

7<sup>th</sup> June 2021

**Rother Valley Railway (Bodiam to Robertsbridge Junction) Order  
– Public Inquiry**

**Statement in Support of the Order from the Heritage Railway Association**

**Introduction**

1. I have reviewed the economic impacts report from Steer and the Proof of Evidence of Mrs Ellie Evans from Volterra, both of which state, to varying degrees, that the Rother Valley Railway project will bring economic benefits.
2. This statement provides a wider briefing on the value and importance of heritage railways to local, regional and national economies.

**Experience**

3. I am Chief Executive of the Heritage Railway Association. I am a chartered surveyor (MRICS). As well as property, my previous career has involved the development of three successful media businesses, plus five years heading-up a local authority's economic development service.
4. I am an active and longstanding volunteer in heritage rail, with hands-on experience in a variety of roles. For 10 years I was chairman of the board of trustees and directors (and still serve on the board) of one of the UK's most financially successful heritage railways - a railway which is a leading visitor attraction in its area and which preserves and operates a collection of historic rolling stock and infrastructure recognized to be of national importance.

**The Heritage Rail Sector**

5. There are some 211 operational heritage and minor railways in the UK, running trains over almost 600 miles of track, with 460 stations.
6. Heritage railways deliver on, or abide by, many aspects of Government policy:
  - DCMS – heritage, culture and tourism, car free access to the countryside
  - DfT - sustainable transport, safety (ORR), links with Great British Railways, use of redundant railway formations, (Highways Agency), level crossings
  - DEFRA – environmental issues, sustainability, coal policy, access to the countryside
  - DWP – employment, apprenticeships and skills training
  - DHSC - healthy lifestyles and mental wellbeing, particularly for volunteers
7. Heritage rail is predominantly part of the tourism sector. It supports local hospitality sectors and provides skilled jobs and training in the rural economy.

Individual heritage railways compete for visitors from the general tourist and VFR market and from the indigenous population. Their primary income is normally centred on fares, prices of which are competitive against other local visitor attractions.

8. The majority of heritage railways are organised as trusts supported by commercial operating arms. As trusts, they have a significant educational role, with many being educational charities. Several have secured Arts Council England status as fully accredited museums.

### **Links to the National Network**

9. 33 heritage railways are currently linked to the national network with main line connections or interchanges (Appendix 1). 19 of these serve specific tourist destinations (Appendix 2).

### **Economic Value of Heritage Railways**

10. Attracting 13 million visitors each year, employing 4,000 people, and with asset values extend to hundreds of £millions, the heritage rail sector is conservatively estimated to be worth £400million to the nation's economy. [Source: 'Report on the Value of Heritage Railways' by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Heritage Rail]. Additionally, the national and international PR value to the nation of 'Flying Scotsman', 'the Hogwarts Express', and other film and TV icons and locations is virtually incalculable.
11. Whether the North Yorkshire Moors Railway attracting 300,000 visitor per year, the IVV Steam Railway attracting 110,000 visitors per year or the Talylyn Railway attracting 60,000 visitors per year, in terms of visitor numbers a heritage railway often tops the list (or is within the top five) of most visited attractions in an area.
12. All of this provides a powerful stimulus to the wider economy, supports the local hospitality industry, and can be the economically important catalyst for sustaining the attractiveness of the tourist offer. When, last summer, the Ffestiniog Railway chose not to operate into Blaenau, a number of local hospitality businesses remained shut. A Leeds Beckett University study showed that, as well as c. £2m pa direct income brought into its' area, the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway creates further indirect economic impact equating to 150 jobs.
13. Accordingly, their importance is recognised by tourism bodies, local authorities, and funding organisations. This is demonstrated by the award of substantial public funds. In recent years this has ranged from a £1.5m Coastal Community Fund grant awarded to the Swanage Railway to c. £20m public funding received by the Ffestiniog and Welsh Highland Railways. In the past year some 60 heritage railways have received more than £30m funding from the Governments' Cultural Recovery Fund.

14. MPs and parliamentarians of all political persuasions recognise the value of heritage railways in their constituencies. From Lord Hague, Baroness (Nicky) Morgan, Lord Faulkner and Lord Berkeley to Richard Drax (MP South Dorset), Liz Saville-Roberts (MP, Dwyfor Meirionydd) and Robert Goodwill (MP, Scarborough and Whitby) and many more, all provide support and advocacy for their local railways. For example, currently, Clwyd South MP Simon Baynes is engaged with local authorities to support the revival of the Llangollen Railway, to prevent long-term damage to the areas tourism and hospitality sector.
15. Local authorities are similarly supportive. After awarding Seaton Tramway an Additional Restrictions Grant, East Devon DCs' Economic Development Officer, Rob Murray, stated: "This grant award is in recognition of the value of Seaton Tramway to East Devon's economy, actively supporting our growing visitor economy ... It is sent with the Council's warmest regards in the hope that it helps the business to recover swiftly and continue to contribute so strongly to East Devon's economy."
16. Heritage railways are important contributors to their local economies and often have a policy presumption to spend on local services. The Swanage Railway contribute an estimated £2m pa in that way and the Lakeside and Haverthwaite Railway (Cumbria) spends some 75% of its income on purchases from local suppliers, paying local sub-contractors and on wages to staff all living within 10 miles of the railway, contributing over £1.2m to the local community in 2019.

### **Employment and Skills**

17. Most heritage railways are located in rural or semi-rural areas. For example, with 53 employees, Seaton Tramway is the second biggest employer in its area after Tesco.
18. The Bluebell Railway recognises it has an important role in promoting job opportunities, apprenticeships and work experience in a rural area. The railway supports the local councils, schools and offers work experience in all areas of the business throughout the year. Like many railways across the country, its locomotive department currently employs apprentices and continues to offer further apprenticeship opportunities.
19. Heritage railways provide a wide range of skilled and semi-skilled roles. Importantly, this provides opportunities for the indigenous population and, where skills are not available locally, brings new people into the locality adding new spend and economic impact to an area. For example, the North Norfolk Railways' full-time staff of 43 includes 6 managerial posts; 18 skilled engineering staff; 2 in finance; 1 in marketing; 1 in health and safety; and 8 in infrastructure roles. The Bluebell Railway has 45 paid employees and, as well as many similar roles to the NNR, also employ professional chefs, skilled events and digital marketing personnel and an HR professional.
20. In addition, the productive use of the time of some 22,000 volunteers, 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, wellbeing and social interaction for the retired or those struggling to find work. At the Lynton & Barnstaple Railway a regular volunteer lost his wife. He continued to volunteer and work on the railway and stated that this 'saved his life'. Similarly, through the Covid lockdown most railways had a steady demand for regular volunteers to continue working on essential maintenance jobs, enabling them to get out of the house, exercise and generally benefit from the activity.

21. For some younger volunteer staff, heritage railways provide a valuable training ground and springboard for subsequent jobs on the main line network or in industries and businesses elsewhere.

### **Heritage Steam's Environmental Responsibilities**

22. Heritage railways enable access to the countryside for people without using a car, enjoying the wildlife and natural environment without disturbing it. Across the country, national park authorities recognise the importance of those railways which are located within their authority areas. Railways such as the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, the Welsh Highland Railway and the Lynton and Barnstaple Railway are all supported by their national park authorities and encouraged to transport visitors into and through national parks by heritage rail – not by car.
23. Increasingly, where opportunities exist, railways wish to see more people visit using a sustainable means of transport. An opportunity for car-free access through connections to the national network, means a much wider catchment can be served and more cars kept off the road. Appendix 2 lists 19 railways that serve major tourist attractions and are linked to the national network with a further two where extensions of the heritage railway are proposed to create that link.

### **Summary and Support**

24. As I stated in my original letter of support for the Order (letter to Secretary of State for Transport dated 31 May 2018) there is strong irrefutable evidence of the power of heritage railways to drive economic growth, create new jobs, and provide skills training.
25. 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.

**Stephen Oates**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Heritage Railway Association**

E-Mail: [steve.oates@hra.uk.com](mailto:steve.oates@hra.uk.com)  
Telephone: 0800 756 5111

## The Heritage Railway Association

The Heritage Railway Association (HRA) is the UK trade association representing some 300 heritage railways, tramways, museums, steam centres, mainline tour operators and rolling stock owners.

The HRA represents its members and the heritage rail sector to the UK government, the three regional governments, the Office of Rail and Road, the media and other relevant bodies.

The HRA assists and guides its members, who may be any organisation that is heritage rail related, and is preserving, or helping their visitors understand, or just enjoy, the UK's rich rail-based history.

## Appendix I - Heritage railways in Great Britain with main line connections or interchanges

Railway	Connection	Interchange	Constituency
Bluebell	running line	yes <sup>1</sup>	Mid Sussex
Bodmin & Wenford	siding	Yes	North Cornwall
Bo'ness & Kinneil	siding	none	Falkirk East
Bure Valley	none (NG)	yes	Broadland
Chinnor & PR	siding	yes	Buckingham
Cholsey & W'ford	none	yes	Wantage
Dartmouth Steam	running line	Yes	Torbay
Dean Forest	siding	Yes	Forest of Dean
East Kent	none	yes	Dover
East Lancashire	running line	none <sup>2</sup>	Heywood & Middleton
East Somerset	running line	none	Somerton & Frome
Ecclesbourne Valley	none	yes	Mid Derbyshire
Ffestiniog	none (NG)	Yes (x2)	Dwyfor Meirionydd
Great Central (N)	running line	None	Loughborough
Isle of Wight	none	Yes	Isle of Wight
Keighley & W V	siding	Yes	Keighley
Mid Hants	running line	Yes	East Hampshire
Mid Norfolk	running line	no	Mid Norfolk

<sup>1</sup> 200m walk between stations

<sup>2</sup> Short walk from Bolton Street to Interchange stations in Bury

Nene Valley	siding	no	Peterborough
North Norfolk	running line	Yes <sup>3</sup>	North Norfolk
North Yorks Moors	running line	Yes	Scarborough & Whitby
Peak Rail	running line	yes	Derbyshire Dales
Ravenglass & E	none (NG)	yes	Copeland
Severn Valley	running line	Yes <sup>4</sup>	Wyre Forest
South Devon	running line	No <sup>5</sup>	Totnes
Spa Valley	none	yes	Wealden
Strathspey	none	Yes	Inverness & Strathspey
Swanage	running line	No	Mid Dorset & N Poole
Talyllyn	none (NG)	Yes <sup>6</sup>	Dwyfor Meirionydd
Vale of Rheidol	none (NG)	Yes	Ceredigion
Weardale	running line	Yes	Bishop Auckland
Wensleydale	siding	yes	Richmond (Yorks)
West Somerset	running line	No	Taunton Deane

### **Planned connections or interchanges**

Aln Valley	none	yes	Berwick-upon-Tweed
Kent & E Sussex	siding	yes	Bexhill & Battle
Cambrian Railway	none	yes	North Shropshire
Embsay & B A	running line	no <sup>7</sup>	Skipton & Ripon
Epping & Ongar	none (LUL)	yes	Epping Forest
Keith & Dufftown	siding	yes	Moray

### Notes:

NG - narrow gauge line

<sup>3</sup> 200 yards walk between North Norfolk and national rail stations

<sup>4</sup> Stations adjacent at Kidderminster

<sup>5</sup> Ten minute walk between SDR and national rail stations

<sup>6</sup> 300 yards walk between Talyllyn and national Rail stations

<sup>7</sup> Skipton would be the interchange if the connection were made.

## Appendix Two - Lines serving tourist destinations with main line connections

<b>Railway</b>	<b>Junction</b>	<b>Tourist destination</b>
Bodmin & Wenford	Bodmin Parkway	Bodmin and Camel Trail
Bure Valley+	Hoveton & W'ham	Norfolk Broads
Dartmouth Steam	Paignton	River Dart and Greenway House
Dean Forest	Lydney	Forest of Dean
Ffestiniog+	Minffordd	Snowdonia National Park
Keighley & Worth Valley	Keighley	Haworth, Bronte country
Keith & Dufftown	Keith	Speyside and distilleries
Mid Hants	Alton	South Downs National Park
North Yorkshire Moors	Grosmont	North York Moors National Park
Peak Rail	Matlock	Peak District National Park
Ravenglass & Eskdale	Ravenglass	Eskdale, Hardknott, Harter Fell
South Devon	Totnes	Dartmoor National Park
Strathspey	Aviemore	Cairngorm National Park
Swanage	Wareham	Isle of Purbeck, Corfe Castle
Telford Steam	Telford Central#	Ironbridge Gorge
Vale of Rheidol+	Aberystwyth	Devils Bridge
Welsh Highland+	Porthmadog	Snowdonia National Park
Wensleydale	Northallerton	Yorkshire Dales National Park
West Somerset Castle	Taunton	Exmoor National Pk, Dunster

### With main line connections planned in future:

Embsay & Bolton Abbey	Skipton	Bolton Abbey, Yorkshire Dales
Kent & East Sussex	Robertsbridge	Bodiam Castle and Tenterdan

### Notes:

+ Narrow gauge railway, interchange only at junction station.

# Madeley Junction