

NETWORK RAIL STALYBRIDGE TO DIGGLE TWA ORDER

I am Andrew Fletcher. My postal address is [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

I object to the proposals for:-

- Moorgate Level Crossing
- The compound between Oldham Road and Chapel Road, north east of Greenfield Station
- The compound north of Uppermill Viaduct between the bottom of Brownhill Lane and the access to the former Saddleworth Station.

I also wish to comment upon:-

- the proposal to build a temporary access road across the fields to the north of Diggle to connect Harrop Court Road and Boat Lane.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. I was born in the centre of Oldham but was fortunate that my parents brought me out walking in the Uppermill area from a very early age. This led to me having a lifelong interest in hill walking , mountaineering and the outdoor environment.

From 1974 onwards I have lived in [REDACTED].

MOORGATE LEVEL CROSSING

Network Rail should build a footbridge as it originally intended. It only changed its mind because it came to the view that it did not consider a footbridge to be “value for money”. How it made that calculation is completely unclear. From the latest information that I have seen, Network Rail’s costing of a footbridge is not supported by any proper evidence. In fact the figures appear completely unreliable. They include exaggerated costs, costs for work that is not required, and a major error of arithmetic. If these mistakes are removed from this presentation of the cost of the bridge, the cost is probably quite normal.

Nobody has been able to tell me how Network Rail has calculated the “value” side of “value for money.” This wasn’t revealed at the consultation stage. I haven’t been able to find a value for money or cost benefit analysis in the application. Yet, Network Rail certainly saw some value in a footbridge when it wanted to build one. I have read the Design and Access Statement which was submitted with Network Rail’s planning application in 2022. Oldham Council approved that application.

It is my belief that, taking all factors into account, a footbridge would be exceptionally good value for money. Much more so than some other bridges built on the route in very recent years.

On the basis of what now appears to be a highly dubious financial calculation Network Rail decided to change its mind. It decided it would not build the footbridge which people had been expecting. Instead it proposed to divert walkers onto Footpath 244. I am not aware of anyone in the local community, or people who we know that visit Uppermill, who favours Footpath 244 over a footbridge. It is very rare to find such unanimity on a planning issue, but in this case it is not surprising.

Footpath 244 is dangerous. There is a risk of fatalities where it meets a very busy main road. The upper parts of the path are completely unsuitable for the type of walkers who have used the level crossing for as long as anyone can remember. They present an additional danger to people with the slightest mobility problems. Many walkers would be unable to use it, and would be putting themselves at risk if they tried. A dangerous obstacle course leading to a potential death trap would be a reasonable description of Footpath 244.

I lived at [REDACTED] house is quite close to the bottom of Footpath 244. I never used Footpath 244. Footpath 244 was so overgrown it became invisible from Ladcastle Road. I used Footpath 209 across the level crossing at least 100 times during that period.

Now I [REDACTED] I often walk with friends who have limited mobility [REDACTED] [REDACTED], and I can support them. We could not use Footpath 244. The limited enhancements to Footpath 244 being proposed by Network Rail would not result in a route which was safe and practical for us. Footpath 209 with a footbridge would be safe and accessible. Network Rail's proposal cuts off our access to walking areas we love and to places we enjoy visiting.

As a grandfather I am acutely aware of the risk to children which is posed by the junction of Footpath 244 with Oldham Road. I have warned my family that they must not use this path, now that the usual route via Dark Lane (Footpath 209) has been temporarily closed. I certainly cannot risk walking with my granddaughter, [REDACTED] on Footpath 244. The only safe alternative for them now is to drive to Ladcastle Road. I cannot drive because of my sight problem. This is hardly the way to encourage young people to walk.

Network Rail, when changing its mind about the footbridge, seems to have forgotten that Footpath 209 is not just a path for use by athletic walkers or members of organised walking groups. Network Rail should have realised that it is a key part of the village's infrastructure dating back many centuries and heavily used by all types of people. Footpath 244 can never play this role. It is too steep. Its exit at the bottom is very dangerous. It doesn't take people where they want to go. This last point is hardly surprising. Once the village of Uppermill

started to form in the valley bottom it became centred around the path which provided the easiest, best graded, route down from the hills. This is Footpath 209 via Dark Lane and Moorgate. It had already existed for a thousand years or more by the time that the village took shape.

By diverting people onto Footpath 244 Network Rail plans to leave itself with no responsibility for the danger it is creating. That will fall upon the local authority and any unfortunate driver who hits a walker when driving on Oldham Road.

Network Rail may make the rail line safer, but it will have ignored the road and footpath dangers which it has caused, the inconvenience to local residents and visitors, the impact on businesses, the destruction of our history, and the disadvantage to vulnerable walkers which it has caused. The solution is a footbridge, and I am convinced that many at Network Rail know this. For some reason it has become locked into a bad decision which it now, with difficulty, strains to justify.

I object to the closure of Footpath 209 at the Moorgate Level Crossing unless it is replaced by a footbridge at the location of the level crossing.

COMPOUNDS

Saddleworth now has a beautiful landscape. Green spaces in the valley areas complement the upland scenery, much of which is in the Peak District National Park. It was not always like this. In 1970 the valleys were blighted by industrial dereliction and waste tips. It has taken a huge effort over many decades to transform the area. As a result of these tremendous improvements, the tourism economy has grown from almost nothing to become a vital part of the local economy. It is a great place to live – an asset to Greater Manchester and the towns and cities of West Yorkshire. It is a reason for people to make their lives in this area, rather than leaving the North. The area is now a great asset for the North of England. It is folly to jeopardise this if an objective of TRU is to strengthen the North

The visitor economy is based on independent businesses. That is part of the attraction for people from far and wide. This domination by independent traders applies to coffee shops, tourist accommodation, shops and much more.

However, independent traders are very vulnerable. Even a short term drop off in custom can be disastrous for them. Disruption of traffic during the implementation of TRU is, of course, a huge concern to them. So is anything that detracts from the scenic beauty of the area.

We have landscaped the approaches to our villages. These “gateways” create an excellent first impression on visitors and are, of course, enjoyed by local people. They also emphasise the separate identities of the villages.

There are many compounds being proposed along the relatively short length of the TRU in Saddleworth. Two are of particular concern to me.

COMPOUND BETWEEN OLDHAM ROAD AND CHAPEL ROAD, NORTHEAST OF GREENFIELD STATION

This is an area of very attractive woodland on a steep slope between two very busy roads. It is the foreground alongside the A670, from which the trees frame the view towards Alderman Hill and Alphin Pike in the Peak District National Park. It is on several bus routes and very visible to passengers on trans Pennine trains. It is at the point of arrival for visitors who have chosen to visit Saddleworth by train.

Its location means it can be appreciated by pedestrians, such a people walking to and from Greenfield Station. Its prominent, elevated position make it a feature in the wider landscape, visible from many locations.

It was designed to include both evergreen and deciduous tree cover, with underplanting of flowering shrubs and Spring bulbs to make the area attractive throughout the year. It has taken thirty years to achieve its level of maturity.

I know that concerns about this proposal have been raised with Network Rail during the objection period. The response was that it had not been intended to give the impression that this area would be used as a compound. However, it would seem that some removal of vegetation is still intended. **I object to any removal of vegetation from this area. The compound should not extend beyond the highway area of the A670, Oldham Road. Damage to this woodland would have a severe and long term impact on the landscape at this gateway to the Saddleworth villages and would be likely to have a negative effect on the visitor economy and the local housing market.**

COMPOUND AREA NORTH OF UPPERMILL VIADUCT BETWEEN BROWNHILL LANE AND THE ACCESS ROAD TO THE FORMER SADDLEWORTH STATION

This area was landscaped as a treatment of a former derelict area. Its location is at one of the most prominent points in the valley areas of Saddleworth. It sits close to the junction of road routes connecting Delph, Scouthead, Dobcross, Diggle, Uppermill, Greenfield, Grasscroft and Friezland. It is on several bus routes. It provides a scenic gateway to Dobcross, Diggle and Uppermill. Across the road is the Huddersfield Narrow Canal. This is now a great visitor attraction following a huge investment in the canal's restoration. The Limekiln Café is diagonally opposite. Also nearby is a large and very visible listed building which will only be saved if considerable private investment is attracted.

The line of trees on the roadside edge of this green space is of particular value and should remain untouched.

I object on the grounds that this important green space is far too prominent to be used as a compound. This use would be likely to damage the visitor economy, detract from the local housing market and hamper the conservation of a prominent listed building.

TEMPORARY ROAD BETWEEN HARROP COURT ROAD AND BOAT LANE, DIGGLE

This proposal is located in the elevated open landscape to the north of Sam Road, Diggle.

When the Saddleworth Neighbourhood Plan was being prepared the Peak District National Park Authority asked for a policy to be included which would require development within the setting of the National Park to be “sensitively designed and located so as to avoid adverse impacts on the National Park.” The proposal is within the setting as defined in the draft Plan.

Network Rail’s application makes brief reference to the draft Neighbourhood Plan, but I can find no mention of this Policy.

I recognise that the temporary access road may be needed. However, it will create a significant scar on the landscape in a place close to the National Park. Its design and construction should be carried out with the intention of minimising this impact. It should remain in place for as short a period as possible. The landscape should be restored to its original condition as soon as possible. My experience of carrying out landscape renovation schemes in an exposed location in Saddleworth is that it can take a considerable time for scars to heal. Here, in the foreground to the National Park, it will be essential for the fields to return to their former appearance. At altitude, in Saddleworth’s tough climate, that can be hard to achieve.