

**TWA 1992 NETWORK RAIL
STALYBRIDGE TO DIGGLE (SADDLEWORTH) ENHANCEMENTS ORDER**

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

Roger Blackmore

Objector 87

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1. I try to represent the people of Uppermill as one of their Parish Councillors.
2. Network Rail has in my view intentionally misrepresented the case for the public right of way (FP209) to be diverted onto an unsafe walking route (FP244). Footpath 209 was quoted by Network Rail as statistically “well-used” only a few years ago when it applied for Planning Permission to close the level crossing and replace it with a footbridge, a footbridge now being refused.
3. Using inadequate consultation and unbalanced presentation of information Network Rail has grossly understated the degree of public concern about the loss of the Moorgate crossing and its footpath. In the view of many the footpath is an important heritage asset, enjoyed as a Green Lane for over 1000 years. Moreover, the closure proposals go directly against Network Rail’s own principles called “Our Guiding Compass” which professes to minimise disruption, protect community spaces and respect heritage assets, bringing about sustainable development.
4. The economic, social and environmental benefits of this ancient path have been downplayed. The people of Uppermill and Saddleworth, walking groups in the area and countless visitors over the years have used the path - Dark Lane – to access scenic areas of interest, walking routes and local facilities like the golf club on this side of the valley and beyond.
5. Network Rail has consistently attempted to ignore or deal unsatisfactorily with warnings about the safety of users on its alternative route FP244. It has disagreed with warnings from Saddleworth Parish Council, Oldham Council, local walking groups and cyclists. I have walked the footpath 244. Until I tried the path from its highest point to its lowest as it meets Oldham Road outside Uppermill I was less aware of the immense danger walkers and families would face at this critical point. Even at 20mph the traffic could cause injury or death as the pavement is barely a foot in width. It would be a case of accidents waiting to happen.
6. If the footbridge is not built across the railway on Footpath 209 when the level crossing is permanently closed, there will be no practical and safe walking route on this side of the valley. As Network Rail has succinctly put it on a notice at the entrance to Dark Lane:
FOOTPATH CLOSED – PLEASE FIND ANOTHER ROUTE.
7. Now we come to the costs of a footbridge. Without going into the detail that other objectors have provided to the inquiry, my Statement of Case emphasised the delays and inaccuracies about the costs of a footbridge that Network Rail has engaged in over recent years. Network Rail has failed to prove that a footbridge is poor value for money. Evidence has been put forward by others that comparable footbridges have been planned or already provided at a much lower cost. Although Network Rail’s breakdown of cost figures for the footbridge has been inconsistent over time, the total cost quoted has been remarkably close to £4.5million on each occasion.

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8. To summarise other aspects of my case:

9. Firstly, I am concerned that Network Rail has done little in planning to minimise the immense disruption that will be caused by the closure of Greenfield railway bridge.

10. Secondly, it is ironic that just as Greenfield station is going to have long-awaited disabled access to both platforms we are being told that there will be minimal parking spaces for disabled drivers. Facilities for non-disabled drivers are more plentiful at various locations near to the station but disabled drivers will have no increase set aside for them. Similarly, Network Rail has announced pick-up and drop off facilities will be provided at 4 named stations along the route, including Greenfield. This, we have discovered, is a fiction regarding Greenfield.

11. Thirdly, we have been left to hope that half-hourly stopping services will be routed between Manchester Piccadilly and Victoria alternately. This we believe would be in line with current latent demand. Without any commitment to providing this standard it is difficult for local and incoming rail users to foresee any significant benefit arising from the Upgrade.

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