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Campaign for Better Transport – East Sussex

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25th May 2018

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing on behalf of the above organization in **support** of the Transport and Works Act Order application to extend the Rother Valley Railway so as to link with the main line at Robertsbridge, in line with the already approved planning application.

Benefits

The extension makes the KESR and Bodiam Castle accessible to significant numbers of visitors by sustainable modes of transport from major centres of population, including London and Brighton – as well as the ‘near continent’.

It would expand the tourism offer of this part of SE England and support the tourism economy locally, sub-regionally and regionally, creating jobs. The restored link would hugely amplify the heritage, recreational and educational value of the line through improved accessibility.

There would be a boost to the public transport market, including the local rural bus network, encouraging innovative combined ticket offers and a bigger role for public transport in general. This would help to redress the decline of public transport in local villages and towns and improve accessibility for all. It would also reduce pressure on country lanes which currently experience inappropriately high volumes of traffic.

Bus routes 304/5 (currently 6 days a week service) and 349 (7 days a week) link East Sussex and Kent towns and villages of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), as well as Hastings, Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone to the railway at Bodiam/Robertsbridge. Increased tourism could see a case made to restore the 304/5 Sunday service. These routes are also a lifeline to local populations needing access to services and workplaces – health, education, recreation.

The extended railway itself would perform a ‘public transport’ role which could be expanded in future.

Perceived Problems

The necessary level crossings are cited as presenting problems but we feel that these are exaggerated.

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- Traffic is already slowing for the roundabout very close to the proposed level crossing, so safety and ‘time penalty’ concerns may not be justified.
- Passage of trains over the crossings will be nowhere near frequencies on the national network, and estimates and practical demonstrations show that the period in which the crossing will be occupied by trains is brief.

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- The presence of the level crossing and accompanying traffic calming measures will create a far safer situation for all road users in what is currently a threatening and intimidating environment characterised by speeding cars and motorcycles in roads with little or no refuge for pedestrians: the level crossing removes a big deterrent to those walking the footpath between Robertsbridge, Udiam campsites and Bodiam Castle. This represents a major benefit in the light of the increased amenities in the immediate area

North Bridge Street

- Traffic is light enough to suggest no serious delay would occur to pedestrians, cyclists bus users or motorists.

In the valley itself, passage of trains would create intermittent noise over a very short period and not seriously affect the tranquility and character of this beautiful valley.

On parking, the station at Etchingham has 185 spaces (off peak day £3.70) and is 4 minutes by train from the Robertsbridge terminus of KESR. This might help those travelling by car from the west on the A265, and reduce pressure on parking at Robertsbridge station. (Eastbourne/Brighton/Lewes/Uckfield/Heathfield).

Visitor Numbers

The major draw of Bodiam Castle (National Trust) and the Kent and East Sussex Railway together achieve visitor numbers of over 300,000 each year (National Trust Annual Report/KESR figures). Many come by car using lanes ill suited to high volumes of traffic. The re-instated railway link would provide an attractive alternative and through the extra passengers attracted by the railway, even make local bus service links commercially viable. This would benefit non-users of the railway and strengthen village communities whose young are often stranded and denied a full social life. To some degree, 'car dependency' could be reversed – a worthwhile policy objective itself with added health benefits – mental and physical – while those without access to a car, or who do not wish to drive will be 'included'.

Other Attractions

Vineyards, nurseries, hop gardens, windmills, picturesque towns and villages, country pubs, campsites, footpaths – links with all these will be strengthened by a reinstated rail link which is the subject of this TWAO. Moving to, from and within the High Weald AONB could become much easier for many more people.

We hope you will grant the TWAO.

Sincerely,

Derrick Coffee

(County Officer, Campaign for Better Transport – East Sussex)