

# English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

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**Urgent Government Action is required now to help keep options open and better steward potential national assets from ruination and destruction on a grand scale.**

## Introduction – what matters now

Across the English Regions old railway trackbeds and routes are being subject to no protection whatsoever in a context of laissez-faire planning and development pressures. The result is that an upsurge in bombardments peppering these old railway courses is now visited upon us. Once lost, unless lands are set aside for realigning railway routes in the event of reopening, they are lost and the upheavals of compulsory purchase apart from being expensive are met with objections and much consternation, understandably. What we wish for is the Government to see that at least some of these old railway routes are not just passive phenomenon or mundane happenings, but a potential loss to recovery and realisation of key corridors and assets for the national well-being. We want the Government to act now to strengthen the hand of those wanting to protect former rail routes and realignment spaces where blockages have occurred and indeed to make it a mandatory policy of planning consideration and practise.

## Background – the historical context informs today's 'reality'

The closures of the late 1950's (pre-Beeching), 1960's (Beeching and Castle eras) and early 1980's (Serpell) was of a dubious nature. Superimposed with very little pre-notice, weakened organisational ability to resource and galvanise against, they were the dismantling of what was once the most intense and integrated public transport system and assets in the world. Indeed, we gave railways to the world as one of our legacies. The closures coincided with a deliberate post-war government policy of preferring roads, the M1 in 1959 coinciding with the closure trickle leading to a wholesale flood. Half a century of neglect for those formations, encroachment development means many are compromised or lost. The cycle of road reliance and dependency for passenger and freight transport is that mass demand has informed side effects like congestion, delays, waste of fuel, air pollution, land use conflicts and demand for parking outstripping urban or beauty spot ability to service. Contrast today, what railways remain are bursting at the seams for want of more capacity, alternative route options and re-connecting outlying places and regions.

## Get the English Regions Back on Track!

Scotland has blazed a trail in rail reopenings and rebuilds and all reopenings and rebuilds have shown unprecedented growth and usage beyond predictions making the case for them. The Borders Railway is a case in point:

- Brand-new infrastructure
- Some old trackbed recovery but also new build where necessary
- 4 million users in first few years of operation
- Serves rural heartlands and outlying urban centres
- Has brought footfall and spend minus cars to these areas revitalising their economies
- Has informed new job and commuting opportunities
- Has led for calls for more re-railing including rebuilding back to Carlisle

**The English Regions, with even more dense populations, more congested roads and higher air pollution levels are lagging behind.** There is probably about 100 reopenings/rebuilds which could wash their face like the Borders Railway example but the stringency of Government demands, the costs associated with commissioning studies and working up schemes has to be able to access capital funds to draw down and if that means taking from capital funding for road schemes as an investment in modal shift nurture for the sake of the environmental as well as any socio-economic benefits, so be it. In short, we wish for:

- **Capital funds** for incentivising local councils to protect railway routes and corridors. This does not have to be passive but can interim double up as linear parks, green spaces, conservation areas and footpaths/cycleways as long as the conversion to a railway is understood by everyone and alternative options for relocation of other uses can be designed in to and integral to a railway.
- **For Government** to commit to giving the go ahead to one reopening/rebuild per region per year from now. For example, Skipton-Colne, Bristol-Portishead, and the Fawley Branch have all been lauded but not given the go-ahead. Once the movement and rewards of reopening/rebuilds come on-stream rather than gathering dust on shelves in the form of umpteen reports, so other schemes can work their way up the chain. Mandating the protection of routes and deviation spaces is urgently required to keep options open.
- **For more incentives for Local Councils** and other agencies to intervene and protect routes and realignment spaces for and to entertain reopening/rebuild schemes in their areas and collaborate together to move the agendas from abandonment, encroachment and dismissal to embrace, nurture and responsible stewardship. A lot can change in 50 years, demand which may have not existed then, may exist now. At very least they should be required to make assessment of new flows and demand.
- **For incentives for start-up costs** to be partly met by grants. Getting more freight by rail can require outlay costs of sidings, fork lift/gantry equipment, reciprocals, sites and wagons/locomotives for example as well as possibly new signalling and other infrastructure. If we are to reduce the costs of road wear and tear, cut carnage and reduce the tonnages on our roads, getting more freight by rail sounds good and is easy to say and quote in a report, but needs seed corn funding to be apparent to enable small schemes upwards to be pioneered and grown to longer/bigger operations. Examples are recycling great and small, pallet-sized consignments to containers, wagon loads to mixed freight. If it is only economical to send all goods by rail if over 100 mile distances for example, then the law should say all freight over 100 miles must go by rail surely, alas this incentive is lacking on the scale required for majoritively modal shift and main carrier status to be awarded back to the railways as the staple future means-ways to send goods.

## Case examples (not exhaustive):

1. **Great Central South of Narborough and Rugby:** This route needs recovery and protection as is under threat now. Largely fallow until the last 10 years it is now bombarded with piecemeal development without any incentive to consider what re-railing the corridor could do. HS2 will not provide intermediate stations between Old Oak Common and Solihull, so all in between growth-wise will be flung to existing roads and rails. Meanwhile the M1 often draws to a standstill, likewise the M40 is busier than ever. Saving land and offering real rail choice going where these flows also go is what recovery of the railway could offer.

2. **March-Spalding:** Closed 1982 this trackbed was dormant apart from Whitemoor Prison for a long while but now development pressures abound and the consensus around building homes is high on the Council's mind. However, more development without infrastructure, means all on to the local roads. £millions are going into more bypasses and yet they say there is no potential demand or justification for a parallel railway. Better protection mandates and a rolling programme of reopenings/rebuilds as part of the mix of what Government facilitates for the railways could help strengthen the call for protection and study to assess whether in fact the railway could deliver benefits and dividends and be well used. Suffice to say the costs of the new Werrington Flyover and routing upsurges in freight by rail the long way around from March-Peterborough-Spalding shows that efficiency gains by a direct railway could free up cost and bottlenecks elsewhere.

3. **Guildford-Cranleigh-Horsham-Shoreham:** Over the years whilst a main part of the route has been protected as a walkway-cum-cycleway, development blocks the route in Cranleigh for example. A deviation or compulsory purchase and relocation of the development is required if the railway is to be rebuilt. Likewise, the footpath and cycleway may either need to be slewed to share the corridor with a fence separating the two or relocated alongside off the trackbed to enable the railway to get through, ideally with double track or long passing loops such as a Cranleigh Station could inform. Demand and benefit of reopening is in scope from Reading/Heathrow-Guildford-Horsham, Gatwick from the south, Shoreham for Brighton and relief to the Brighton Main Line, A24 and sustained town centre footfall and spend minus the cars keeping town centres vibrant. It would also open up new employment and commuting opportunities to a wider area.

4. **Harrogate-Ripon-Northallerton:** Development has scotched early hopes of progressing reopening and now we need Government to demand that alternative access is identified, laid aside and provide seed corn funds for studies to work up the case and demand with a real prospect of sanction for rebuilding the entire line in due course. Benefits connecting the regions and 2 main lines as well as benefits to the ancient location of Ripon should not be under-estimated and new development if tailored correctly could inform new demand, especially with commuting for example.

5. **Bedford-Northampton:** Made it for consideration to be given the go-ahead for reopening in 2004 following a number of studies showing potential including the Government sponsored London South Midlands Multi Modal Study 2003. The 21.5-mile route would link existing rails between Brighton-Bedford and with East-West Rail East Anglia-Cambridge-Bedford with Northampton (population 200, 000) and links to West Midlands and North West on current West Coast Main Line (WCML). Given the lack-lustre route protection and breaches of trackbed principally at Olney (part of Greater Milton Keynes jurisdiction) a study to update the case and look at options of getting around, through or completely new route is now required. Like many old routes, time is running out, development pressures abound and action is urgently required.

## The way ahead:

A rolling programme of line reopenings and rebuilds is crying out across the English Regions. A level playing field would inform more schemes can be worked up and investigated. Better and stronger Government mandatory rules, guidance and laws are needed to stem the rot of routes being lost beyond reasonable recovery to keep options open, make development more integrative and sustainable.

Unless Government acts and starts a rolling programme of delivery even a trickle of one per region now, we are saying goodbye to sustainable transport options and the conveyance of people and goods more by rail, which evidence shows is being used more today than ever before – this on 1/3-1/2 the network which existed in 1955 for example.

We call on elected representatives and others to add their voice to our calls and champion them to the highest levels of Government as an investment in ourselves. Likewise, if members of the public agree with our calls, why not join ERTA and help us do even better?

For an index of the top reopenings we have identified please request our Rail Reopenings Pamphlet which lists 32, again not exhaustive but indicative that if a fraction were being incentivised to be protected, worked up and delivered by Government sanctioning a rolling programme akin to calls for more electrification for example, then in our view, that would be a very prudent act and investment in our nation's well-being.

**Disclaimer:** The English Regional Transport Association is a voluntary organisation and as such relies on the generosity of professionals and public for entertaining and supporting our work and calls. Please help us and be part of the answer to the question of why reopenings/rebuilds are not happening and help get the English Regions moving in a healthier way.



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Membership of ERTA costs £12 per annum. I/We wish to join  \_\_\_\_\_

**Name (Please Print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Postcode:** \_\_\_\_\_

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I/We hereby give consent to our data being used and stored for the purposes of communication with ERTA and its purposes compliant with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)  \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Dated:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please send completed form and payment to ERTA Membership:**

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