



Councillor Barry Lewis
Leader of the Council (Conservative)
County Hall
Matlock
Derbyshire DE4 3AG

James Derbyshire
Director Peaks and Dales Railway
118 Pall Mall
London
SW1Y 5EA

Office: (01629) 536003
Mobile: 07920 484 207
Email: barry.lewis@derbyshire.gov.uk

County Councillor for Wingerworth and
Shirland (Conservative)

Stephen Chaytow
CEO, MEMRAP
201 Station Road,
Langley Mill,
Derbyshire
NG16 4AF

Ref: BL/LB
1 September 2020

Dear James and Stephen

RE: Restoring Your Railway Fund: proposal to reinstate the Peaks and Dales Line

Thank you for your letters of 24 July and 18 August 2020 regarding the above. Please note that Mike Ashworth has retired from the County Council and Tim Gregory is now in post as Director. May we apologise for not responding sooner to your first letter.

In our view, the report which accompanied your initial letter does not address the fundamental concerns of Derbyshire County Council and the Peak District National Park Authority. These have been expressed previously in our joint letter of 29 June 2020 and revolve around the impact of your proposal to reopen the rail line from Matlock to Buxton.

We cannot overstate the importance of the Monsal Trail to our existing offer to both residents and visitors, or the prominence, within our ambitious forward plans, of extending this and completing the White Peak Loop, of which the Monsal Trail is a vital component. There are some 300,000 walker and cyclist users of the Trail annually and we have seen the numbers continue to grow year-on-year. Once the White Peak Loop is completed, we expect to see this increase further, as it will become an even more attractive and iconic route.

Given the nature of the line, we can see no way in which a Trail, open to all users, can co-exist with any form of rail operation along the whole of this route, particularly through its tunnels or over its viaducts and bridges. We do not believe that there is any alternative to the use of these tunnels and bridges, given the geography and terrain. There are no details about how a replacement for the current Monsal Trail could be identified or delivered. Even if feasible, any adaption would be a major undertaking and extremely costly and, if there are proposals, they would have to replicate the truly outstanding character of the current route, without making them impractical for walkers and cyclists. We cannot see how this could be achieved.

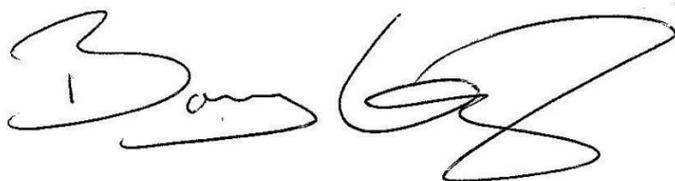
Similarly, the impact of reintroducing passenger and freight rail services into a highly sensitive environment such as the Wye Valley, is not addressed in detail. The context of a Site of Special Scientific Interest imposes a significant challenge for any infrastructure proposal, and neither of our Authorities will place itself in the role of promoting or supporting any project without first establishing how this is to be addressed. We are also mindful that impacts would not be restricted to the new section of route, with any additional rail services passing through the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site and potentially involving night-time freight paths through residential areas.

We wish to stress that we are extremely keen to see rail play a greater role in both passenger and freight movement. However, we are not at all convinced that this route would bring anything like the level of benefit needed to justify its impacts. The main settlements of Buxton and Matlock are already served by passenger services, and we struggle to see that a rail connection between these points would make a material difference to highway traffic levels along the corridor. On freight, Network Rail is already committed to a project to increase capacity on the Hope Valley rail line that is due to be completed by the end of 2023. This should resolve many of the issues around freight services, from the quarries in the Buxton area, which you raise and provide additional paths for passenger trains across the Park, connecting the East Midlands to the North West.

Improvements to local bus services, such as those proposed in Derbyshire County Council's recent submission to the Department for Transport's Rural Mobility Fund scheme, can also play a key part. The scheme would involve expanding demand responsive transport services into the area which would connect with rail services in Buxton and the Hope Valley, providing seamless travel for residents and visitors. This would then provide even better access to the ambitious plans to expand the County's Key Cycle Network, including the completion of the White Peak Loop.

We are strongly opposed to the current proposition as it threatens a vital and popular facility, highly valued by a very large number of Park users. We remain open to receiving any evidence which you feel might bring about a change in this stance. This can only change if you are able to answer the real concerns that we have regarding your proposal. Until then there seems little value in taking part in the workshop proposed in the report.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Lewis', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Councillor Barry Lewis
Leader of Derbyshire County Council