

East-West Rail Central section – a consideration

1. The Bedford St John's site: A housing development threatens to block this site and portal access to the rail corridor to the east of Bedford down to Cardington Road, Bedford.

a. ERTA is not against social housing but believes this site and rail option being retained in this case outweighs the other pressure to deliver more urban housing.

b. ERTA believes the Borough needs to look elsewhere to locate social housing and improve facilities to conjoin with it.

c. The St John's site would be poorly road accessed and cul-de-sacked in all probability.

d. The land needs to be protected either by interim rail use like a washer plant or a park amenity area with a cycleway down to Cardington Road, utilising the corridor meaningfully until a railway is re-laid.

e. If we block the site, it means trains cannot access it from the west (Bletchley direction) or north-east (from Bedford Midland direction). That locks in the current mooted East-West Rail Companies (EWRC) Northern Route, which in our view is unsatisfactory.

2. The Northern Route. This route rightly facilitates the running through Bedford Midland clearing platforms for other services in an intensively used railway station but is problematic because:

a. No provision on A4280 Road Bridge for extra tracks to join the slows from north or south.

b. mooted fields for the junction south of the Western Bypass Link Road have been built on and so that means junctioning north of the Girder Bridge.

c. North of Girder Bridge conflicts with that same land for a Northampton-Bedford rail link flyover from the slows over the main lines going west.

d. North of Girder Bridge has less than 10 metres to go to a height to clear juggernaut lorry height to cross the A6 Clapham Bypass, cross flood plains to cross the River Great Ouse and old Clapham Road before hitting a hillside.

e. Tunnelling or cuttings from where to where as it is hilly and extra hills around North Brickhill, Cleat Hill, Ravensden plateauing to Wilden, avoiding built Renhold to Colesden.

f. From Colesden area, avoiding Great Barford, you have to engage with A421, A1, Black Cat Roundabout reconfiguration, River Great Ouse/Ivel conjoined ascending to the Tempsford flood plain to intersect the ECML from a north-westerly direction to head off easterly, the exact formation lineage to yet be determined.

3. The alternative Southern Route:

a. From an automatic points reinstated triangle and double-track railway, you head off to Cardington Road on the flat.

b. Cardington Road needs the road bridging the railway and could be made single carriageway as a part of a traffic calming exercise. Level Crossings are controversial and difficult to secure, even though such would be visually less intrusive and cheaper in all probability.

c. From Cardington Road, you head eastwards on a straight flat trajectory. 3 old railway bridges would need replacing with double-track specification bridges. The Sustrans Cycle Route would need redirecting either alongside on new embankment or re-routed via Barker's Lane for example to Goldington Road and Castle Mill for example.

d. A level crossing would be required for Priory Park entrance or a new bridge link to the roundabout north side of current Barker's Lane if flood barriers were erected/metal girders put in to direct river flood overflow.

e. You then head on flat land directly eastwards and the A421 Bypass needs to be raised with a bridge over the old railway formation to double track specification and accommodating a cycle-cum-footpath/equestrian access. This was raised in the 1993 Side Roads Order 199 whereby the Department of Transport said were the railway pursued they would give sympathetic consideration to accommodating rail access. This clause should be evoked and worked on to the aforementioned specification.

f. From east of the bypass the railway leaves the old formation at an angle to go through Willington Woods (largely a gutted quarry) to cross the River Great Ouse and bypass-built Willington. It would then cross back the other side of Willington and curve round to go under the Willington-Great Barford Road and continue erring to the left to align and bridge the Great Barford-Blunham Road. From here, on embankment to avoid River Great Ouse flooding, to continue to north of built Blunham to access the Tempsford flood plains from the south-westerly direction.

g. Crossing the A1 and River Great Ouse/Ivel on embankment you ascend the plains north of Station Road Tempsford.

h. Our preference would be a multi-aspecting flying junction interceptor with the slows of the ECML rather than another station. This would enable passenger and freight integrations from:

- Peterborough/all south including St Neots-Bedford/Oxford corridor and vice versa
- Stevenage/Thameslink/East Bedfordshire direct access to County Town of Bedford and the Oxford Corridor and vice versa.
- Peterborough/St Neots – Cambridge via Cambourne direct including access to/from Addenbrookes.

4. Land West of Bedford Midland: The former goods shed should be saved for extra parking and second booking hall (capacity) as new bays or through tracks will displace current parking and require extra lands to spread out. Losing this capacity to other-than-rail development would seem short-sighted if growth of usership from current broad range catchment is envisaged.

5. Retail Park/Kempston Town Station: Residents of growing populations south of Bedford River Great Ouse need better rail-based access to Bedford Midland as driving adds 20 minutes to journey time. We recommend the Retail Park on the Bedford-Bletchley Railway be given a station. Studies hitherto have shown positive and expanded parking off Southfields Road could avert any local residential concerns from the Magnolia Close quarter.

Summary:

It is our view this would significantly enhance reach, range and diversity utilising same tracks. Our route avoids hills, avoids housing conflicts and in all probability would be much easier, cheaper, retains the Northampton-Bedford integrative option and enables through working via Bedford Midland 'north-east' and vice versa, whilst trains from Oxford could bay at Bedford Midland if adequate bays are provided, and reverse out to Cambridge and vice versa. Key detail is savvy end-to-end train swaps by drivers and even on X5 that is always a bug bear for passengers as is constantly having to change from a coach to a bus at Bedford for whatever reason, resulting in a downgrade often.

For this reason, we ask that the St John's site development is rejected and that the route we are suggesting is given a fair and objective evaluation contrast the northern route with the wider gains added to the benefit/cost ratio listing and that comparison to be placed in the public domain.

R. B. Pill21-07-2020