

Caroline O'Neill

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From: Steve Oates <steve.oates@hra.uk.com>
Sent: 31 May 2018 17:35
To: TRANSPORTANDWORKSACT
Cc: mark.smith@hra.uk.com
Subject: Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order
Attachments: HRA.RotherValleyRly.LetterToSecOfStateForTransport.31-5-18.pdf

Dear Sir ...

Please find attached our letter of representation and support for the above scheme.

I would be grateful if you could acknowledge receipt.

Yours faithfully

Steve Oates
Chief Executive
Heritage Railway Association

0800 756 5111
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31st May 2018

Secretary of State for Transport
c/o Transport and Works Act Orders Unit
General Counsel's Office
Department for Transport
Zone 1/18, Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR

By Email: transportandworksact@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Sir,

Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order

I write on behalf of the Heritage Railway Association to strongly support the application by Rother Valley Railway Ltd (RVR) for the above order under the Transport and Works Act 1992.

The Heritage Railway Association is the national trade body representing over 300 of the UK's heritage railways, tramways, museums and affiliated groups.

We have studied the application documents and noted the extensive support for the scheme that is the subject of this order from a range of acknowledged professional consultants and statutory bodies.

In supporting the application we make the following points:

Economic Benefit

Heritage railways are acknowledged to contribute over £250 million of economic impact nationally. [Source: 'Report on the Value of Heritage Railways' by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail]

Where heritage railways are present in an area, they are important contributors to their local economies by spending substantially on local services and by providing interest and participation for local residents. As such, they provide a powerful stimulus to the wider economy as well as making significant contributions to the economies of the areas they serve.

The RVR scheme will contribute substantially to the economy of its locality. Economic benefit to the area, not least to Rother District in East Sussex and Ashford Borough in Kent, is estimated at up to £4.1m p.a.

This and other benefits will be achieved without charge on the public purse.

Employment and Skills

Nationally, heritage railways employ over 4,000 people.

The RVR scheme will provide new employment opportunities for full time and part time staff with up to 75 new jobs being created. Job creation is a key priority for the local authorities in this area.

The scheme will also provide new opportunities for volunteer staff.

Across the industry, heritage railways retain and nurture important skills, and provide valuable training including apprenticeships in a wide range of skills and disciplines. In addition, the productive use of the time of some 20,000 volunteer supporters across the country who devote their own time and money to running, maintaining or developing their railways offers a sense of achievement, the health benefits of steady exercise and social interaction, and, for some younger volunteer staff, they provide a valuable training ground for subsequent jobs on the main line network or in industries and businesses elsewhere.

Visitor Economy

Heritage railways make a major contribution to the nation's visitor economy attracting in excess of 10 million visitors each year.

Tourism is a key priority for the local authorities in this area. The contribution heritage railways make to their local visitor economies elsewhere in the South and South East is well established.

We note that RVR has already reconstructed 3/4 mile of track at the Bodiam end of the proposed line, and 1/2 mile at the Robertsbridge end, and have created a terminus station adjacent to Network Rail main line.

When complete, the scheme will provide access by rail from Hastings and London to major tourist attractions in the Rother Valley including Bodiam Castle, Great Dixter, Tenterden Town, Sissinghurst and many others.

We note that the scheme has received strong support from a number of organisations and relevant individuals including Network Rail, The National Trust, East Sussex and Kent County Councils, Rother District Council, Ashford Borough Council, 1066 Country (the local destination management organisation for the area), and local MPs.

Other Issues

With regard to certain other aspects of the scheme we briefly comment as follows:

1. Proposals for Use of Compulsory Purchase

We note that, following the Public Inquiry into the Rother District Plan, the Planning Inspector recommended the use of compulsory purchase powers to acquire the land from the then four landowners. However, RVR has since acquired two of the parcels by negotiation and made generous offers to the two outstanding landowners and expressed a strong wish to acquire the land, if at all possible, by negotiation.

2. A21 Level Crossing

Importantly, we note that the Office of Rail and Road make no objection in principle to the installation of a level crossing on the A21. There is precedent elsewhere on heritage railways for such an installation.

The road will not be closed to road traffic during morning and evening rush hours. The proposed full automated barrier system will be locally monitored, and closure would be around one minute, as demonstrated by a similar installation elsewhere.

3. Environmental and Ecological Issues

We note the extensive and thorough assessments undertaken which have been validated by the Environment Agency and Natural England.

It is widely acknowledged that railways provide an undisturbed area where protected and other species thrive. The RVR scheme will create a protected wild life corridor along the section where the railway embankment was removed.

Summary and Support

In summary, there is strong irrefutable evidence of the power of heritage railways to drive economic growth, create new jobs, and provide skills training.

Accordingly, and for the reasons set out above, the Heritage Railway Association supports the application by RVR for the above order and urges you to approve.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Oates
Chief Executive
Heritage Railway Association

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