

Peak District National Park Authority

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**PEAK
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NATIONAL
PARK**

James Derbyshire and Stephen Chaytow
Peaks and Dales Railway Ltd
118 Pall Mall
London
SW1Y 5EA

Your ref:

Our ref: Peaks&Dales/MEMRAP

Date: 22 September 2020

Sent by Email

Dear James and Stephen

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

I am writing to you in response to your letters of 24 July and 18 August 2020. Please accept my apologies for the delay in replying, although I understand that John Scott has spoken to Stephen Chaytow in the last week and given him some feedback. We have also seen Barry Lewis's reply on behalf of Derbyshire County Council, dated 1 September.

Your letter of 24 July included your report on the possible future reinstatement of the former railway line between Matlock and Chapel-en-Frith, with a significant stretch of this along the Monsal Trail.

In your letter of 18 August you say that the proposed reinstatement of the line will make a *"vital, urgent and strategic contribution to the shared aspiration of all parties to:*

- *reach net zero emissions within the PDNP*
- *help deliver the joint DCC / PDNPA contribution to HMG's overall #NetZero target.*

You add that it *"represents an opportunity which is likely to have a significantly beneficial impact on the future sustainability of economic activity in those regions which take full advantage"*.

You go on to set out how the proposal could contribute to a "sustainable future" for the National Park, with a particular focus on visitor numbers. You also quote Andrew directly on his ambitions for a "fully integrated public transport network".

In response to this, our position remains as set out in the joint letter from the Authority and Derbyshire County Council on 29 June 2020. To be clear, the Authority does support strategies and proposals which will help get us to net zero and which will help to move visitors and local residents away from car-based travel. The National Park Authority's position is not

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Chief Executive: Sarah Fowler

Chair: Andrew McCloy Deputy Chair: James Berresford

Working together for the Peak District National Park:

• To speak up for and care for the Peak District National Park for all to enjoy forever •

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an “anti-rail” stance but a pro-sustainable and active travel stance. We support investment in the existing rail connection along the Hope Valley line as we think this provides an opportunity for residents and visitors to access parts of the National Park, whilst providing a Manchester to Sheffield/East Midlands Mainline (and in future HS2) connection. 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. As the County noted in their response, 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. We have been involved in discussions with Transport for the North about their strategy, which also covers the northern part of the National Park.

Our concern with your approach is that it is a single focus rail option, predicated on the reinstatement of the former line. It does not consider what other options there may be and which of these is the best option in terms of sustainable travel, carbon reduction, landscape impact and other considerations. Your proposal does not consider whether an integrated transport service with buses operating between Matlock and Buxton, coordinated with the train service, would provide a better option for the communities along this corridor – other than Bakewell, the former line does not directly serve any communities in the National Park. An integrated bus system would provide a more flexible, demand-responsive option, with significantly less environmental impact.

The second aspect of your proposal that raises significant concern for us is, as you know, the impact on the Monsal Trail. Since the reopening of the tunnels between Bakewell and Blackwell Mill in 2011, the use of the Monsal Trail as a multi-user activity route has increased enormously. This use has grown again since the release of the Covid-19 lockdown, with levels in July nearly double what they were last year. Our planning policy position on this is very clear – we seek to protect the trails as multi-user trails and require any proposals for rail use to provide an equally convenient alternative route. We also expect that route to be of similar quality as an experience and we would require the alternative to have an acceptable impact on the high quality landscape and environment through which it passes, otherwise this would, in itself, be a reason to oppose the scheme. Our starting point for this are the National Park purposes, set out in the Environment Act 1995.

In your letter of 18 August you have said that *“Our proposed relocation of the trail to a new, adjacent and permanent home, connected to every station along the route of the reinstated Peaks and Dales line, would enable rail-connected users of the Monsal Trail from surrounding core cities to travel to and from the National Park with their bicycles (using the proposed cycle carriages), or, better still, to support the local economy by hiring locally. The re-provisioning of the trail seems to us a relatively modest cost to preserve the economic and environmental well-being of central Derbyshire for those generations who follow us”*.

Our Policy and Communities team, led by John Scott, have spoken to Stephen about this and met with the Buxton Town Team on 16 September; the Town Team are looking at improving walking and cycling routes into Buxton. I understand that the meeting was useful as it explored the possibilities for providing additional cycle routes in the Wye valley corridor, whether the Monsal Trail is displaced or not. Having heard what the Town Team have proposed, officers remain unconvinced that it is possible to retain the Trail or an equally convenient alternative route if the railway reinstatement takes place. Consequently, we do not consider that the “re-provisioning” would provide an acceptable alternative. None of the alternatives provide the same level, easy to navigate route that the Monsal Trail currently offers. We are also very concerned about the impact the new route and the works associated with on the exceptional quality of the valley through which it passes, especially in Cheedale, which is also an SSSI.

Looking ahead, both the Authority and the County Council are committed to extending and completing the White Peak Loop, of which the Monsal Trail is a vital component. In 2019 there were more than 300,000 walkers and cyclists using the Trail annually and as we noted above, this has increased in 2020. Once the White Peak Loop is extended, we expect to see this increase further, as it will become an even more attractive and iconic route, connecting a wider area.

In your letter you ask the Authority and the County Council to “*demonstrate (our) commitment to delivering a low-carbon, sustainable future for Derbyshire and for the Peak District National Park by confirming that:*

- a. this region’s priorities for the Integrated Rail Plan - to be completed before the year end – include the full reinstatement of the Peaks and Dales line;*
- b. you will engage with us to support our work at both the forthcoming NIC roundtable(s) and in developing the Strategic Outline Business Case for the reinstatement of the Peaks and Dales line”.*

In response to this, we have to say that whilst we are totally committed to a low-carbon and sustainable future for the National Park, we do not accept that the reinstatement of the railway on the route of the Monsal Trail is part of the solution, for the reasons we have set out above. We cannot therefore, support the reinstatement of what you now refer to as the Peaks and Dales line. We are also prepared for National Park Authority officers to engage with you on a strategic discussion on sustainable and active transport solutions for the National Park, rather than a discussion that is a single rail focus only. This engagement is on a without prejudice basis

Yours sincerely



Andrew McCloy
Chair



Sarah Fowler
Chief Executive