted to 2018 prices using CPI, and is consistent with that set out in the Economic Impacts Report.

<sup>6</sup> Cambridge Tourism Economic Impact Model or 'Cambridge Model'; a computer-based model developed by Geoff Broom Associates and the Regional Tourist Boards of England.

<sup>7</sup> Homes and Communities Agency, 'Additionality Guide', Fourth Edition 2014

- research by ‘1066 Country’ highlighted how 20% of local business value is from overseas visitors, for whom any increase in their numbers or spend is wholly additional to the UK economy.

#### *Summary of Tourism Spend impacts*

- 3.60 Our summary of the expected tourism impacts of the Rother Valley Railway is set out in the table below. The ‘central case’ forecast assumes additional annual visitors of 22,000; the ‘high’ and ‘low’ forecasts a range estimate based on a +/-30% change in visitor demand around the ‘central case’, reflecting the inherent uncertainty in forecasting future KESR demand.

**Table 3.2: 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
<b>Total economic effect – local area £ p.a.</b>	<b>£742,700</b>	<b>£1,061,000</b>	<b>£1,379,300</b>	<b>92% of total</b>

- 3.61 We 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 two main drivers of the overall scale of benefits are:

- the assumed uplift in rail-based demand from the Rother Valley Railway; and
- the value of the multiplier used to estimate the overall economic impact from the direct expenditure effect.

#### *Demand and benefit upsides*

- 3.62 In respect to each of these drivers, we have adopted a prudent estimate within our ‘central case’ forecast, with a ‘bottom-up’ uplift in rail demand benchmarked against the experience of the Bluebell Railway, and a conservative multiplier rate based on local evidence and benchmarked against other, recent, academic work. Our estimate is based on prudent assumptions on the level of economic impact, and in practice there are several ‘upside risks’ whereby the economic impact is significantly greater than the figures above. These include:

- **Encouraging longer stays** – the Rother Valley Railway would link up a number of tourism attractions – from Hastings and Battle through to Robertsbridge, and then via the KESR to Tenterden – which would be readily accessible by rail. The ability to visit multiple attractions by rail may encourage more staying trips (with higher per trip expenditures) and fewer shorter stay trips;
- **Higher spend per trip for rail users** – evidence from the GB Tourist Statistics suggests that spend by tourists who travel by rail is around 10% higher than that of car users.<sup>8</sup> A 10% increase in spend per person (also a proxy for longer-stays) would increase the economic benefits from the central case estimate of £1.06m per annum to £1.17m;

<sup>8</sup> The GB Tourist Statistics 2012, Table 2.1, p41 (spend/trip). VisitScotland, Visit Wales, VisitEngland.

- **Higher multiplier** – the multiplier we have employed for this study is considered prudent. If a multiplier rate of 1.38 were used (based on the local multiplier rate in the Homes and Communities Agency/Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 2014 Additionality Guide) then the central case benefits would increase from £1.06m to £1.20m per annum.

#### *Benchmarking of Economic Benefits*

- 3.63 Previous research by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail in 2013 (RVR 31) provides an additional ‘sense-check’ of the overall economic impact of the RVR on the local economy. It estimated the local economic impacts of a range of heritage railways, and benchmarked this against the turnover (in terms of fare revenue) of each, concluding that:

---

“for every £1 that is spent on the railway, a mean average figure of £2.71 is added to the local economy.” *All Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail: Report on the Value of Heritage Railways, page 17*

---

- 3.64 Based on an expected revenue per passenger of £18.14 (2018 prices, inclusive of concession tickets, catering and retail), and 22,000 additional visitor trips, this would generate an additional circa £400,000 in annual turnover on the KESR. Applying the average ratio of 2.71 between heritage railway turnover and the impact on the local economy indicates an estimated local economic contribution of circa £1.08 million per year – marginally greater than our central estimate set out above. This provides an additional degree of confidence in our ‘bottom-up’ assessment of the total volume of local economic benefit generated by the RVR.

#### *KESR Investment Plan*

- 3.65 The 2018 Economic Impact Report presented economic impacts based on a scenario in which KESR visitor numbers were assumed to grow substantially (to between 150,000 and 200,000 annually) over the next decade. The KESR has an established track record in investing in the railway (covered in the evidence of Shaun Dewey - RVR/W9/1), demonstrating its commitment to the railway.
- 3.66 The scenario suggested that, should passenger numbers increase to around 180,000 per year – approximately 90,000 above current footfall and comparable to patronage on similar heritage railways elsewhere, this would result in a greater annual economic impact of up to £4.6 million (2018 prices) per year.
- 3.67 The immediate impact on Covid-19, and the suspension of the railway together with the regions’ tourist economy, has meant that the short-term focus of KESR is on financial stability, and there are no immediate plans for investment beyond the extension to Robertsbridge.
- 3.68 However, it remains the longer-term aspiration of the KESR to continue to invest in a range of initiatives, from ‘special’ events, improvements to stations facilities and other improvements to significantly raise visitor numbers in the longer-term. This increase, while supported by additional investment in the railway, is predicated on the implementation of the Order, which would act as the vital catalyst to securing further investment and, in turn, help deliver increased visitor numbers to deliver KESR’s ambitions.

### *Employment Impacts*

- 3.69 Research carried out by Deloitte for Visit England in 2013 suggests that each £54,000 of tourism spend is associated with an additional job (**RVR/W2/2-11**). On this basis, the operation of the Rother Valley Railway could help deliver a number of new jobs within the regions' tourist economy. In the 'central case' scenario, the £1.06m of local economic impacts would deliver the equivalent of 20 permanent, full-time jobs in the local area.

### *Construction impacts*

- 3.70 In addition to the economic benefits from additional visitor trips to Rother, 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.
- 3.71 This represents both the direct expenditure on local contractors and labour from the circa £5.3m capital costs (£4.8 million excluding land acquisition) (RVR 21), and the indirect economic effects through the supply chain and induced effects through an increase in household expenditure. Overall construction impacts, to the UK economy, are estimated at £13.2 million.

## **Transport Impacts**

- 3.72 Concerns have been raised from Objectors regarding the impact of the RVR on the local highway network, both as a result of the level crossings of the A21 and B224, and additional car trips made to Robertsbridge. Our analysis shows that that impact of modal shift away from the private car to rail as a result of the RVR, with passengers now able to arrive via National Rail and interchange at Robertsbridge to access the KESR, more than compensates for delay impact at the level crossing, with a net reduction in highway congestion.

### **Positive impacts of the RVR on traffic volumes / congestion**

#### *Transfer of Highway Trips from Tenterden to Robertsbridge*

- 3.73 GIS analysis indicates that that between 40% to 50% of current users are located within a shorter drive of Robertsbridge than Tenterden, and hence a proportion of these users would be expected to 'switch' to access the KESR at Robertsbridge. This will reduce the total vehicle miles of those accessing the KESR, and hence reduce congestion on the overall highway network.
- 3.74 A second-order benefit is that the shift in access station would have a positive effect on the balance of demand on KESR services. At present, the majority of demand boards at Tenterden on specific 'peak' services. A redistribution of some of these journeys would result in a less peaked pattern of demand at associated station facilities, and enable the RVR to carry more passengers more efficiently without running additional services.
- 3.75 Not all these users would be expected to transfer location, given the established role of Tenterden as the main access to the KESR, Tenterden's larger size and role as a tourist attraction, and the lack of free parking at Robertsbridge. We have assumed that, of the 40% - 50% of visitors for whom Robertsbridge would be notionally quicker to drive to, up to half (we have taken 20% of the current market as the basis for our assessment) would drive to Robertsbridge instead of Tenterden. In particular, those from the south (e.g. Hastings) and the west (e.g. Uckfield) would be most likely to change their point of access.

- 3.76 The greatest savings in time and distance would be for people coming from the west and south, who would save around 20 minutes/19 kilometres, and 17 minutes/12 kilometres, in each direction respectively. Those accessing from the north, including London, would have a smaller, but still noticeable, saving of around 11 minutes and 8 kilometres. Based on this assessment, we have assumed that that people driving to Robertsbridge station rather than Tenterden would, on average, drive about 10 kilometres less, which is equivalent to an average time saving of around 13.5 minutes in each direction.
- 3.77 This equates to a reduction in 62,000 vehicle kilometres on the local highway network annually for those accessing the KESR.

#### *Modal Shift to Rail*

- 3.78 There is also the potential for some existing car trips to transfer to rail, particularly from London where the length of the journey and existing levels of traffic congestion are greatest. This would also contribute to decongestion on the key routes from London to Robertsbridge, including the A21.
- 3.79 Additionally, there is the potential for mode shift for visits to Bodiam Castle. Currently nearly all visitors to Bodiam Castle access the site by road. The Castle is accessed by minor roads and on busy days there can be significant localised congestion on the approaches to the Bodiam Castle car parks.
- 3.80 The new station at Robertsbridge would enable visitors to access Bodiam by rail. This could either be in part (i.e. driving to Robertsbridge then getting the KESR) or in full (getting the train to Robertsbridge to connect with the KESR). Where existing car trips transfer to rail, this would result in benefits from reduced highway congestion in the local and wider area.
- 3.81 Increasing the public transport mode share of visitors is an objective of the National Trust, and there is the potential for joint train; KESR-Bodiam ticketing arrangements that would encourage this. As there is currently no parking at Bodiam station, and no potential for future parking provision, there is greater impetus to explore the possibilities of joint ticketing in order to increase visitors to the Castle (and on KESR) without adding to congestion on the local roads.
- 3.82 Based on the above, we have assumed a small reduction in the proportion of current car-based trips to KESR and Bodiam Castle, which would – with the Rother Valley Railway – transfer to rail:
- 1% of existing car-based trips to KESR shift to rail; and
  - 1% of existing trips to Bodiam Castle transfer from car to rail access.
- 3.83 This reduction equates to a reduction in 86,000 vehicle kilometres annually for those accessing the KESR and Bodiam.

#### **Negative impacts of the RVR on traffic volumes/congestion**

##### *Level Crossing Impacts*

- 3.84 Delivery of the KESR will also involve the operation of level crossings on the A21, B2244 and Northbridge Street in Robertsbridge, resulting in small delays to highway traffic. A separate analysis has been undertaken by Mott MacDonald to assess and quantify these disbenefits.

- 3.85 This analysis appraised the highway disbenefits during a six-month operational season (March, April, May, June, September and October). The analysis includes weekdays and weekends, but excludes bank holidays, effectively adopting 179 days of operations per annum.
- 3.86 The analysis uses the traffic flow data and calculates the time disbenefit that results from the proposed level crossings on the A21, B2244 and Northbridge Street operating once per hour per direction per day (16 closures), between the hours of 10:00 and 18:00. The results were prepared for two scenarios - a 51-second closure time and a 112-second closure time.
- 3.87 The analysis undertaken suggests that the overall disbenefit per year from increased journey times to vehicles, in welfare terms, is between £2,900 and £6,300 (2018 prices), depending on the length of level crossing closure. In terms of the general scale of highway user benefits and disbenefits for a typical local transport scheme, this represents a very small figure; and in any case the £6,300 figure represents a 'worst case', since:
- Since the Mott MacDonald assessment, further engagement between i-transport (on behalf of RVR) and Highways England has sought to clarify the overall barrier down-time and resultant traffic queue length. 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. This is significantly less than the 'worst case' of 112 seconds previously assumed within the Mott MacDonald analysis;
  - as covered in the evidence of Shaun Dewey (RVR/W9/1), the 16 closures assumed per day is greater than currently envisaged level of KESR operations, which assume that eight return journeys per day (16 closures) would only operate on the busiest 9 days of the year. On 128 days of the year, only 5 return journeys (10 closures) would be required;
  - restrictions on the use of the A21 level crossing in planning permissions will prevent its use between 07:00-09:00 and 17:00-19:00 Monday to Friday and Bank Holidays.
- 3.88 Additionally, the timing of the level crossing closures due to operations on the Rother Valley Railway are likely to be primarily in August, and during off-peak periods on the highways, such that major delays during commuting periods would be avoided. Services would not be operation for more than half of the year.

#### *New Car Trips*

- 3.89 Since the KESR will now be accessed at Robertsbridge, there would be expected to be additional (new) car-based visitor trips that are attracted to KESR by the potential to access at Robertsbridge rather than Tenterden.
- 3.90 Assuming an average travel distance by car to the KESR is around 40 kilometres; that of the additional 13,300 visitors in the 'central case' annually, 15% arrive by car (as set out in Para 3.48); and a typical vehicle occupancy of 2.5 people per car, this would equate to an increase of 65,000 vehicle kilometres annually for those accessing the KESR.

#### **Summary of Highway Impacts**

- 3.91 We have valued the transport impacts described above based in line with Department for Transport TAG guidance.<sup>9</sup> This forms best practice for quantifying the welfare impacts

---

<sup>9</sup> 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.

associated with changes in journey times and traffic volumes, based on an average value of time (£5.33 per person per hour; 2018 prices) and decongestion benefit per car kilometre removed of (6.8 pence per kilometre; 2018 prices).

- 3.92 This indicates that the ‘net’ welfare impact upon users of the highway network is positive (an annual benefit of £18,100 per year (2018 prices), even allowing for the ‘worst case’ delays at the level crossing, and:
- The main welfare benefit accrues from time savings to visitors who access Robertsbridge rather than Tenterden (£18,600), and from modal shift from car to rail (£5,800);
  - This exceeds the journey time disbenefits from the level crossings on the A21 and B2244 (-£2,900 to -£6,300);
  - The net congestion impact from additional visitor car trips attracted to Robertsbridge (a disbenefit of £4,200) and the reduction in car kilometres from re-routeing of ‘existing’ car trips (a £4,200 benefit) is broadly neutral; and
  - Even if there were to be no modal shift (of existing trips) from car to rail, the net overall transport impact would remain positive.
- 3.93 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.

*Impacts of additional car traffic on Robertsbridge*

- 3.94 We have also assessed the forecast additional number of car trips that would access Robertsbridge as a result of the Rother Valley Railway, to ensure that these trips do not result in additional congestion or car parking pressures within the village.
- 3.95 There are two sources of additional trips:
- Existing trips to the KESR who currently access at Tenterden, but who would, in the future, choose to access at Robertsbridge instead; and
  - New car trips to the KESR as a result of easier access to the KESR.
- 3.96 Currently, 452 visitors on average travel on the KESR on each day the railway is operational. Assuming 80% of these trips arrive by car, and 20% of trips re-route from Tenterden to Robertsbridge, and an additional 11 person-trips by car to Robertsbridge who would not otherwise visit the railway (as set out above), this would equate to 83 daily visitors accessing by car in Tenterden. With a car occupancy of 2.5 people per car, the additional number of cars (vehicle trips rather than person trips) would be in the order of 30 for an average day.
- 3.97 These visitors would comfortably be accommodated in the Robertsbridge 124-space station car park on all but the busiest visitor days, which is relatively lightly-used outside of working days.<sup>10</sup> Casual car parking on residential roads is an issue that has existed for many years in Robertsbridge, as with many other towns in the UK. The Parish Council, Rother District Council and the East Sussex County Council have been considering potential options to relieve the problem and parking enforcement is now being carried out by ESCC pursuant to the Civil Enforcement of Parking Contraventions Designation (no. 2) Order 2020 SI2020/946 which designates Rother as a civil enforcement area for parking contraventions and as a special enforcement area for the purposes of Part 6 of the traffic management Act 2004. To limit the

---

<sup>10</sup> It is primarily used for commuters, with little use on weekends and bank holidays.

impact on Robertsbridge, the reconnection of the railway would be marketed primarily with rail travellers. Cars would be discouraged from travelling to Robertsbridge and instead would be redirected to Northiam and Tenterden.

#### *National Rail Revenue Impacts*

- 3.98 Our forecasts also suggest that the Rother Valley Railway would result in an increase of around 22,200 return journeys (or 44,400 single trips) per annum on the National Rail network, as a result of the additional trips on the KESR by people accessing via the rail network. Assuming a fare yield of £8.00 per passenger per single trip, this equates to an additional £355,000 per year to the rail operator (and, in the longer-term through the franchising system, to the Government).
- 3.99 Rail trips would take place largely outside the peak hours, and in a counter-peak direction (i.e. from London to Robertsbridge in the morning), which means that the additional demand and revenue generated by the Rother Valley Railway can be accommodated without any material adverse impact on rail crowding or costs

#### **Impact of Covid-19 on Economic Impacts**

- 3.100 Covid-19 has had a significant impact upon the population and economy of the UK, with the 'travel and tourism' sector one of the most affected. We have hence considered the longer-term implications of Covid-19 on the scale of economic impacts that the RVR is expected to generate.

#### *Impact of COVID-19 on Travel and Tourism Sector*

- 3.101 The Office of National Statistics (ONS) prepared a report on the impact of COVID-19 on the travel and tourism sector (**RVR/W2/2-12**), based on evidence of the impact of the pandemic in 2020 (March onwards) compared to previous years. This examined the impact on hotel occupancy and revenue, impact on businesses and labour market impacts within Rother and the South East.
- 3.102 The ONS report cited Visit England survey data<sup>11</sup> which showed that for the full year 2020 room occupancy in the South East of England (the region containing Rother District) was 29%, compared with 66% for the full year 2019. Revenue per room per day (total room revenue divided by total number of rooms) decreased from £45.02 per room to £16.72 per room.
- 3.103 The impact on business turnover was similarly marked. Across the 'travel and tourism' sector business turnover in May 2020 was 26% of February levels, compared to over 73% for all other sectors. There was some recovery through the easing of lockdown in the autumn, though still well below February 2020 levels (around 70%), before a decline following the November lockdown.
- 3.104 The percentage of travel and tourism businesses trading reflected the level of restrictions, with 43% of accommodation and travel businesses trading in July 2020, increasing to 98% by late August. By mid-January 2021 only 37% were trading (**RVR/W2/2-12**).
- 3.105 In terms of labour market effects, the ONS report reported that across the travel and tourism sector 10.8% fewer people reported their job being in this sector in July to September 2020, compared with the corresponding period in 2019. Employment in other sectors increased by

---

<sup>11</sup> Visit England, England Occupancy Survey, December 2020 Results

0.1%. The reduction in employment is largest among the 16 to 24 and 25 to 34 years age brackets.

- 3.106 The impacts of the pandemic are still being felt, and the potential timing of any recovery in the travel and tourism sector remains uncertain. Visit England has prepared a ‘domestic outlook’ for 2020 and 2021 (**RVR/W2/2-13**; prepared December 2020) which forecast that 2020 domestic tourism spend would be 62% lower than 2019 with a forecast that 2021 would be 33% lower than 2019. Therefore, while the Visit England analysis suggests a recovery in 2021 compared to 2020, the overall forecast spend remains significantly lower than pre-pandemic (2019), suggesting the challenges for businesses and workers in the travel and tourism sector will remain acute.

*Implications for RVR Economic Impacts*

- 3.107 The RVR would be completed and operational in Summer 2025. The forecasts of KESR usage and the RVR uplift do not take account of any ongoing restrictions related to the pandemic. The implicit assumption is that there would be no material restrictions (travel restrictions or social distancing requirements) by the time of opening, or thereafter.
- 3.108 The impacts of the current pandemic on future tourism demand remain uncertain. The trend prior to the pandemic was that total domestic tourism trips were broadly constant year-on-year, whereas international tourism (outbound trips) was increasing (**RVR/W2/2-14**). A potential impact of the pandemic is that the relative attractiveness of domestic tourism versus international tourism could increase, due to health-related concerns and due to the economic effects of the pandemic. However, whereas this does represent a potential upside it is difficult to quantify at either a general level (the scale of the domestic visitor economy) or for a particular attraction such as KESR.
- 3.109 The greater significance of the pandemic is in the large negative impact it has had on the tourism sector, and therefore the greater positive impact that the RVR would have in supporting key local businesses (hotels, retail, food and beverage), attractions (including KESR and Bodiam Castle) and workers in these sectors.
- 3.110 The need for economic stimulus in Rother District is recognised by National Government, with Rother District being categorised as ‘Category 1’ (of three) (**RVR/W2/2-15**) within the Government’s ‘Levelling Up Fund’ (**RVR/W2/2-16**), based on the need for economic recovery and growth. The specific importance of KESR, in both cultural and economic terms, is underscored by the £552,200 Government grant made to KESR through the Culture Recovery Fund.
- 3.111 The importance of tourism to the local economy is underscored by the ‘tourism intensity’ of employment in Rother District, which at 16.1% ranks 40<sup>th</sup> highest among 368 Local Authority Areas. The impact of RVR, and the visitor spend it will generate, will therefore support post-COVID-19 economic recovery imperatives for the area, targeted on businesses and workers in the sector most adversely affected by the pandemic. Moreover, the construction phase activity will support local jobs and spend over the next couple of years.
- 3.112 Overall, we do not consider that the implications of covid-19 materially affect the forecasts of visitor numbers and spend presented in this evidence. However, the economic challenges presented by the pandemic increase the importance of securing the economic benefits that the RVR would deliver.

## 4 Themes from Objections

4.1 I will now respond directly to matters raised by objectors to the Rother Valley Railway Order.

### **Limited/negative economic impacts**

#### *No economic benefit of the RVR*

4.2 The Rother Valley Railway will extend the KESR to Robertsbridge, providing direct interchange within national rail services to London and Hastings, and hence open up a new market both for the RVR and for tourism in Rother, Bodiam and Tenterden. Our analysis indicates that more than 4.3 million people will be able to access the RVR by rail via Robertsbridge within two hours, opening up a significant new market for local tourism.

4.3 We estimate that, by generating an additional 22,000 trips on the KESR and within the local area, the Rother Valley Railway is forecast to generate local economic benefits of over £1m per annum once operational. This is comprised of both the 'direct expenditure' of visitors on both the railway and local attractions and facilities (such as Bodiam Castle and local pubs, cafes and hotels), that on local construction, and the multiplier effect as this spending filters through the local economy.

4.4 The estimation of these benefits is directly informed by visitor spend data from Visit Britain. Collectively, additional visitor spent will also support approximately 20 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs when operational, in addition to 34 during the construction phase.

#### *No account taken of impact on farming output/income*

4.5 Our work is concerned with the impacts of the RVR on the local tourist economy, and the transport impacts of additional visitor trips. Responses to this objection are dealt with in detail in the proof of Mr Peter Hodges (RVR/W10/1), although, as outlined in the Agricultural Impacts Report, the impact of the RVR on farm income is negligible when compared to the significant local economic benefits of the scheme.

4.6 Indeed, the Agricultural Impacts Report notes a reduction in the overall gross margin of the 17.76 acres of arable land at Parsonage Farm lost to pasture of £2,646 per annum, compared to the total annual local economic benefit of the RVR of £1,061,000 per annum under the 'central case' scenario, and no significant impact on the farming operation of Moat Farm. Compensation, including for the loss of freehold, together with severance, disturbance and expenses, would also be payable to the landowners.

#### *Local impacts will be offset by loss elsewhere*

4.7 Both local and regional policy is to promote tourism and the 'visitor economy', as a means of supporting sustainable economic growth, as highlighted within Chapter 2. This includes both encouraging more people to visiting existing attractions and supporting the development of new and improved attractions to broaden their appeal, including with public-sector funding.

4.8 With any tourism-related investment, it is inevitable that a proportion of additional visitor trips, and spend, will be displaced from elsewhere. This, however, is not viewed as a barrier to public support or funding for tourism, as its benefits are recognised to the economy of local communities such as Rother are explicitly recognised within public policy. In any case, no public funding is being requested for this scheme.

*No economic benefits to Robertsbridge.*

4.9 Robertsbridge is a small, historic village with a number of local attractions, including a number of historic buildings dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Centuries, a Grade-II listed church, and an attractive high street with a number of local businesses. It is hence likely to form an attractive destination for tourists, who many choose to walk round village/eat/visit local shop before or after visiting the railway. The proprietor of the Ostrich – a local public house located near the terminus in Robertsbridge – wrote to express his support for the scheme for this reason (SUPP/221).

4.10 We have not explicitly calculated the economic impact within the village, but as a result of bringing additional visitors to the town local businesses would be expected to benefit from increased trade and hence directly benefit from the RVR. There would be additional opportunities for businesses to ‘market’ their offer to such visitors.

4.11 The impacts of additional visitors on parking within the village is discussed in Para 3.96. In summary, the majority of those accessing the KESR via Robertsbridge are expected to do so sustainably, via mainline rail. This would generate a significant source of potential income for local Robertsbridge businesses, without any impact on parking provision.

4.12 However, as set out from Para 3.72: **Transport Impacts**, a proportion of demand would be expected to ‘switch’ to accessing the KESR at Robertsbridge, rather than Tenterden, and a small number of additional visits would be expected to be generated by being able to access the railway at Robertsbridge.

4.13 We estimate that the total increase in vehicle trips to Robertsbridge, on an average operational day, is approximately 30 vehicles, which could be accommodated in the station car park. Casual car parking on residential roads is an issue that has existed for many years in Robertsbridge, as with many other towns in the UK. The Parish Council, Rother District Council and the East Sussex County Council now have powers to enforce parking regulations. Increased traffic resulting in negative economic affects.

4.14 Para 3.92 sets out how, while some additional traffic will be generated by the new ability to access the RVR at Robertsbridge, this is more than compensated by the reduction in driving distance and congestion from a proportion of those currently driving to the RVR ‘switching’ from Tenterden to Robertsbridge, together with a small volume of mode shift from road to rail.

4.15 Time savings to visitors who access Robertsbridge rather than Tenterden have been estimated at £18,600 per year (2010 PV), and from modal shift from car to rail £5,800 per year, in accordance with DfT TAG guidance. The net congestion impact from additional visitor car trips attracted to Robertsbridge (a disbenefit of £4,200) and the reduction in car kilometres from re-routing of ‘existing’ car trips (a £4,200 benefit) is broadly neutral, and even if there were to be no modal shift (of existing trips) from car to rail, the net overall transport impact would remain positive.

### **Economic impact of delays at level crossings**

- 4.16 Para 3.87 sets out how, while new level crossings on the A21, B2244 and Northbridge Street will result in minor, temporary delays to road traffic, the overall economic impact of this delay is marginal. Analysis previously undertaken by Mott MacDonald indicates that the overall disbenefit per year from increased journey times to vehicles is up to £6,300 per year, based on an assumed delay of 112 seconds.
- 4.17 This figure is very small in relation to typically associated with a local transport scheme, and in any case is significantly less than the value of the time savings for visitors who access Robertsbridge rather than Tenterden. Para 3.92 sets how, when the other transport impacts of the RVR are considered, the benefits from the improved accessibility of RVR outweigh the costs of delay associated with the level crossings, and the overall efficiency of the highway network would improve.
- 4.18 Furthermore, since the Mott MacDonald work was undertaken, further engagement between Highways England and i-transport (on behalf of RVR) has agreed a figure of 72 seconds for the delay, significantly less than the 112 previously assumed, with the frequency of closures also less than previously assumed. This indicates that the economic impact of level crossing delay would be ever less than previously indicated within the Economic Impact Report.

## 5 Appendices and Reference Information

**Table 5.1: Summary of Appendices and relevant core documents**

Reference	Description
RVR 09	Rother Valley Railway Economic Impacts Report
RVR/W2/2-1	RAIL Magazine, 'Heritage railways receive combined £6.7m Culture Recovery Fund lifeline', 13 October 2020
RVR/W2/2-2	UK Parliament Public Accounts Committee, COVID-19: Culture Recovery Fund
RVR/W2/2-3	De La Warr Pavilion, 'Tourism is even bigger business for 1066 Country', 21 October 2019
RVR/W2/2-4	1066 Country Membership Summary
RVR/W2/2-5	Route #12 bus timetable, Maidstone – Tenterden
RVR/W2/2-6	Route #2 / #2A bus timetable, Ashford – Tenterden (– Hastings)
RVR/W2/2-7	Route #349 bus timetable, Hastings – Bodiam – Hawkhurst
RVR/W2/2-8	National Rail London and the South East rail services map
RVR/W2/2-9	Southeast Communities Rail Partnership 'Explore the Uckfield & East Grinstead Lines' tourist map
RVR/W2/2-10	Oxford Economics / Heritage Lottery Fund, 'The impact of heritage tourism for the UK economy', August 2016
RVR/W2/2-11	Deloitte / Oxford Economics, 'Tourism: jobs and growth – The economic contribution to the tourist economy in the UK', November 2013
RVR/W2/2-12	Office for National Statistics, 'Coronavirus and the impact on the UK travel and tourism industry', February 2021
RVR/W2/2-13	VisitBritain / VisitEngland, 2021 Tourism Forecast, 7 May 2021
RVR/W2/2-14	UK Parliament House of Commons Library, 'Home sweet home: How popular is domestic tourism in Great Britain?', 5 November 2019
RVR/W2/2-15	HM Treasury, 'Levelling Up Fund – list of local authorities by priority category', 29 March 2021 (only 'Level 1' areas shown)
RVR/W2/2-16	HM Treasury, 'Levelling Up Fund: prospectus', 29 March 2021
RVR/W9/1	Proof of Evidence of Shaun Dewey
RVR 19	RVR Report on Consultation (letters of support as appendices)
RVR 21	RVR Estimate of Costs
RVR 31	HM Government All party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail, 'Report on the Value of Heritage Railways', July 2013
RVR 51	National Trust letter of support, July 2018
SUPP/113	Letter of support from Tenterden Town Council
SUPP/221	Letter of support from The Ostrich Hotel

## Control Information

**Prepared by**

---

Steer  
28-32 Upper Ground  
London SE1 9PD  
+44 20 7910 5000  
www.steergroup.com

**Prepared for**

---

RVR  
[Company Address]

**Steer project/proposal number**

---

**Client contract/project number**

---

**Author/originator**

---

TH

**Reviewer/approver**

---

**Other contributors**

---

**Distribution**

---

Client:

Steer:

**Version control/issue number**

---

**Date**

---

