

Report to COUNCIL

TransPennine Route Upgrade (Stalybridge to Diggle) Transport and Works Act Order – Formal Objections by Oldham Council

Portfolio Holder:

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Reason for Decision

For Oldham Council to make a valid objection to the TransPennine Route Upgrade it must be endorsed by a majority of the authority's councillors at a meeting of the Council, held after the requisite notice of that meeting has been given.

Executive Summary

Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council supports the strategic objectives of the TransPennine Route Upgrade (TRU) and recognises its importance in improving rail capacity, reliability, connectivity and long-term environmental outcomes across the North of England. The Council has engaged constructively with Network Rail throughout the development of the scheme and remains committed to working collaboratively to maximise public benefit.

However, while supportive in principle, the Council has submitted a formal objection to elements of the draft Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO) due to several unresolved concerns that impact on public safety, statutory responsibilities, public rights of way, highway operations, land interests and future development potential.

The Council's principal objections can be summarised as follows:

Public Rights of Way and Highway Safety

The Council objects to proposed temporary vehicular diversion routes at Boat Lane / Harrop Court Road and Station Road, where non-motorised public rights of way would be used for vehicular traffic without sufficient clarity or safeguards. The proposals risk compromising user safety, particularly for vulnerable users, and lack legally robust detail. Network Rail has since confirmed that they are required to develop a Construction Traffic Management Plan, including the proposed temporary diversion routes, and this will need to be approved by the Council.

At Greenfield Station, the Council remains concerned about insufficient design information for highway alterations, including pedestrian crossings and drop-off arrangements. Although Network Rail has committed to establishing a design working group and escalation process, these arrangements are not yet formally documented and highway safety impacts remain unresolved.

Moorgate Halt Level Crossing

The Council strongly objects to the proposed permanent closure of Definitive Footpath 209. This is an ancient and well-used route, and Network Rail's own assessments previously identified a footbridge as the appropriate mitigation. The proposed diversion is steep, inaccessible and unsuitable for vulnerable users. The Council maintains that a footbridge remains the only acceptable solution to preserve a safe, inclusive public right of way.

Land Interests and Development Impacts

The Council has lodged objections in relation to several land plots affected by temporary and permanent works, particularly where access rights, landscaped land, operational assets or future development potential may be prejudiced. Of particular concern are impacts on land with existing or potential residential development, where bridge replacement works may permanently affect highway sightlines and site viability.

Construction Programme and Local Events

The absence of a clear construction programme raises concerns about potential conflict with major Saddleworth events, which rely on safe and effective operation of the local highway network. Without firm commitments on programming and event coordination, the Council cannot be satisfied that public safety and community impacts will be appropriately managed.

Overall Position

The Council supports the TRU in principle but considers that the draft TWAO currently lacks sufficient clarity, assurance and mitigation in key areas. Until detailed information is provided, and satisfactory solutions are agreed—particularly in relation to public safety, rights of way, highway design governance, land impacts and construction programming—the Council is unable to withdraw its formal objections.

The Council remains willing to continue working constructively with Network Rail to resolve these matters and to support delivery of the scheme in a way that safeguards local communities and enables the Council to fulfil its statutory duties.

Recommendations

That the Council:

1. Formally endorses the submission of the Council's letter of objection to the TransPennine Route Upgrade (Stalybridge to Diggle) Transport and Works Act Order, as set out in the report and at Appendix 1.
2. Authorises the Director of Environment, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Transport & Highways, to:
 - Continue engagement and negotiations with Network Rail and the Department of Transport;
 - Make minor amendments to the objection where necessary, provided these do not materially alter the Council's position; and
 - Withdraw individual objections on behalf of the Council should satisfactory assurances and mitigation be secured in respect of:
 - Public rights of way and highway safety;
 - Moorgate Halt level crossing;
 - Land and development impacts; and
 - Construction programming and local events.

TransPennine Route Upgrade (Stalybridge to Diggle) Transport and Works Act Order – Formal Objections by Oldham Council**1 Background & Current Position**

- 1.1 Following the submission of Oldham’s letter of objection on 18th January 2026, Oldham Council received a letter from DfT’s planning unit on 6th January 2026 acknowledging receipt of our objection. They sent a subsequent letter on 12th January 2026 confirming that the Secretary of State had decided to hold a public inquiry into Network Rail’s Transport & Works Act Order (TWAO) application.
- 1.2 In the 6th January letter the DfT pointed out that our letter of objection needs to be endorsed by a majority of councillors at a meeting of the Council, held after the requisite notice of that meeting has been given, and so this report has been prepared to seek that endorsement from cCouncil.
- 1.3 The invitation to comment on the TWAO application received 259 objections and 29 representations and therefore, at the time of writing this report, the Secretary of State is in the process of appointing a planning inspector for the public inquiry, with a provisional date set for 9th June 2026.
- 1.4 Network Rail wrote to Oldham Council on 5th February 2026 with a response to our letter of objection and follow-up meetings will be arranged to discuss their response. As such, dialogue with Network Rail remains open and officers hope that some of the objections can be resolved prior to the public inquiry if suitable plans and information are provided to the Council. If that is the case, those objections will be withdrawn.
- 1.5 However, it is unlikely that all objections will be satisfactorily resolved, and so the Council’s continued representation at the public inquiry will be necessary to make our case. In particular, it is unlikely that the Moorgate Halt Level Crossing objection will be resolved before the public inquiry.
- 1.6 Consequently, Oldham Council submitted a Statement of Case on 23rd February 2026.. The Statement of Case included full details of Oldham’s arguments, evidence and case to present at inquiry.
- 1.7 As part of the inquiry process, officers will be required to prepare witness statements and will take part in the inquiry to present evidence, respond to questions, and cross-examine witnesses called by Network Rail.

2 Options/Alternatives

- 2.1 Option 1 – to endorse the submitted objections related to the TWAO application

This is the recommended option, so that the objection is given formal weight at the public inquiry and officers can make the case for the objections and seek alterations to Network Rail’s proposals accordingly.

- 2.2 Option 2 – to not endorse the submitted objections related to the TWAO application

This option is not recommended, as the Council's objection will not be formalised, and will not be able to be considered further at public inquiry, meaning that necessary changes to Network Rail's proposals will not be secured through the Council's participation.

3 Consultation

- 3.1 No consultation by the Council is necessary on this decision – the objection being considered is being made to a consultation being undertaken by the Department for Transport.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The issuance of a valid objection to the TransPennine Route Upgrade, following the requisite endorsement by Councillors, will have no additional financial implications for the Council, other than the staff time of Officers.
- 4.2 Any perceived costs will be funded from existing budgeted resource.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 Under section 20 of the Transport and Works Act 1992, a body with the power to promote or oppose Bills in Parliament also has the power to apply for or object to Transport and Works Act orders (TWAOs). Where the power to propose or oppose Bills is subject to any condition, the power in section 20 is also subject to that condition. Under section 11 of the Act, the Secretary of State has a discretion whether to cause a public local inquiry or a hearing to be held for the purposes of an application for a TWAO and may give to a person who makes an objection an opportunity of appearing before and being heard by a person appointed by the Secretary of State for the purpose. Local authorities for an area in which any works authorised by the proposed order are to be carried out are statutory objectors and if they inform the Secretary of State in writing that they want their objection to be referred to an inquiry or hearing, the Secretary of State shall cause either an inquiry or hearing to be held.
- 5.2 Section 239 of the Local Government Act 1972 gives local authorities the power to promote or oppose local or personal Bills in Parliament if they consider it expedient to do so. Therefore in accordance with section 20 of the Transport and Works Act, the Council have the power to object to a TWAO affecting the Council's area.
- 5.3 The procedure to be followed in objecting is set out in section 239 of the Local Government Act 1972 and requires a resolution of the Council to oppose a Bill (TWAO) to be passed by a majority of the whole number of the members of the Council at a meeting of the Council held after the requisite notice of the meeting and of its purpose has been given by advertisement in one or more local newspapers circulating in the area of the authority, such notice being given in addition to the ordinary notice required to be given for the convening of a Council meeting. The requisite notice is ten clear days' notice in the case of opposition to a Bill (TWAO).

6 Procurement Implications

- 6.1 N/A

7 **Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People**

7.1 An Oldham Equality Impact Assessment is not required for this decision, as it relates to whether to support an objection to be submitted to another organisation, and does not involve works or policy decisions by the council that would impact on those groups with protected characteristics under legislation.

8 **Key Decision**

8.1 No

9 **Key Decision Reference**

9.1 N/A

10 **Background Papers**

10.1 N/A

11 **Appendices**

Appendix 1 - TRU Stalybridge to Diggle (Saddleworth) Order_ Letter of Objection_Oldham Council_FINAL