

# Great Central Rail Link Committee

*~ Seeking the rebuilding/reopening/new build of the Great Central corridor as a railway from off the Leicester-Nuneaton Lines to Rugby, Calvert with links to Aylesbury, Heathrow, Oxford and Reading for passenger and freight traffic. Also, capacity and relief creation off of the existing north-south main lines and the M1/M40 corridors. Part of the English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) a voluntary membership based pro-public transport organisation. ~*

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**Summary Report of the case of the English Regional Transport Association's Views on matters pertaining to reopening part of the former Great Central Main Line Railway or use of the corridor thereof for re-railing purposes.**



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**£3.50 where sold**

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## **Foreword and Disclaimer**

### **What this report is and is not.**

This report is about what we at the ERTA consider to be a realistic proposition worthy of professional and investment interest in further study, evaluation and business case exploration, making and formally taking the project forward. This, in one whole scheme or in phased incremental segments with Phase 1 profits rolling forward for Phase 2 and so forth to the utmost potential in reach, range and business courting.

Since inceptions, and Britain gave railways to the world, railways have courted both passenger and freight and whilst adaptable, this balance has and was the best of what the railways could offer the nation as a whole – social and economic systems of efficient transit of people and goods. The erosion through deliberate Government policy to transfer from rail to road of domestic freight and encourage competition took away vital revenues to local lines and undermined their ‘on paper’ economic justification. That from the post war period was the pattern informing the closures in the 1960’s. But 50 years on and we face a different situation whereby demand is rising, growth in a global context is pressing our economy and challenging whether the systems of transportation we have are robust enough to meet those challenges, keeping cost down but delivering bulk in a timely manner. Motorways and trunk roads creek under wear and tear spiralling costs and increased tonnages. Likewise, rail sees spiralling passenger and freight access demand but existing lines are reaching capacity.

Too many people approach the Great Central from a past glory and nostalgic perspective and too many are dismissive or sceptical about reasonable partial recovery because they don’t see the case today and the needs of tomorrow whereby if we fail to recover the corridor, invest in the capacity and new flows the Great Central could tap into now going forwards, we leave a legacy of at least a missed opportunity and at worst a dereliction to correct past mistakes and short comings and irresponsible problems with few solutions within reasonable reach of resolution. We are poorer if that is the case and ERTA believes we should not allow it to be as far as Great Central corridor is concerned at this hour with Brexit looming and uncertainty high with inflation and increasing fluidity in the jobs market, which then affects footfall and spend, town centres and the economy. Productivity agendas without infrastructural rebalance is short sighted. ERTA believes the national interest and cohesion agendas are better served with re-railing large communities and creating a green economy and that ultimately means reopening or new building local lines and enabling more people and good to go by rail as a choice and lifestyle liberty. In short, we have it gives a flavour of ERTA thinking and aspiration here upon which others can build to inform a new railway delivering benefits to local communities into the 21st Century.

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## **Executive Summary**

This report seeks to reopening/rebuild/new build along the former Great Central Corridor between the current Leicester-Nuneaton Lines in the East Midlands to Calvert near Aylesbury with interception of East-West Rail and links to Heathrow. It would act as both a local commuter link and regional distributor for passenger and freight to and from a variety of places. Key aspects are:

- Passenger Radius: East Midlands/Leicester - Aylesbury/Heathrow 'not via London' via Lutterworth, Rugby, Willoughby, Woodford Halse, Brackley and Calvert
- East Midlands/Leicester – East-West Rail for Oxford/Didcot/Bristol, Reading, South West, Southampton and Guildford 'not via London' via same corridor as above
- Freight trunking routes to and from the West Coast Main Line/Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT) and East Midlands from Channel Tunnel (via new Tonbridge-Redhill curve onto Brighton Lines and via Horsham-Guildford (rebuild) for trunking to East Midlands or West Coast Main Lines (via new Rugby Link) and vice versa 'not via London'.

### **Rail link would enable:**

- Local Commutes between Leicester and Rugby, Willoughby/Barby, Rugby-Southam/Daventry Parkway, Woodford Halse, Brackley and Calvert for aforementioned destinations south and north.
- Relief for West Coast Main Line, M1 and associated lines and roads to and from junctions associated with these trunking corridors, bringing capacity creation, relief to congestion and freeing up paths for growth.
- Offers a sustainable green corridor, which could live happily with an associated railway maybe move walking, cycle, parks and ponds either side of the corridor as the open terrain and urban landscapes may lend and new deviations where blockages exist.
- Offers access within a 15-minute bus ride to Silverstone and associated orbits by rail and a Park and Ride at Brackley offering commuting to London Marylebone and other destinations.
- Could utilise Watford West made redundant with Croxley Link as a terminal for some local services via the direct Amersham curve onto the said set of rail links.
- Limited stops, 125 mph specification offers faster end to end times without the cost and upheavals associated with projects like HS2 for example, saving public money, time and energy in a world of need.

The report deals with the practical matters of a need for route protection/recovery and deviation consideration where blockages have encroached the old trackbed. Re-railing is the main goal and reclamation of a rail interest in the corridor for the greater good of the nation as a whole. There is a balance between local/parochial interests and national and regional needs for clean-green railway access and routes to de-congest London and the heated South-East but also protect and save land which road alternatives at cost offer. Choices have to be pragmatically made and this report seeks to carry people with its grain of intent whilst outlining what the railway could offer a wide spectrum of potential interests.

In sum, it needs investors, business acumen and determined support to have a reasonable chance before all options are lost and NIMBYism is rewarded with mass growth but no sustainable infrastructure, handing on a collateral damage to successive generations.

## Introduction

ERTA's vision is that the Great Central Main Line was an under-rated line and never got a fair chance to prove its worth and was a victim of its time of closures by stealth based on ideological considerations that road investment would provide better dividends. That today, fifty years on and we have spiralling growth and associated congestion of both passenger and goods vehicles and insufficient monies to widen existing roads. We also have insufficient lands for more motorway building and HS2 is the wrong type of railway.

The solution in ERTA's eyes is to look at re-railing the former Great Central corridor London extension but with looking at more 'not via London' in terms of scope for enabling a basic railway corridor to do more.

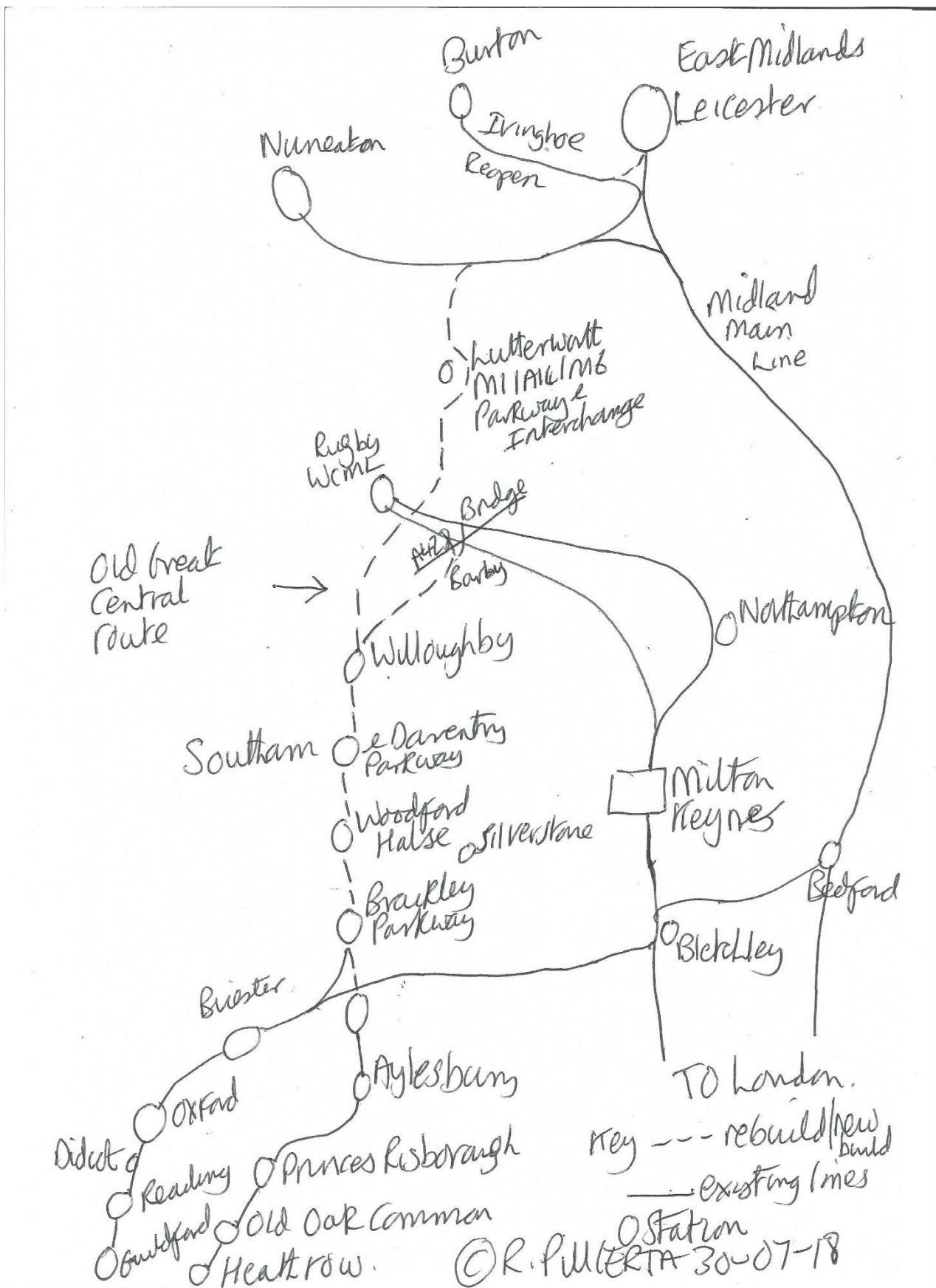
The report looks at sectional breakdowns of the rebuilding such as Calvert to Brackley which would link Heathrow/Aylesbury to a potential new town at Calvert to the Great Central stub and with a revived East-West Oxford-Cambridge rail link, provide plenty of 'other than London' destinations for a variety of passenger and freight services to go south and west from the Great Central stub and on to it for access to the West Coast Main Line (WCML) via a new link from the Willoughby area to link with WCML south of Rugby via the Barby area. This in turn would free up sending mass of passenger and freight via Bletchley and Milton Keynes Central which will be fully utilised with East-West services and London centric provision and lacking much baying capacity, would result in through lines being blocked by wait over trains.

ERTA's proposed Great Central railway would take a share of this freight and passenger traffic and free up paths both along the WCML but also the congested and slow moving M1 motorway. This means rail would be in a position to take more and as a result check spiralling costs associated with the tonnages, pounding and wear and tear on existing roads and enable a growth share of freight and people movements by rail, increasing rail's share and ability to manage growth sustainably.

The report calls for route protection, local policies to work towards re-railing not against. It calls for creative approaches to foster interest and support at every level and for Local Councils to work together with ERTA to take the project both seriously and take it forward towards implementation maybe one whole project or segmental projects like a commuter stem with a Parkway Station adjacent to the A43 and Brackley, then to a new Rugby link, then rebuild GC over Rugby to Lutterworth and a new Parkway Station for Lutterworth and freight depot for getting freight from the A14, M1/M6 conjoiners to use rail maybe intermodal, roll-on, roll-off or Piggyback. Designing a new railway on an old railway corridor enables new approaches and capacity which otherwise is lost to us.

Leicester as a gateway to the East Midlands would be an ideal destination from places direct like Oxford, Aylesbury, Heathrow and Rugby for example and with a reopened link to Burton upon Trent and Peak Rail for Manchester, the whole East Midlands dynamic could be radically improved with more business, footfall and spend, trade and better environments from more switch to rail based freight and people movement longer and shorter distances in all directions.

The report concludes with a call to action and that call is inclusive to everyone as we live in a shared nation and as such are all potential stakeholders to benefit if the railway is restored or suffer if we leave existing infrastructure to cope in a context of growth.



## 1.0 Past and Present Landscapes

Although the Great Central London extension opened by 15<sup>th</sup> March for passenger traffic and 11<sup>th</sup> April 1899 for goods, it was preceded on 25 July 1898 for coal traffic. Running from Manchester and Hull to Sheffield and south through East Midlands heartlands areas of Nottingham, Leicester onto the famous railway town of Rugby and ultimately via the Chilterns to Marylebone, a stopping off point with aspirations to the Continent via a Channel Tunnel thwarted by the outbreak of the First World War. Coal was a staple goods that moved along GC rails throughout its lifetime span, closing respectively in 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1966 and 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1969. (note 1)

The line's connectives to other parts of the nation and railway networks were recognised and through services from Newcastle to the South Coast were not unknown and all in between. The closure, like so many seems retrospectively short sighted. At the time with limited finances and a huge network to service, maintain and update, British Railways under Government control felt that closure would rid it of less well used routes or duplicate routes and the Midland Main Line out of St Pancras survived with the Great Central London extension truncated north of Aylesbury with only a connection to the East-West Oxford-Bletchley line at Calvert-Claydon being used for freight movements until it too was mothballed in 1985.

Tracks and infrastructure were removed and in the intermediate 50 years we have seen roads, housing and other development sweep away chunks of the old line which is why when ERTA looks at the project, it sets limits to a rebuilding from a chord off the Leicester-Nuneaton railway onto the old Great Central with realignment/new build/deviations at places like Lutterworth, new viaduct over the M1 and West Coast Main Line and onwards through Willoughby, Woodford Halse (deviation needed), Brackley (deviation to the eastern side and incline from southern top to lower A43 valley parallel and embankment to cross over and implement a new station) and plug into tracks in the Calvert area for Oxford and Aylesbury respectively. Oxford gives links with Bicester, Didcot and Reading for Guildford, Basingstoke, the West Country and Southampton for example. Guildford is significant as if the ERTA proposal to reopen to Cranleigh and Horsham is accepted then you would have access to Gatwick Airport via Three Bridges. It is also proposed that a Tonbridge-Gatwick new curve is implemented with cross-overs or new flyover with the Brighton Main Line would enable passenger and freight from the Channel Tunnel, Ashford, Kent and Tonbridge to orbit London and access to and from the East Midlands 'not via London' freeing up vital capacity in, around and out of London both ways for other passenger and freight services – there is a growing demand for both to be laid on but are inhibited by pinch points in the network principally getting around London. Aylesbury for links to Princes Risborough, Old Oak Common, Heathrow and beyond via new links to Woking and Guildford and new reopened links direct to Brighton and Gatwick respectively.

ERTA makes no excuses that this is a new rebuild scheme. We use the old trackbed and corridor as a note of originality and starting point for a new railway. No High Speed (HS) proposal, not so much cost as HS2, but a robust conventional twin track railway able to circumvent other busier areas and provide crucial growth and capacity on north-south alignments to existing main lines and the M1 which crawls along at between 5-25mph during peak periods or grinds to a virtual stop. Just think of the cost to British Business, goods, services and competitiveness that puts UK Plc? (2) ERTA's view therefore is that Great Central rebuild/new build makes a critical social and economic sense and should be courted and looked at, studied and case made to satisfy professional and establishment demands of business case, feasibility and environmental impact/benefits to meet the Network Rail GRIP criterion for example and hopefully court Department for Transport (DfT) support as a national infrastructure project.



**Caption Above:** 1990's scene at the now preserved Great Central Railway Loughborough, this site illustrates a picture of the 1960's legacy of decline and closure of the railways. The end of steam coincided with a swathe of mass railway closures, many of which then and now it was felt went too far. ERTA believes some reopenings are justified in a new context today.

**Caption below:** Great Central Loughborough 1990's shows the twin track Great Central hallmark and how island platforms were a distinctive feature and would need disability access modifications these days. The twin tracks split to interface them. Great Central was built to Berne Gauge which meant standard clearances.





## 2.0 ERTA's big picture for the Great Central

Creating capacity and choice means reopening this rail corridor. This is the claim of ERTA. If you look at alternatives to this claim you have the following options:

### 1. Widening the M1:

This would not only be equally as costly but incur huge upheaval with demolition of housing and relocation of businesses over a 100-mile corridor stretch between London and the East Midlands. Pinch points like North London, Luton, Milton Keynes, Northampton and Leicester suburbs would be a massive intrusion and for what? It is an established fact that you cannot build your way out of congestion (3) and the following quote

*"The concept is called induced demand, which is economist-speak for when increasing the supply of something (like roads) makes people want that thing even more. Though some traffic engineers made note of this phenomenon at least as early as the 1960s, it is only in recent years that social scientists have collected enough data to show how this happens pretty much every time we build new roads. These findings imply that the ways we traditionally go about trying to mitigate jams are essentially fruitless, and that we'd all be spending a lot less time in traffic if we could just be a little more rational."* (Peter Nunns, October 2014) (4).

What experience shows is that motorways and trunk roads take a lion's share of vehicles but junctions and urban interfaces become congested with high concentrates of volumes of traffic leading to standstills/gridlocked conditions sometimes for over an hours duration at peak periods especially but not exclusively and areas such as the M1/A509/MK Coachway Junction and Northampton interface are prime examples where high volume, convergence and urban interplay come together for total wastes of time, fuel, energy and costs distribution businesses and members of the public respectively let alone the environmental impacts of standing traffic belching out emissions going nowhere fast, junctions jammed and 5mph being the order speed of the day in any direction. Widening the M1 then would not only exacerbate this with growth, but also end to end, London and East Midlands would also exacerbate adding a ripple effect of more of the same dysfunctional across an ever-wider area and network of roads.

2. **Midland Main Line enhancement:** The line is already being incrementally electrified and quadrupled to Kettering with bridge clearances to 9'6 container standard. Terminal capacity constraints at St Pancras means growth of terminal access is limited. Paths are critical and whilst extension and turn-off to Corby will reduce sitting on the cushions at Bedford Midland, the growth of East-West Rail as a passenger and freight driver will probably mean that more platform and track flexibility will be needed. However, whilst the M1 serves Luton/Airport-Milton Keynes/A509-Leicester, the MML serves Luton/Airport-Bedford-Leicester. Milton Keynes is a bigger traffic driver in all directions than Bedford but the lack of physical rail links to Milton Keynes from Luton/Airport and Bedford-Northampton means that an MML based solution as a rail alternative corridor is patchy to say the least and probably has own market share rather than indents significant traffic off the M1. It is not a balancing act, rather a horses-for-courses with most freight going by road sadly.

3. **West Coast Main Line enhancement:** Again, only so much you can do with this already upgraded railway corridor. Paths are premium and limited and with growth, passenger and freight potential for more is extremely limited south of Rugby. In 2001 Connex wanted to run between Rugby, Northampton and London but were curtailed under the auspices of a lack of paths. Consequently, Southern's Croydon-West London-Milton Keynes Central service is reduced to an hourly frequency even though popular contra commuting takes place demanding more frequency. Baying at Milton Keynes is extremely limited and with Southern, Aylesbury and Bedford trains vying for the same terminal capacity, the queue is unresolved and will remain a conundrum for years to come possibly. So, in short, the WCML is congested already, and again follows M1 from London to Watford but M1 goes to Luton, whilst WCML serves Milton Keynes and Northampton and both lack a direct physical rail link with Leicester which the M1 also serves. (5)



**Caption Above:** Taken early 1990's this shot south from Newton Purcell in Buckinghamshire, now a private railway restoration location and under threat from a possible High Speed 2 (HS2) rail construction, which may not accommodate freight and as an isolated operation at £100 billion may turn out to be the 'wrong type of railway'. ERTA believes the money could be better spent on conventional rail. Photo by Richard Pill.

**Caption Below:** Taken from 2012 the picture shows a typical scene on the M1 motorway which is repeated weekly on numerous days especially at peak times, whereby long stretches bung up with congestion; nothing moves very fast and is not only polluting but inefficient for road, cost and logistical operations. This is the nationwide legacy of the local rail closures; reopening Great Central could bring alleviation with benefits for all. Photo by Richard Pill.



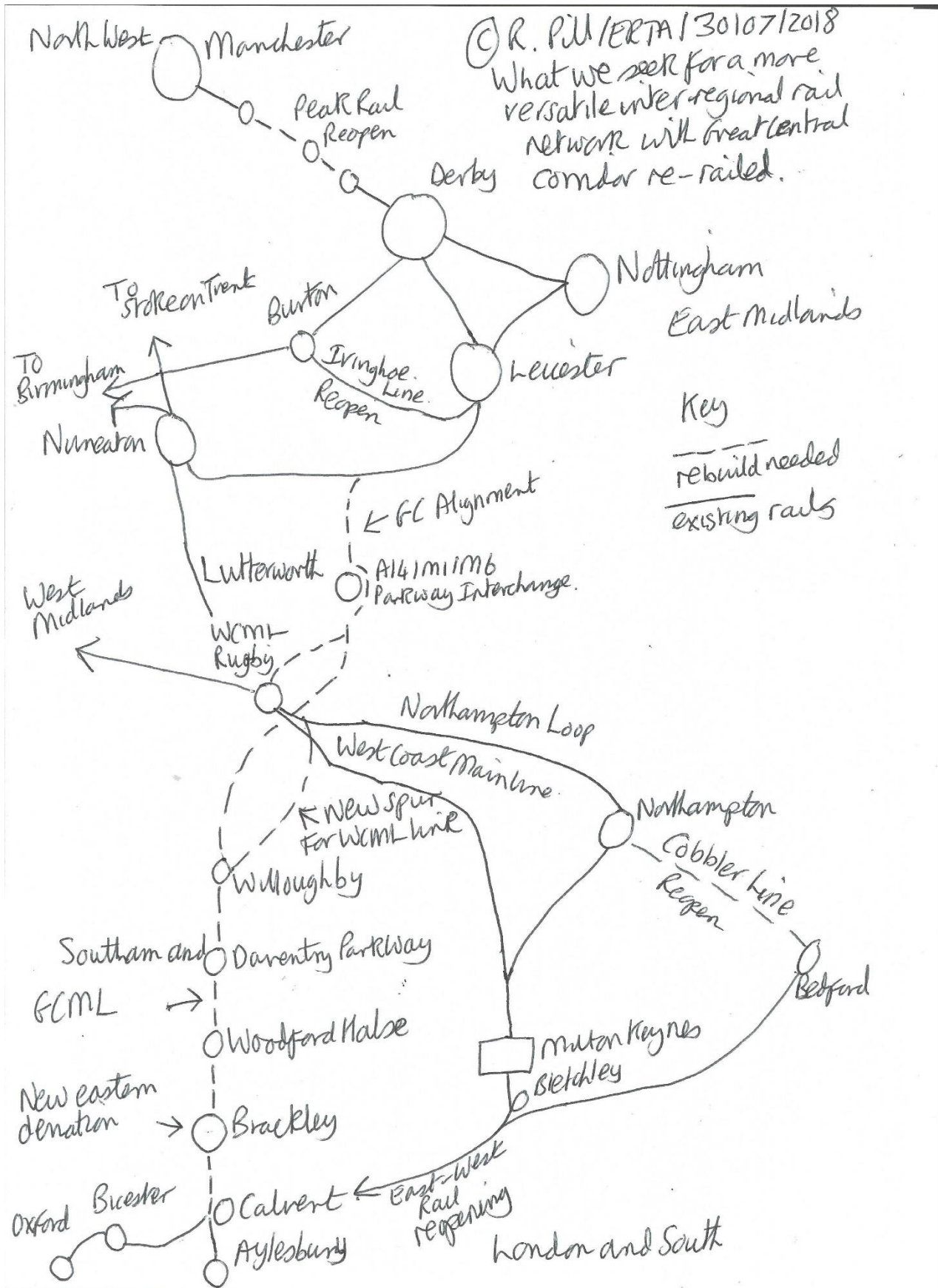
### 3.0 Calvert area to east of Brackley

One view of ERTA is that whilst the whole reopening from Leicester-Nuneaton-Calvert area is a project whole and could be approached as such with additions before, during and after, another view is incremental delivery plans which look at phased implementation arriving at a unity whole. Thus, to extend a railway line along the old Great Central trackbed corridor to the brow of the hill from which in former days the Brackley Viaduct took the railway across the valley going north, to build a steady descent incline but to embankment to enable the railway to deviate to parallel to the A43 and finish with a Parkway Station on the eastern side of Brackley adjacent to a roundabout of the A43. This would enable:

1. Brackley/A43 (population 13, 000) (6) corridor park-and-ride and commute to Aylesbury/Chiltern Rail Network for London or via Princes Risborough to Heathrow via Old Oak Common for example and vice versa.
2. Brackley/A43 corridor Park and Ride to Oxford via Bicester for connections far and wide maybe South Wales, Bristol, South West, Southampton and the South Coast as well as Reading and Guildford for example and vice versa.
3. Outlets mentioned in destination terms in 1 and 2 above to the Brackley area, a growth area of logistics and residential combinations also within a 10-minute bus ride of Silverstone and thus rail access to within that sphere and associated supply chain networks which orbits a 20-mile radius of Silverstone. Brackley, a historic town with long established school, has access to Banbury, Towcester, Northampton and Buckingham as well.

This should be ample demand and market potential with growth for rail to serve. Any venture north would take from the eastern flank, cross over the A43 with HGV clearance height to proceed towards the next Phase, Woodford Halse which sits in a 20-mile radius with no rail access or facilities whatsoever. That could join the commuter corridor pattern and prelude both growth opportunities but also, given they are happening across the regions anyway, would absorb the growth in a more sustainable fashion. This essentially needs a rail alternative, an attractive one at that with good links to important places of work, further afield travel and inwards benefits of sustainable minus land-use parking demands of footfall and spend in local outlets.

Some will argue a top-down posture of rebuild with compulsory purchase and removal of encroachments of whatever they area, but that tends to repel the benefits of the scheme as the pain is too great. ERTA wants to balance sensibility with sensitivity and that means realignments. Some will argue speed would be compromised, but Lowest Common Multiple (LCM) position should be work with what is there and a train travelling a consistent 25 mph upwards is far better than no train at all or traffic crawling because of high volumes stacking back as junctions cannot cope let alone urban interfaces. We try and work with the grain not of what once was but how it is now and try and bring people on board wherever we can. It may mean a slower overall end-to-end line speed say 80 mph on average, but that is gain by comparative route options of MML, WCML and M1 or even M40 and as for HS2, it is unlikely they will build a station between Old Oak Common and Birmingham, which at 120 miles or more is a long gap, brownfield will be created and where will the traffic from that development go? Onto existing roads and railways and that is the straw which breaks the camels back surely? Enough is enough we say and it is time to say, whatever the challenges and twists and turns of the journey to fulfil the goal, the railway is an investment we cannot afford to ignore, put off, deny or cover up any more. It is time to start where we're at and agree the railway is an essential piece of infrastructure to rebuild and recover a lost corridor useful in present and future determinations.



#### 4.0 Brackley to Rugby

From a new Parkway Station, the deviation would continue to reunite with former Great Central trackbed. It is more a straight forward rebuild job at this stage once realigned to original trackbed. Woodford Halse may need a minor deviation and one or two other locations, otherwise a relocation package could be tabled. In any case it is a straight run until the Willoughby area south of Rugby. Stations at Woodford Halse and another one at the interception of the A425 could serve as a Parkway both the growing areas of Daventry (population 25, 026) (7) and Southam (pop. 6, 567) (8) coming from east and west along the trunk road respectively. Again, a large area with no railway access and HS2 will not address these deficits either, but may bring brownfield creation and development in such wakes, which will be flung to existing lines and road networks.

At the Willoughby area we have 2 projects.

1. **New deviation from either or both fast and slow WCML lines south of existing WCML Rugby Station a link to the GCML south of the bestriding A428 bridges (Crick Road) via the edge of Barby to the GCML in the Willoughby area.** This needs further study and evaluation but the prize would be:

a. WCML-GCML linkage on a north-south/east-west varied route and rail-based theatre. This would enable freight and passenger services from points north of Rugby to Aylesbury for Heathrow and Oxford for further afield and vice versa. The benefit of this is to cut out using the east-west rail route via Bletchley-Milton Keynes Central-Northampton-Rugby WCML which in turn releases paths for other train services maybe freight or passenger operations. That is a gain for rail, more slack, more capacity, room for growth on both lines, more market share and decluttering of road space and cutting down of air pollution as a result.

b. Intermediate stations and communities to strategic other places by rail, quick transits, transits not currently available, more options, choices and des-res underscore of property and locational accessibility.

2. **Continuation along old GCML corridor, largely preserved in the Rugby area with viaducts restored/new built to modern standards over WCML: and onwards to cross M1 for parallel running and new-build deviation around expanded Lutterworth (pop. 9, 353) (8)** where a new Parkway Station could be located for the box of rail desert which Lutterworth sits central to, namely Rugby-Coventry-Leicester-Kettering and could have a road-rail transfer station for freight to inter-model together more as it is the interception of the east-west A14 from Felixstowe and the north-south M1-M6 continuum. The parallel running to M1 for some sections could also boost rail share of traffic movements with benefits checking growth impacts going forward. Ultimately the railway would come off the old GCML trackbed with a chord to join the Leicester-Nuneaton lines in the Narborough areas facing eastwards. Passenger services from Heathrow and Oxford could run direct into Leicester Midland and share with and integrate with other passenger services and connections, whilst freight could take the Knighton Junction to Burton-on-Trent line for onwards to Derby and the East Midlands and, WCML/M6/A6 busting; via a restored Peak Rail access Manchester and the North West from the East Midlands and vice versa, offering again more capacity, more options, better rail competition to road in terms of bulk, timing end to end transits and serving the logistics needs of passengers and goods in the modern context. Given the global competitive demands a post-Brexit world could place on the nation for robust logistics and travel, ERTA believes a restored GCML as above detailed could make a significant contribution otherwise ruled out to harm only our own national well-being. Again, further study, examination and business case needs to be done coupled with protection policies at Local Government levels bolstered by some national impetus.



**Caption Above:** Picture looking down on old Great Central Trackbed from bridge which once had the access for Rugby Central Station. Picture taken by Mr Stephen Byatt 2018.

**Caption Below:** A local West Coast Main Line train approaches Rugby on the Northampton Loop Line which with the fast lines via Blisworth, fans out south of Rugby. Picture taken from the A428 Crick Road, Rugby by Mr Stephen Byatt 2018. The Great Central link line would have to connect from Willoughby area on the traditional Great Central corridor to these lines somehow via Barby.



## 5.0 Recovering M1 old Midland Rugby - GC lines

The new link from the Willoughby area to link to existing tracks into Rugby WCML Station and vice versa transits for passenger and freight operations raises the question of could we go out via the north of Rugby onto the old Midland Route to Leicester? Deviations and realignments would be necessary and negotiating the new model signalling and track assignments at Rugby would need to be rectified to accommodate including maybe reinstatement of the north facing bay platforms for local services from Leicester and West Midlands orbital local services from Stoke on Trent – Rugby for example. The key thing is that the old GCML and Midland Lines crossed each other at right angles near the M1 and the old Midland route into Leicester is lost to significant other than rail development. Therefore, we wonder whether a new chord curve could link from the old Midland Line onto the Great Central trackbed and share the new links to the Leicester-Nuneaton lines for onwards vice versa transits by rail?

There is scope for fast end to end via the core tracks of the GCML project and more localised commuting services. We do not subscribe to a “one size fits all” or Dr Beeching era views that cutting out local stations to speed up fast services. Rather by encouraging local commutes you provide the trains for new or reopened stations whilst accommodating end-to-end faster services (passenger and freight) from a variety of destinations to a variety of destinations via core tracks. Just because the core of GCML was double track, does not mean we could not fan out in some places to quadrupled tracks or significant passing loops. The route into WCML Rugby and out with the Midland line offers much flexibility and ability to exploit the business on offer for passenger and freight. But in terms of services, you could have Nottingham-Oxford-Guildford or Bristol and Derby-Heathrow via Aylesbury. Likewise freight from Southampton to East Midlands Hubs and Channel Tunnel – Manchester via this and reopened Peak Rail gives more capacity for more freight by rail and that in itself is a boon for rail and any scope for things like inland roll-on, roll-off service development, more post by rail, perishables by rail as well as more container and even Piggyback services should all be looked at, the capacity of GCML plan outlined here gives potentially more and that should be embraced by backers, investors and support for the reopening.

The East Midlands can sort themselves out but it seems absurd that we see investment in Derby-Birmingham direct lines, but no consideration is given to what Derby-Manchester direct could offer with a rebuild of the Peak Rail missing gaps between Matlock, Buxton and Chinley. Likewise, the reopening of the Ivinghoe line for passenger and freight again declutters both M1 and Midland Main Line north of Leicester and offers new commuting to Leicester from the wider county and Burton on Trent. These reopenings could also allow Kettering-Derby via Burton, East Anglia – Manchester ‘not via Sheffield’ as a more direct time saving link and diversity like service to and from the Peak District National Park as well as Airports linked by rail like East Midlands and Manchester for example as well as the respective employment and night life the Manchester area and East Midlands offer respectively.

Nottingham is a key hub and services radially from and to Nottingham should be explored such as Nottingham-Glasgow via the Leeds-Carlisle line, Nottingham-Manchester or Blackpool via Matlock and Buxton/Chinley, Nottingham-Birmingham via either Derby or Leicester and of course existing services along the Midland Main Line to Bedford and Luton/Airport and London St Pancras. Places east of Nottingham include East Anglia, Lincolnshire and indeed north of the Humber criss-crossing the country. Reopening the Old Dalby-Nottingham Midland Line could be more direct services off the East Coast Main Line (ECML)/Peterborough and Midland Main Line via Corby to Nottingham and inform a new direct southern approach access allowing more for more. In context of growth, keeping such options open, seems prudent if not environmentally responsible. Failure to do so, seems irresponsible and negligent for many missed opportunities.



**Caption Above:** End of the Great Central Line trackbed north of Rugby where the M1/M6 slices across it. So, the line would either have to be raised to go over on a viaduct or tunnelling under maybe with a pump if necessary. It is envisaged the Great Central would run parallel to the M1 with a deviation required at Lutterworth for onwards to link with the Leicester-Nuneaton lines. Picture by Mr Stephen Byatt 2018.

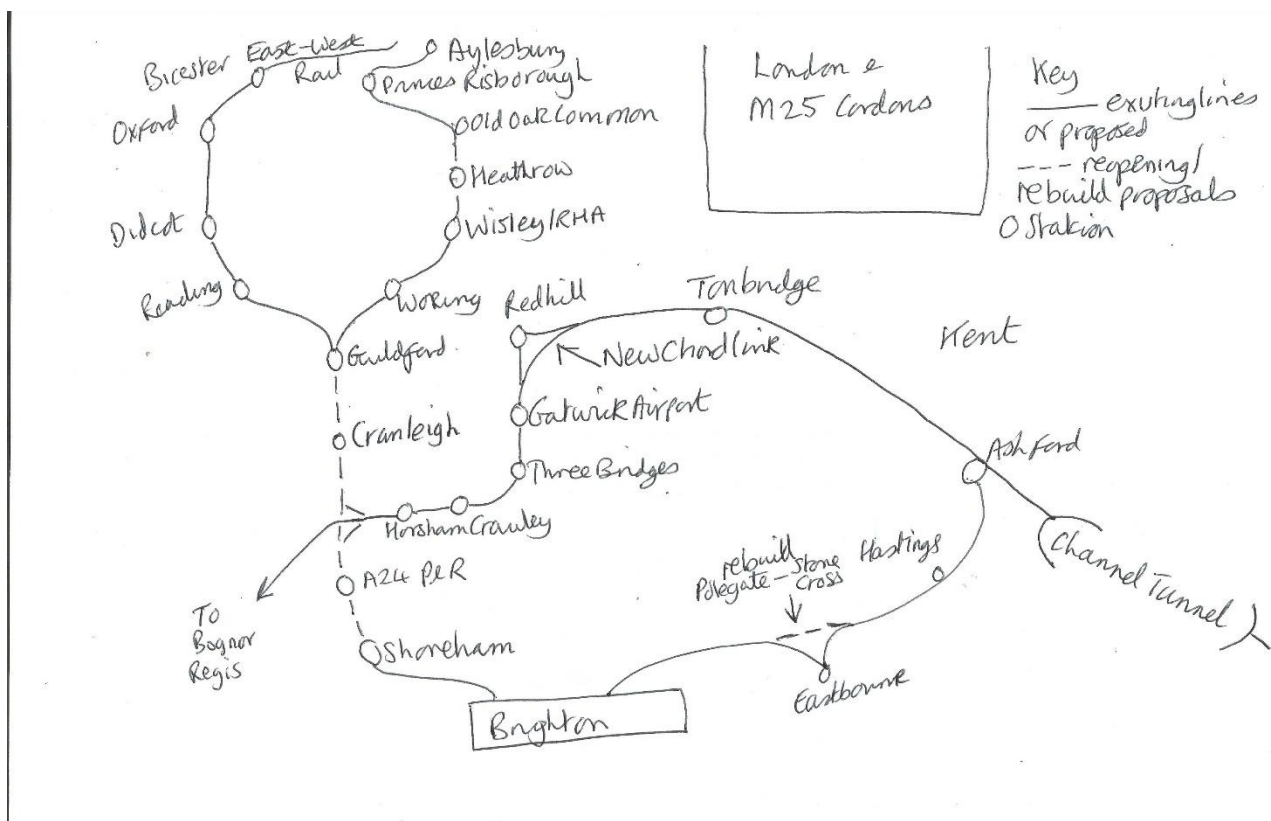
**Caption Below:** The county lines are drawn! Great Central Trackbed hits the M1/M6 at the boundary mark and access is required as part of a rebuild-new build scheme. It is not insurmountable but a matter of priorities, investing in our future and getting the 'right sort of railway' infrastructure our country needs – able to accommodate passenger and freight. Picture by Mr Stephen Byatt 2018.





## 6.0 South and West of Calvert

Upon reaching Calvert the railway would split with one set of twin tracks linking into the East-West Rail project westwards towards Oxford. Oxford has links to Worcester, Didcot for Bristol and Reading for the West Country, Southampton and Guildford. Guildford would link with one of ERTA's sister campaigns to get the rebuilding of the Guildford-Brighton line via Horsham and Shoreham to act as a 'not via London' alternative and relief to the Brighton Main Line and offering a continual and new feed between Guildford and Brighton, a currently un-rail served market and growth corridor. Horsham would give access to Gatwick from the South, saving reversal at Redhill and with a new crossover and curve from the Brighton Main Lines to the Redhill-Tonbridge line, access to and from Kent and the Channel Tunnel opens a flow of potential passenger and freight 'not via London' which would feed to the wider network. Oxford-West Midlands via Banbury cannot cope with all the demands made on it, so Great Central with the new link to WCML Rugby from the Willoughby area via Barby linking existing lines by a grade separated junction, would enable more volume to go by rail, a less congested M6-M1 corridor, a less congestion and overcrowded London and enable rails market share to increase sustainably across a wide spectrum of reaches and ranges utilising the common Great Central corridor. Thus, ensuring whether we have HS2 or not, that the Calvert area can accommodate a new Great Central Railway is essential now at the planning stage and the dual access to the east-west rail for Oxford and likewise to the east-west rail corridor to Aylesbury, Princes Risborough, Old Oak Common and ultimately Heathrow is possible and not blocked or ruled out of the planning equation. Some sharing of tracks is required, so access provision even passively is vital to optimise what the feed to and from Great Central could be and likewise the contribution it could make to retain the best of a green countryside and corridor and revitalise in a sustainable way, a currently non-rail served corridor which is a growth area. To fail to grasp this, is to consign ever more loads to roads with consequences and costs across a wide spectrum.





**Caption Above:** A pond dug on the Great Central route. These things can happen in an absence of 50 years of the railway and free-will planning without regards to strategic stewardship of an asset which one day may need recovering. Ponds can be relocated either side of a railway, so the Great Central could be an eco-friendly corridor as well as green transport! Picture by Mr Stephen Byatt 2018.

**Caption Below:** This is the view of the car park close to the M6 on the Great Central Walk. The walk could be moved alongside a reopened railway with ample room for a cycle path as well. The whole alignment from edge of Leicester to Calvert should be protected and we welcome support to be directed to nurturing these ideas further. Picture by Mr Stephen Byatt 2018



## Conclusion

This report demonstrates that we do have a recognisable corridor between the three main points of reference namely the Leicester-Nuneaton lines at Narborough to Rugby to Calvert. This is a rebuild-new build, but along a distinguishable corridor through which the Great Central Main Line once ran and whose corridor, with deviations, new builds and links, could be recovered and indeed enhanced to be an all-singing, all-dancing modern railway. Speed is not the imperative or an end in itself. Rather, a railway able to take various passenger and goods off local roads and onto local and accessible rails to and from a variety of destinations and with plethora of connectives.

It provides a rail alternative to overflowing roads, a rail answer to a context of growth and impacts with regional and London consideration markets. It could utilise a twin track rail solution for it all. What the nation needs is solutions to problems and suitable checks and balances in tackling growth with ecology, land use and planning and access and mobility for outlying communities with main centres.

The cost of not supporting this initiative is to throw all current and future growth to the roads which everyone knows are at capacity now, let alone 5 or 10 years hence. An aging population, a growing population, a nation stand-alone trade and international links post Brexit holds out for us as a nation, makes the case for such infrastructure as this rail link. This rail link should be an essential consideration to factor in from now going forward.

In sum, Forward was the motif of the original Great Central Main Line and the reality is still today. We cannot turn back the clock, but what we can do is to make this railway relevant to local people and communities. Government has erected barriers to stem reopenings across the English Regions, whereas it should be offering incentives. Match funding would be one such avenue for funding the reopening, start-up cost grants another. Likewise, land-use directives to avoid the example of Catesby Tunnel being made into an automotive wind tunnel testing base and returned or alternative bore or cutting made available to enable the railway and help with negotiating Brackley and Woodford Halse, the access to Rugby West Coast and viaducts over M1 and M6 for example, means that Government support as a piece of national infrastructure should be sought and won but the Government needs to meet half way. The ideal scenario is Local Authority buy-in to the idea, they inform consortia to make a business case and study it further whilst pro-actively protecting the corridor and both the rail industry and Government taking an interest and informing a level playing field. In such a collaborative context, the chances of this railway coming about, would be greatly enhanced. ERTA invites YOU to help us get towards that goal and by joining ERTA you help strengthen our voice. Please see form on page 31 or go to <https://ertarail.com/membership/>

Richard Pill B.A. (Hons)  
September 2018



**Caption Above:** Newton Lane Bridge. The old Great Central was designed to a generous loading gauge and standard clearance of bridges. If the Great Central and feeder links are rebuilt, these could be made to continental loading gauge to enable things like an inland roll-on, roll-off rail network to cart vehicles across the country and things like a spinal railway distributor corridor to offer Piggyback could be nurtured. Picture by Mr Stephen Byatt 2018

**Caption below:** This is an unnamed bridge which currently serves as a farm access. Again, plenty of scope to interweave a cycle cum footpath alongside the railway corridor for leisure and rail use. The alternative is congestion, air pollution, 24x7 noise from traffic, £billions spent on new and widened and current road maintenance which all has to be quarried. Picture by Mr Stephen Byatt 2018



## Appendices

### 1. Appendix 1: ERTA 2017 Dossier on Great Central Scope

#### Great Central Dossier April 2017 by Richard Pill The following questions come to mind:

Questions	Associated Focus'
Why Reopen	Benefits of Reopening
What Reopen	Our Selection and Connections
How Reopen	The challenges and costs in an economy of scale
State of Route now and going forward	Blockages, Pinch Points and where realignments/new build is required
Links with Other Lines	Identifying Gaps in the network
Capacity Creation Scope	Existing trunking road and rail arteries
Passenger Use	Core Trunking and multiple aspecting accessibility to core trunk route if available
Freight Use	Now and generating new flows

#### Introduction.

The mooted reasons for closures were many and diverse and putting one's finger on an exact reason or justification is an elusive exercise as one delves into minutiae. The Great Central was a 20<sup>th</sup> century main line employing the most modern thinking and construction of its time and was part of a dream to link the North of England and established cross country links with a southern portal to France and inter-continental flows of passenger and freight trunking. That ambition of model and design left a legacy of consistency in construction. The M1 heralded a change of Government policy and funding towards a road based main carrier and operations and the tossup was pitted that parallel routes are to be cut and so it was Midland Main Line v Great Central for closure.

Closure came in 1966 and since then the line has deteriorated in various locations more severely than others but in its wake, has flung new growth onto existing infrastructure – roads primarily and rails secondarily. The point is that as the M1, West Coast Main Line and elsewhere sees growth, capacity constraints and conflicting issues, something has to give, some more capacity becomes necessary and be it land use, environmental, sustainable balance or sheer change of policy and funding back towards rail agendas – the need for more rail north-south remains tabled here and elsewhere and thus our call to have potentially interested and beneficiary parties look at what a new and select reopened Great Central could offer is ever becoming a more pertinent consideration because the alternative of congestion, pollution, wear and tear

costs eroding local authority budgets and the sheer waste and environmental cost, makes a relative cost-gain trade off advantageous with the wider strategic benefits a rail access and capacity facility could offer and thus moves to nurture it incrementally and implement it in top-down demand and supply mechanisms becomes ever more relevant and meaningful to consider. This is what this dossier aims to bring to the fore.

### **Why Reopen?**

- Existing north-south arteries to and from London and the South-East are congested and at capacity
- Existing railways to and from London terminate there, we need orbital access to Kent, South Coast and the Continent and vice versa with the rest of the United Kingdom
- Widening the M1 would blight many residential areas and be environmentally damaging.
- Land is becoming scarcer; more expensive and thus land-use stewardship and prudence is ever more required.
- New commuter routes could be established
- Growth corridor could be realised sustainably
- There's a glaring gap and a big opportunity needing a backer

### **What Reopen?**

- South of Leicester – East-West Rail and links to London, South-East, South Coast and the Continent
- Former Great Central corridor recovery and return to rail use
- Realignments where blockages exist including new construction such as at Brackley and Rugby
- A twin track railway for passenger and freight use
- North of Rugby a dual solution needs greater evaluation as well as serving Leicester
- Connections with other lines and existing lines and services is critical to optimum operational demand-supply fostering
- Bringing Daventry, Brackley and Buckingham back onto the rails creates capacity elsewhere and links growth areas to the rail network currently disenfranchised.

### **How Reopen?**

- Rebuild using old formation as a corridor basis for reconstruction
- realignments where blockages exist and major deviations such as at Brackley are required
- Integrating by a Parkway Station at Daventry and A43/Brackley and a new loop for integrating Buckingham
- A coming together from respecting angles, disciplines and customer basis' of Local Authorities, Rail Industry Players and Governmental Strategic Inclusion
- Whether HS2 or not, the wider connecting roles the corridor offers should not be under-estimated
- All beneficiaries have the onus to contribute in design, engineering, case making and courting the funding required.
- We have to see the case in a context of growth, congestion, capacity creation and demand-supply study and case making.

### **Links with other lines**

- East-West Rail
- Grendon and Old Oak Common
- Oxford-Reading-Guildford-Horsham-Shoreham-Brighton
- Rugby-London West Coast relief
- Midland Main Line – Western Rail Network (Leicester-Oxford)
- Feeds into Leicester-Burton (freight diversionary route for more passenger capacity at Leicester).
- Spinal Freight route for re-railing more freight by rail creates road capacity/frees up congestion, bolsters business operational efficiency and competitiveness.

### **Capacity Creation Scope**

- Relief to M1 end to end London-Leicester and beyond
- Interception with M1, M6 and A14 either at Lutterworth or within a nearby vicinity
- More freight by rail scope, including new flows and diversity nurture and development if initial start-up costs and infrastructure from wagons to depots can be funded and growth incrementally nurtured local-regional-trans-continental
- New commuter flows and sustainable community development growth fostering
- saving land for other uses which otherwise motorway development would swallow up
- If electrified can utilise spare and existing stock allocations/budgets and integrational trunking systems ensure costs on new rolling stock is mitigated.
- East Midlands-Heathrow-Continent potential 'not via London' frees up terminal capacity, M25 and orbital trunking and cuts emissions.

### **Passenger use**

- South-West – East Midlands direct access 'not via London' and vice versa
- Second London-West and East Midlands artery, choice and competition
- More seats, more trains, new flows
- Multiple operators can utilise same tracks with core station calling on the trunking route
- HS2, if at all, does not have a station between Old Oak Common and Birmingham, which leaves a 120-mile gap with brownfield creation with M40 corridor which will spill onto existing other roads and rail services creating overcrowding and price managed controls with winners and losers
- Great Central with Stations for Daventry/Southam/A425 locational presence of scope, Brackley/A43 and Buckingham would mop up that growth and development and ease pressure elsewhere as a direct result of HS2 passing through areas without providing the means to access that transport corridor but it is not a neutral development, it is intrusive with ramifications on wider areas 20 miles either side surely in development prospecting terms, domestic or commercial speculation?
- Rugby-London commuting route and West Coast diversionary capable of semi-fast operations.

### **Freight use:**

- London-West and East Midlands
- Southampton, West Country and South Coast/Chunnel -West Coast Main Line outside Rugby-Euston premium cordon
- generic line-side potential being curtain sided wagons for warehouses, pallet sized freight and casual regenerative from the corridor
- diversionary traffic
- extra capacity for new flows and double movements by rail currently on M1 and M40

### **Benefits of reopening**

- More off roads and onto rail
- cuts emissions and pollution
- cuts congestion and aggregate savings collective and individual pockets
- new commuting corridor opened up and served sustainably
- more capacity elsewhere on and off rails
- land saved for sustainable, rail served development
- careful development crafted to optimise rail use

### **Our selection and connections**

- Oxford and beyond-Rugby/Nuneaton and beyond/Leicester
- South Coast-Heathrow-West Coast/Midland Main Line
- East-West Rail-GC core trunking- East/West Midlands
- London -Leicester via alternative route
- Heathrow focused access/OCC and Reading/Thames basin
- West Country – East Midlands – North East diagonal cross-country core trunking
- HS2 back-feed line and link for routine stock and other operations off fast tracks

### **The challenges of costs in an economy of scale**

- Less than HS specification
- 125 mph capability between Calvert and Rugby/Leicester
- Twin Track
- Loop for Buckingham
- Link to East-West Rail near Claydon
- Stations for Daventry, Brackley and Buckingham
- Capability for Piggyback dedicated route from Chunnel-Guildford-Heathrow Tunnel-GC via OCC and Grendon link reinstated/new build

### **To ascertain/do/develop:**

- State of Route now and going forward
- Blockages, Pinch Points and where realignments/new build is required
- Identifying gaps in the network
- Existing Trunk Road and Rail Arteries
- Core trunking and multiple aspecting accessibility to core trunk route if available
- Other options, but does it have to be either or?

R.B. Pill

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12-05-2017

**Disclaimer. This was as per 2017, subject to review and consider any new development.**





**Caption Above:** This is the view looking east along Newton Manor Lane as it cuts across the GCR route. There are a number of pinch-points along the trajectory of some 43 miles or more, but after 50 plus years of abandonment only to be expected. Picture by Mr Stephen Byatt 2018

**Caption Below:** The route skirts around Newton running parallel to Crowthorns. There are a number of residential roads that cross the route with gates blocking the GCR route. This is very much a footpath rather than a cycle route. Whether bridges or underpasses accommodation for all can probably be incorporated at the design stages. What the project needs is professional and business interest, faith, vision and leadership to invest in business case making and nurturing Government support. Picture by Mr Stephen Byatt 2018



## Appendix 2 – Google Earth Rough Summary

### **Great Central-Midland-Great Central Inter-twine for best route recovery inventory 06-03-2018 RP using Google Earth.**

#### **Calvert-Grendon:**

1. Clear at Junction Grendon end/old route distinguishable
2. Private Land/domestic dwelling – need to gently go around space available.
3. Breedon Construction Materials – possible freight feed.
4. Access Road blocks trackbed, realign to the north.
5. New bridge over River Ray
6. Connect to rail south of Lower Great Moor Farm.

#### **Great Central North of Calvert**

1. New connections to Oxbridge lines north to east and west, south to west and east
2. HS2 impact – if it is tunnelling, no reason why GC can't go on top or over the top.
3. North of Oxbridge lines, trackbed needs recovery, mainly farm land.
4. New bridge over road north of Portway Farm.
5. New road bridge east of Barton Hill Farm.
6. A421 (old route) renew twin track bridges.
7. North of old A421 a private railway plant.
8. New bridge over new A421 road
9. Church Lane Farm? Modest demolition or realignment needed
10. Brackley Bypass – take the railway down to parallel A43 and proceed east side to P&R Station in vicinity of roundabout area, heading north to re-join old trackbed north of Brackley.
11. Helmdon: some realignment to the immediate west.
12. Open country to Moreton Pinkney – trackbed needs recovery/land procurement negotiations.
13. Bypass needed to the east at Woodford Halse due to extensive encroachment of various development sprawl of the place. Do they want the railway, do they want a station – if 'yes' plan for it now and make room available.
14. New bridges at Charwelton
15. New Catesby Tunnel or like Twyford Down, open excavators to rip open the hill and plant trees on embankments.
16. A425 Southam/Daentry Parkway Station
17. Flecknoe to immediate west development
18. A45/Wiloughby new bridge and realignment needed to the east.
19. WCML south from Rugby coming off WCML or parallel lines to South of Crick Road/A428 thence via Barby to link with GC at Wiloughby. Again, a route needs protecting for double track corridor capacity. Old route into Rugby is not properly protected, is developed to close and passageway capacity and no-go really.

## **Rugby Station-Leicester-Nuneaton Line**

1. Taking old Midland railway route north out of station – new access over or under A426 needed.
2. Realign at Fele UK to the immediate west.
3. Access over or under M6
4. New access over/under A5
5. Check through route via Ullesthorpe otherwise a need to bypass south to east to north
6. Broughton Astley – rebuild or realign south-east-north with new access over/under B581
7. At M1 new curve onto former GC trackbed alignment and mainly parallel M1.
8. Stay parallel to M1 to avoid Cosby
9. Cross over or under (preferably) M1 to join Leicester-Nuneaton tracks for passenger onwards to Leicester Midland and freight via Knighton for Derby and yonder.

**Costings not available at this time. But this over-view gives a basic rule of thumb to work on in:**

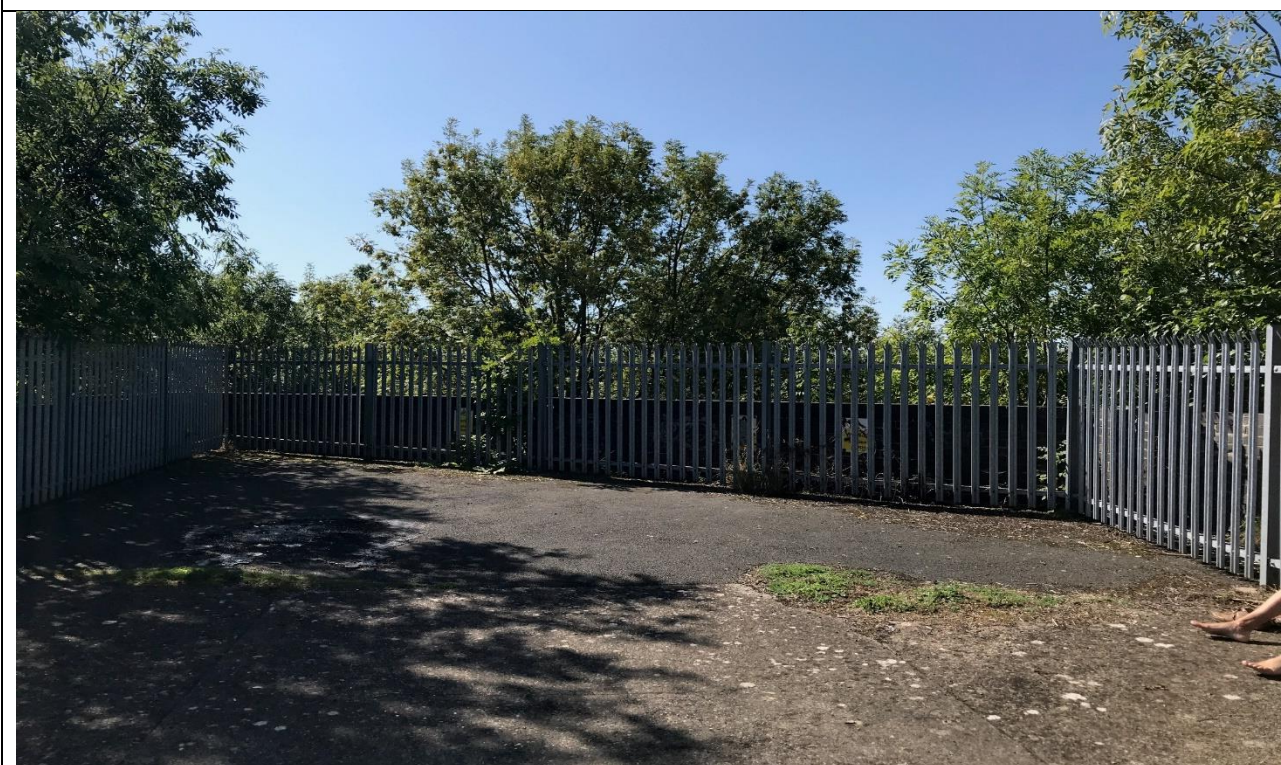
- a. Identifying key blockages and obstacles
- b. Laying foundations for cost evaluations
- c. Showing it is still recoverable
- d. Using Midland and GC we weave round issues and include interchange with WCML
- e. WCML-GC – Chiltern or EWRL optimises potential including access key and principal places and markets like Old Oak Common, Heathrow and Southern and Western England and vice versa.
- f. It is hoped refining will continue and updating and ideally adoption of protection policies at local government level would benefit strategic planning – what incentive?

**Disclaimer:** Since these notes were done Catesby Tunnel has been given the go-ahead for a car testing station and wind tunnel. It is not insurmountable to recover the tunnel or do another bore or cutting or some other arrangement to be considered. All other impediments to reopening need to be assessed and priorities made, whether recovering the railway offers greater gains and relocation less pain, with accommodation for everyone being the gain overall. ERTA is not advocating planning blight, but would welcome policies by Councils which nurture reopening rather than make it harder. In short route and deviation land protection is not a waste, cycle-paths, walk-ways, linear parks, green space corridors can all be used to adopt a trackbed and protect it whilst offering community assets at one and the same time, being moved to the side of the formation once reopening happens.



Caption Above: This is the view looking north from the canal fence. The terrain looked similar to this over a bridge and past a meadow. Elsewhere the old Great Corridor we want reopened is a hotchpotch of open trackbed (former railway route), missing bridges, development or ploughed field. In short, we have a defined corridor, we have swathes and tracts of lands recoverable, but the vision, plan, purpose and delivery of a new railway needs to start from these humble remnants. Picture by Mr Stephen Byatt 2018

Caption Below: This is the view looking south of the fence guarding the drop from the GCR down to the Oxford canal. Or so I was told. I could not find any point on the canal where I could see this fence. Picture by Mr Stephen Byatt 2018



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## Glossary

Daventry International Rail Freight Depot (DIRFT)  
East Coast Main Line (ECML)  
English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)  
Great Central Main Line (GCML)  
Midland Main Line (MML)  
West Coast Main Line (WCML)

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## Acknowledgements

Text and some pictures and diagrams provided by Mr Richard Pill. We thank Mr Stephen Byatt for a lion’s share of more recent pictures of the railway and scenes thereof.

## Future Endeavours:

The English Regional Transport Association, a voluntary organisation holds Forums and tables a Committee dedicated to build support for forwarding the chances and windows of opportunity for rebuilding/reopening/new building this railway from south of Leicester to Calvert via Lutterworth, Rugby and Brackley. If you are interested and supportive of such an idea, please join the association to strengthen our voice and feel free to come to our meetings and encourage friends and family also to give support. The more the merrier and with fair winds, could turn the tide from rot to re-railing in our life time. A thousand miles begins with a single step and we invite you to join us on this journey together. Thank you.

Contact Mr Simon Barber, Secretariat and Admin. 20 Fitzherbert House, Kingsmead, Richmond, Surrey, TW10 6HT T. 0208 940 4399, E. [simon4barber@gmail.com](mailto:simon4barber@gmail.com)

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