



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Mr Ian Jenkins  
Inspector

22 June 2021

Dear Mr Jenkins,

**Rother Valley Railway - Transport and Works Act Order Public Inquiry**

As Member of Parliament for the Bexhill and Battle constituency since 2015, I have taken a keen interest in the aspirations of the Rother Valley Railway to restore the missing railway line from Robertsbridge to Bodiam which will reinstate the full length of the Kent and East Sussex Railway heritage route from Robertsbridge to Tenterden.

This ambitious project, which is being paid for entirely by voluntary contributions, would link the KESR heritage line to the Southeastern London to Hastings mainline railway at Robertsbridge. This gives it added benefit of encouraging more visitors to the area by rail rather than road.

The financial benefits of the RVR project to the local economy are estimated to be substantial and long-term - in the region of up to £35m over the 2-year construction period and the first ten years of operation, and up to £4.6m per annum from 2030. It will generate approximately 34 jobs during the construction phase, and up to 85 in the operational phase. Additional revenues of up to £330,000 pa, would accrue to the main line operator. This represents a significant boost to the local rural economy. There are clear additional benefits to the wider tourism and hospitality sector from opening our area up to better visitor experiences. This is not just a question of attracting those from further afield but enhancing the quality of lives for the individuals and families who live in the constituency.

This project has understandably generated local objections and concerns. As the local MP, I believe that my role is to ensure that everyone has an opportunity for their voice to be heard in this process. I have therefore sought to help with these concerns by liaising with the appropriate statutory agencies as well as with the RVR.

I have listened and considered all of the objections and offered to help with submissions which the landowners may wish to make regarding the TWAO order.

Local residents have been concerned about the impact of this project on the local road infrastructure (A21), flooding and their quality of life.



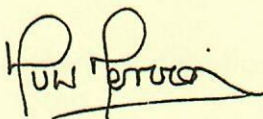
With regards to the A21, I have been heavily involved in a wider ambition to improve the safety of the A21 by seeing this road rebuilt to accommodate a dual carriageway over its entire length. I do not believe, looking at all other logistics, that the RVR extension would impact the aim of road redevelopment. As has been seen via the works at Pembury, the redevelopment would be a vast engineering project with many technicalities to overcome. With regards to other safety enhancements, I and neighbouring MPs, have succeeded in pressing the government and Highways England to bring forward a package of safety measures into the current Road Investment Strategy (RIS) period. I have carefully considered the impact of a new level crossing on journey times for those using the A21. Given that the railway will only operate outside of peak times, and modelling has demonstrated a negligible impact on traffic on the A21 at other times of the day, I do not consider the installation of a level crossing to be a reason to object to the project.

With regards to flood risks, I am acutely aware that this is a problem for Robertsbridge village. I have recently been involved in a case of flooding of some village properties due to issues relating to the A21 road. It has therefore been very important to me that the high requirements set by the Environment Agency (EA) to mitigate flood risk have been met. The necessary modelling and Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been undertaken and it has been agreed with the EA that the design of RVR proposed will have no significant effect on the depths or extent of the flooding, including when taking account of latest guidelines for climate change introduced recently.

I am also aware that Robertsbridge Village has suffered in the past from inconsiderate parking by those accessing rail services from the village station who did not wish to use the station car park. Increasing visitors numbers to the village due to the RVR project is therefore an understandable concern. However, the introduction of civil parking enforcement (CPE) in Rother district in September 2020, means that dangerous, illegal, and inconsiderate parking issues can now be dealt with. Prior to CPE, Sussex Police did not have the resources to enforce parking problems in the village, except on an ad hoc basis, which was insufficient.

To summarise, whilst I understand and sympathise with the objections to the TWAO by the landowners who do not wish to sell their land to the RVR, I fully support this project as I believe that the economic benefits to the local area present an unrivalled opportunity to deliver long-term jobs for local residents as well as wider economic benefits to the local tourism and hospitality sector. It also supports sustainable tourism by rail to towns and villages along Kent and East Sussex Railway line and surrounding areas. I am satisfied that the statutory agencies dealing with environment and infrastructure concerns have been stringent in their demands of the RVR to ensure that this project does not adversely impact the local area or its road infrastructure.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Huw Merriman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Huw Merriman MP  
Chairman of Transport Select Committee  
Member of Parliament for Bexhill and Battle