

1.0 Executive summary

Rother Valley Railway (RVR) commissioned this report to update the findings of a previous investigation undertaken by Manchester Metropolitan University in 2007. The earlier study concluded that restoring the link between Robertsbridge and the Kent and East Sussex Railway presented a rare opportunity for K&ESR to realise the vision of founding members and secure the basis for a more viable future.

The principal findings of this study are as follows:

- Development of the RVR “missing link” should improve the commercial position of the Kent and East Sussex Railway with passenger numbers increasing to 150,000 per annum given moderate increases in capacity and 200,000 visitors per annum when additional resources from RVR come into place.
- Recent studies conducted by a parliamentary select committee and the Heritage Railway Association confirm that heritage railways now make a significant contribution to local economies. Although short term multiplier values range from 1.2 to 2.47, over the long term values can be much higher as indicated by research into the ‘legacy’ effect of the London 2012 Olympic Games.
- The nature of Rother District and adjoining economies suggests, as shown in the main text, that the proposed RVR “missing link” development would have a significantly beneficial economic and social impact upon these communities given the wider than average variations in income, deprivation and inclusion.
- The KESR turnover for 2012 was £2.43m. Providing the capital investment required to increase capacity on KESR is made, as passenger numbers rise to 150,000 the potential economic benefit could be of the order of £8.1m of which £3.24m is directly attributable to RVR. On reaching its full potential of 200,000 passengers the total economic benefit becomes £10.80m. of which £5.94m would be directly attributable to RVR. (Using the multiplier of 2.0 recommended in the main text).

Higher figures are obtained if the average multiplier of 2.47 suggested by the July 2013 Parliamentary sub-committee is utilised.

- The proposed RVR “missing link” development fits well with the vision and objectives set out in Visit England’s *Strategic Framework for Tourism 2010-20*.
- Increased visitor numbers will directly benefit RVR/K&ESR and indirectly nearby visitor attractions but not without difficulty if resistance to modal shift (from private car to rail/public transport) remains. Without substantial marketing inputs this problem may prove difficult to overcome just as it has done for operators in the commercial transport sector.

RVR/K&ESR like many heritage railways currently face a turning point in their development. As they move increasingly towards the provision of products having wider public appeal or function (such as a tourism transport railway), the balance of resources, especially the ratio of paid staff to volunteers, may call for a fundamental rethink. Demographic factors such as an ageing population may benefit heritage railways in terms of customer base and volunteer recruitment but the age profile of volunteers who were founder members inevitably works against them. Heritage railways such as RVR/K&ESR are now firmly woven into the economy and fabric of their host local community. The economic and wider impacts cement this relationship and in a manner increasingly of benefit to both parties