

Public Inquiry - Closing Statement

Cllr Helen Bishop

Saddleworth South

Whilst I do not object in general to the TransPennine Route Upgrade, it must be delivered in a way which impacts positively throughout the North, especially in areas like Saddleworth which never benefit from the regenerative funding enjoyed by the larger city and town centres, but very much relies on the good will and resourcefulness of its residents to survive. I believe that its benefits were intended to be felt in all places along the line, however it is extremely difficult to identify how it will benefit Saddleworth, which sits between Manchester and Leeds.

It feels as though Saddleworth has been perceived as a place to build a piece of infrastructure at minimum cost to Network Rail. There has been very little understanding of, or sensitivity to the role of Saddleworth as an asset within the TRU corridor, and little respect for the life of our community. TRU offers absolutely no discernible economic benefit to Saddleworth. If anything, it stands a good chance of doing irreparable damage to it. That's why it is all the more important to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to ensure that it is at the very least listened to about the concerns it has raised and that Network Rail is mandated where possible to accommodate some of the relatively small asks such as a drop-off facility at the station, extra disabled parking spaces, a compensation fund for affected businesses and community groups and of course, a footbridge at Moorgate Crossing.

What's more, without a commitment to two stopping trains an hour throughout the day, the only perceivable difference is that trains will be travelling more quickly through Saddleworth, providing a speedier service between cities, but nothing for those who live in between. In refusing to **actively** listen to Saddleworth's residents, business owners and elected representatives, Network Rail is undermining a place which it should be supporting.

The only direct benefit Saddleworth is being offered is in-station disabled access at Greenfield Station, when this in truth should have been provided decades ago, and certainly didn't require an infrastructure project on the scale of TRU to deliver. Even now there won't be enough disabled parking spaces. The addition of a lift which will finally make both platforms accessible are not a bonus of the project, it is simply bringing us up to an acceptable standard and is not the 'luxury' that it is being presented as. It feels as though we are being asked to accept the scraps from the table and be grateful for them.

It feels as though Network Rail is doing things to Saddleworth, not with it. As the Inquiry has heard repeatedly, as a community we have made many attempts to have a constructive conversation with Network Rail, but Network Rail's attitude has seemed to be to stick rigidly to its original plans and beat us at an Inquiry. It was made quite clear that they had no intention of negotiating on anything and would simply take it to Public Inquiry. This does not seem to me to be a desirable approach either to public relations or money. This is no way to run a modern infrastructure scheme, and I hope that this approach is not the norm along the whole TRU route.

We could have made many more objections – for instance, about the impact on Upper Mill Viaduct – In many cases we have trusted “experts” to know best. I am very much questioning

this now that I have seen the attitude to other parts of our heritage e.g. FP 209, and the botched repair of the road bridge at Greenfield Station. We have focused on issues where local knowledge is crucial, only for our efforts to contribute this knowledge to be rejected by Network Rail. The contempt demonstrated towards the many people who have tried to explain the problem with FP244 was a significant demonstration of the type of resistance to genuine consultation. I have attached photos which show the scale of the torrential water which currently floods down the footpath when we have heavy rainfall, which sometimes is monsoon-like. A drainage system capable of dealing with this would likely cost more than the

The traffic around Saddleworth is already very heavily congested. There are in essence two main routes into the main villages of Saddleworth, Huddersfield Rd which tends to service one side of Saddleworth, and Oldham Rd which services Greenfield and Uppermill primarily, the two biggest and busiest villages. A single set of traffic lights or even a delivery truck near the train station can cause a traffic jam and back up as far as the viaduct through Uppermill or Past the Farrars Arms coming from Oldham/Mossley.. The situation is also incredibly difficult at weekend when thousands of people access Uppermill and Dovestones. The removal of the road bridge will see many of these trying to use narrow, winding roads fit for 18th century life, and will be completely untenable.

Just this last weekend, the whole country has yet again witnessed the volatility of our environment here in Saddleworth, something I alluded to in my objection and testimony to the Public Inquiry. It genuinely sits on a knife edge, being especially exposed to a micro-climate which sees extreme weather conditions impact our daily lives, and this will only worsen. Yet again our moorland has been incinerated, and emergency services, especially fire engines, need easy access to the area around Dove Stone reservoir and the moorland, which covers a substantial part of the borough.

The road they want to close for 17 weeks whilst they rebuild the road bridge, Oldham Road, is the main route for fire engines to access the area. They will be snagged if they have to use more narrow lanes. The road is also a main route for many across country to and from the M1. One of the photos I submitted in evidence showed what happened when the Holmfirth Rd was recently closed, with HGVs having to be turned around on a sixpence after ignoring closure signs and then trying to make their way up single-track country lanes. The one in the photo was on its way to Anglesey. If possible, it must be mandated that representatives of local residents and businesses are included in the Highways Management Group, otherwise, it will not happen and we shall see a repeat of the damaging situation which occurred when the road near the viaduct was closed last year for two weekends, where some businesses lost vital income because everyone thought Uppermill was inaccessible due to poor signage.

Lastly, I am now more concerned about the impact on our green spaces and heritage. I do not feel confident that they are a priority for Network Rail. The Viaduct is another jewel in Saddleworth's crown, and I wonder what the impact of the gantries will be and whether they could damage this splendid historical structure? I am also concerned about the use of inappropriate materials on some of our bridges and believe again that they will be harmed, especially with materials such as cladding. The lift and bridge at the station also need to use appropriate materials which are consistent with the character of the area.

Diverting traffic up Ladcastle Rd would have to be strictly one way as it is a single lane with few pull ins or turning points. The same can be

said for the lanes above Uppermill such as Gelfield lane. Church road is

full of residents vehicles as is Shaw Hall Bank Road. SADDLEWORTH WILL BE GRIDLOCKED.

The knock on effect to both businesses and tradesmen throughout Saddleworth will be disproportionately affected. As travelling around and people visiting will become very difficult and time consuming.

It will damage the local economy and I believe it will shut some Cafes and small businesses down on the High St of Uppermill 'The Heart of Saddleworth'. As people will stop trying to enter Saddleworth if it is any more congested. The loss of revenue for the local economy will be considerable.

What would help?

TRU offers absolutely no economical benefit to Saddleworth

Planning conditions must be strong enough eg materials. Modern 'cladding' or artificial stone will not be appropriate, only local stone

Don't trust NR when it comes to respecting and preserving our heritage, and I fear corners will be cut to save money