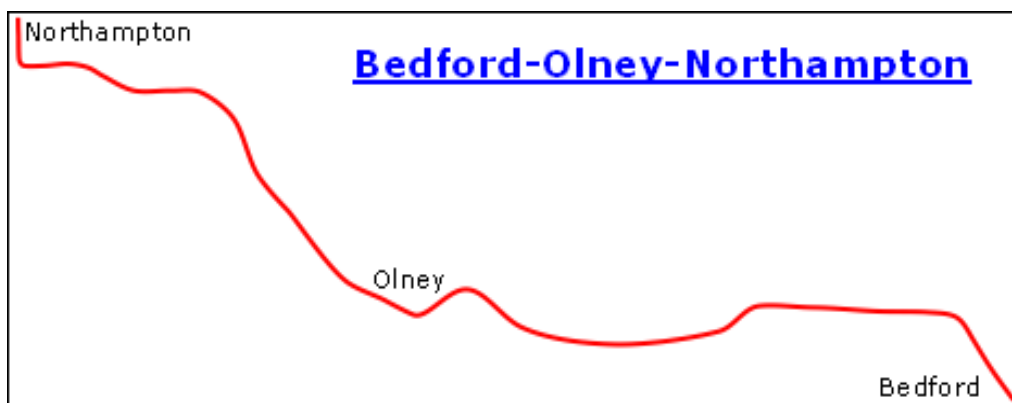


English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

Website: <https://ertarail.com/>

Making a case for a new Northampton-Bedford Rail Link



~ Local Links, Regional Connections ~

By Richard Pill
£4.50

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A voluntary membership-based association committed to making a contribution for the retention and enhancement of public transport.

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Foreword

Originally this publication was going to be a report but subsequently was converted to a booklet style publication. The reasons for this was to try and make it more saleable at our various stalls and meagre networking outlets as well as to court the attention of stockists and professionals who may consider the merits of the case for why the Northampton-Bedford rail link should be considered for reopening and ideally acted upon.

We have given 20 years of our lives to this project and as the booklet says, have seen highs whereby it got to the table of the Secretary of State for Transport in 2004 but from then on has slipped into the long grass – literally in some places!

It is our conviction that this project needs resuscitation with a fresh team of people who can see not only the need for it now and going forward but the dire consequences and responsibility remiss if we do not seek to nurture its plausibility and practicability such as to inform a chance for its revival.

The booklet may not be a last word on the matter, but certainly a handy reference manual for campaigners interested in taking the matter further and for professionals who want a handy index for matters pertaining to the project from whence to commission other work and study to enhance the progression from dormancy and blockages to realisation and delivery, certainly within the next 10 years.

It serves as a marker as we, after 20 years hang up our proverbial boots and pass on the baton and challenge and the possibility of realisation to a new up-and-coming generation who will live in a world bereft potentially of the padding and comforts we have now, and whether hard or soft Brexit, the winds of self reliance and community resourcefulness to generate flows of income and sustainability will rely on realisation of projects such as this and their resurrection.

We have got thus far and no further can we go for the time being. Development abounds and the consequences are plain for all but the most cocooned individuals to see.

I'd like to thank the teams of people who have befriended me on this journey and given time and talent for the cause over the years. Many have now sadly passed away; others are still hanging in there seeking to nudge the awareness of councils and political representatives as to the necessity of this rail link.

As East-West Rail dawns and as Northampton realises its remoteness from it, so this link for a better deal will come into its own. Likewise as Milton Keynes realises that to get more trains they need to give more in rails which create the necessary diversionary capacity to realise that goal, so a coming together can only but take the form of a consortium and add other interests who can see the rail link as a core matter and spinal corridor which needs re-railing and whose time has come.

In a time of growing social insecurity and environmental impact on the negative side be it exhaust emissions, noise intrusions or the sheer boredom of daily competition, this railway offers a break from negative spirals and hopefully this booklet opens the doorway for such a hope informing a rise of faith.

Richard Pill
March 2017

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Introduction – why this booklet is being written

Northampton (Population approximately 200, 000) is half-way between London and Birmingham off the West Coast Main Line (WCML) and Bedford (Population approx. 150, 000,) on the Thameslink/Midland Main Line, -way location is Olney (population 6500 but 5 mile catchment of villages adding up to 33, 000). There is a 20 mile gap between Northampton and Bedford. Bedford has services to Luton Airport, Luton and London, Gatwick Airport and Brighton, Northampton to Birmingham via Rugby. The two towns stare at each other, but the gap means awkward travels by lengthy bus (1.5 hours each way with congestion) and the service is not commensurate to the timetable of the railway. Different operators means different and not transferable ticketing and changes means delays and cost. Traffic queues form on the A428 into Bedford, whilst Northampton suffers gridlock with A14 (Felixstowe-Thrapston)-A45 to Northampton/M1.

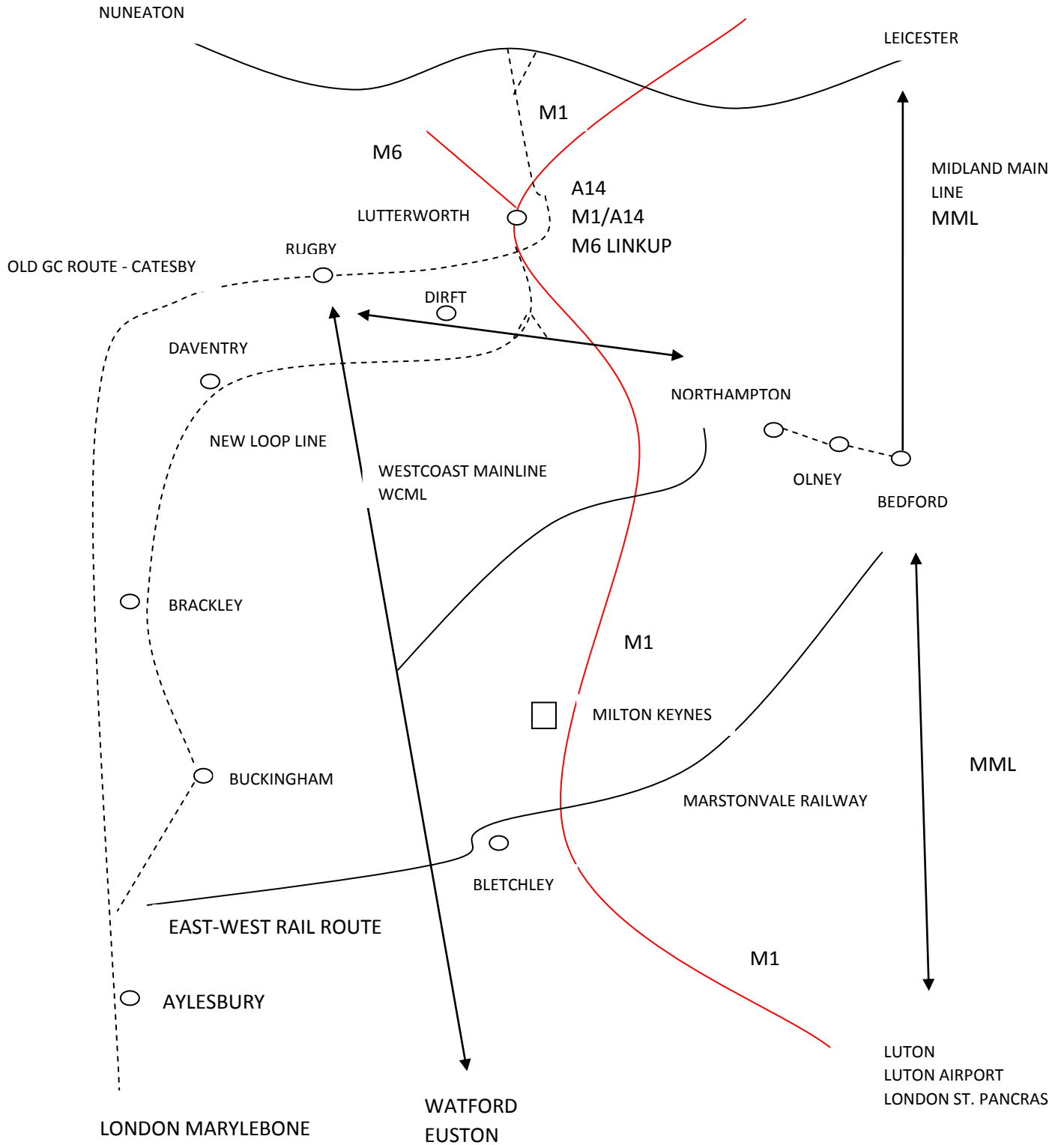
We are seeking reopening of this rail link, this missing 20 mile gap in the rail network. It would link 4 airports (Gatwick, Luton, Coventry and Birmingham), one train, one ticket, and offer more joined-up options. However despite our best efforts, the Local Authorities and other agencies are not showing the sort of interest we would wish for. They don't seem interested, committed or talking to each other to find common ground for route protection for example. Laissez-faire development without proper safeguarding of the route means it is subject to development encroaching on it and on deviation space making reopening prohibitive. Whatever is on paper, is not translating to the grassroots in actioning terms. It is not 'our' railway; it is in the wider public interest being served as to why it should be supported.

We face an inner road scheme at Northampton, piecemeal development and multiple development threats at Olney and Bedford junctioning remains under a cloud of uncertainty. The railway would play a role in creating more capacity through Milton Keynes Central Station in terms of a loop off the West Coast Main Line (Bletchley-Bedford-Northampton/Rugby) and feed more business into the supported East-West Rail link (Oxford-Bedford-Cambridge/Corby). This scheme (Bedford-Olney-Northampton dubbed 'The Cobbler Line') needs professional support, interest and champions. We should not let a strategic corridor be assassinated by piecemeal developments of dubious worth and I therefore ask you to help us get the official and strategic support we need.

This booklet seeks to highlight some key aspects which we believe relate to a Northampton-Bedford rail link. The rail link would be beneficial in addressing a number of problems both at the Northampton end, along the A428 corridor, for Olney and Bedford too. There are inherent opportunities if the line is rebuilt and this booklet seeks to strike the balance between the two halves of problem solving and creating benefits for a swathe of society to make things work better, shore up stakeholder engagement and a more cohesive window of opportunity inherent of the railway in finding work, contra commuting, tourism, visitors, footfall and spend. Sustainable communities is something often banded about, but in the context of growth, without the physical rail link restored, all that growth is road-bound majoritively and it is the conviction of this booklet that it is bad for society, bad for the environment and detrimental to public health and wellbeing

The booklet seeks to call for the protection of the old route, adequate lands for deviations where blockages exist such as in the Olney area and for Councils and organisations to club together and invest in further studies both as a part of East-West Rail (Northampton-Bedford-Cambridge) and as an extension of Thameslink (Luton Airport-Bedford-Northampton).

Map of the area



© By Scott Miller – enquiries welcome e. scottmiller4741@hotmail.co.uk July 2016

Executive Summary – what are the main conclusions and next steps

- Bedford, Olney and Northampton would benefit with increasing footfall and spend minus the cars in the context of the railway being reopened.
- Queues and parking demand for commuting to London and other places would be stemmed with an Olney Parkway Station half-way between Northampton and Bedford. This would free up space and capacity for urban users of existing stations and ensure rural commuters get an earlier seat on the rail leg of their journey.
- Milton Keynes Central Station is constrained on and off the rails capacity-wise and on the rail side, without Northampton-Bedford it is unlikely to accommodate the number of trains wishing to call at it from a wider variety of destinations including South and West London, Bedford, Oxford, Aylesbury as well as increased freight, Virgin Expresses and London Midland operations.
- With a Bedford-Northampton rail link, Northampton would benefit with:
 - a) More inflows of people minus the cars for the town centre, the University, Delapre Abbey and much more
 - b) More commuting and work opportunities/Brackmills/University Campus by rail
 - c) Easier access to other towns, airports and general travel
 - d) More parking spaces for others to use
 - e) Town centre regeneration/inward investment
 - f) Underscore the central strategic position of Northampton
 - g) Could have a green park /cycleway alongside fenced off – see Marston Vale Railway for example at Millbrook.
 - h) Buses could feed and be fed linking A428 with faster transits in and out of the corridor
 - i) Northampton-Bedford-Cambridge links A45-A14 end-to-end giving freight by rail as a realistic choice than remote long way round as current.
- Strategic trunk and motorway networks diverge on Northampton and whilst the A428 is a lesser-used road, the wider railway as part of a wider network would offer longer distance passenger and lorry reductions on those roads e.g. A45-A14 but deliver volumes of people wanting to visit and spend their money in a town centre location.
- As part of the wider rail network, it would offer more flexibility of rail operations, inform a Northampton-Bedford-Bletchley loop off of the West Coast Main Line and East-West Rail core route.
- It would provide a second route to London and direct one train option linkage with St Pancras International, Eurostar and other services with just one change.
- It would give Luton and northwards, direct rail access to Northampton and the West Midlands, currently a broken and missing link in the rail network.
- Within a 5 mile catchment of Olney there's a population of over 33, 000 people who may wish to access a train nearer to where they live.
- Roade Station should also be studied and lands set aside to keep it open as more development goes in and the A508 corridor is a very heavily used trunk road corridor by HGVs and cars.

What this booklet calls for:

- Protection of the old route and deviation lands. This need not be blight, as these linear lands could be used as a greenbelt corridor with walking and maybe cycle-paths which can be sited in the vent of rebuilding the railway. This has been done interim for Bedford-Sandy.
- Councils and other organisations to club together to invest in more studies to make the case, tailor development interim and take it into Network Rail's GRIP processes; assess engineering, practical and other considerations.



Above: One locomotive can take the equivalent of 18 juggernaut lorries in a single train. ERTA believes that if we are to see fewer juggernauts on main arterial roads and indeed intruding in town centres, we must have the tracks going where flows of freight exist such as A14-A45 end to end and London-Northampton via Luton. Both of which just 50 miles of new railway between Northampton-Bedford-Cambridge would address allowing multiple angles and operations on same twin track solution. Without the reopening, you lock-in congestion and road wear and tear costs to wider areas.

The Problem: The closure of so many lines in the 1960's inflicted a gap in a joined up transport network which has resulted in a roads-based society. This basis of operations has had unforeseen negative effects on people and places from air pollution to congestion, parking demand to land use allocations and insatiable appetite for more sources of cheap oil to the impact of procurement in environmental terms from local to global and from global to communities anchored in specific geographical places.

The Solution: The reopening of the Bedford-Northampton rail link would bridge a gap in the depleted rail network and help give choice of transport, mobility and bring many benefits which without it, informs a foreboding future of spiral decline and development minus the transport to obtain fairly access to adequate employment, income adding up to costs of housing and general living. This is what this booklet is about, making a case upon which further study and interest may be realised in a timely manner.

4. Bedford

With a population of (163, 924 – source

http://www.bedford.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/statistics_and_census.aspx) and growing, Bedford suffers from congestion, a high demand for parking in an ancient built town landscape centre creating a conflict of land use. Do we want parking and if so who pays? Do we want residential properties, repopulating town centres, there is a housing queue?

These demand-supply issues abound and with growth in a regional context. Bedford, given its geographical position, suffers from incoming traffic and inadequate places to put it all. Through traffic, which despite the bypasses, still comes through the town centre consisting of large juggernaut and container lorries and volumes of mixed traffic (cars and vans). The bypass has facilitated growth overall, not reduced volumes which means we are worse off at cost. The clear remedy is for a rail choice to be implemented. Oxford-Bedford is a given due to the fact that most of the track is there and its reopening is now a work in progress. Northampton-Bedford-Cambridge (50 miles of new/rebuild) makes for a 'Y' on its side network effect of cross-country rail choice, currently lacking. This booklet focuses on Northampton-Bedford section but clearly the eastern link is a critical determinate for the two to work more effectively together. It is not a matter of either or.

Parking (closer to home access)

A Northampton-Bedford rail link would enable a station at Olney with a commuter parking and riding facility to give choice closer to home. We can roughly divide the 21.5 mile railway corridor into 3 lots of overlapping 5 mile radiuses. Bedford-Turvey as one 5 mile radius would tend to still drive to Bedford, although from Turvey to Yardley, the second 5 miles inclusive of Olney and the A509 corridor up to Wollaston would gravitate to an Olney Parkway Station. First they save on duration of drive time journey. No more queues into Bedford which can take 20 minutes extra in journey times especially during am/pm peak periods. Secondly they save on fuel wasted and spent by accessing a station closer to home. If Wollaston and southwards drive into Bedford or Milton Keynes they face up to 12 miles each way per day commute on top of any rail journey. Olney Parkway reduces that to 5 miles and thus not only is time and fuel saved but the chances of getting a seat increased, saving standing. The Olney Parkway 5 mile population catchment comes in at some 33, 000 population and so even 10% of that for rail at 3, 300 per day is a considerable amount of traffic removed from local roads and parking pressure reduced for other users.

Train paths through the station (2-3 trains on through tracks removed per hour)

The current Bedford Midland Station acts as a terminating point for Thameslink electric trains and so coming in and going out, trains occupy 2 out of 3 platform tracks during most hours of railway operations. This acts as a bottleneck for other rail service providers and new flows in addition to and from the Bedford-Bletchley railway alias Marston Vale. This link line to the North London, Willesden and Watford areas to the Midland Main Line north of Bedford is a strategic north easterly-south westerly diagonal network, but which is underutilised, under realised and thus poorly served. The end to end market of Bletchley-Bedford is dumbed down by a poorly served hourly frequency, numerous stops and long duration could be cut from 45 minutes to just 20 with end to end nonstop additional running.

Studies should compare whether the local service serves more Bedford-Stewartby and other stations than end to end durational journeys. If so, the end to end could be pepped up with nonstop additional services. This opens the door to explore Open Access so a Leicester/Nottingham via Melton Mowbray-Corby-Bedford-Bletchley-Watford and reverse would cover this and if capacity

south of Bletchley is prohibitive, then terminating at Bletchley with good cross platform interfaces and timings is the key to ensuring passengers can have faith in the services on offer.

Clearly the ideal is for the trains currently terminating at Bedford to clear the through tracks. The extension of electrification offers extension to Corby but that is an extra 35 miles in the saddle from places as far afield as Brighton and may take more than 35 minutes to go out and back before arriving at Bedford again. If one takes into account stops and additional stations as well the duration for driver changes or walking from one end of the train to the other for the return, 45 minutes duration may not be unreasonable. At 90 mph a Thameslink train, with one stop at Olney, could traverse the Bedford-Northampton new built railway in under 35 minutes and serve a larger population at Northampton than any comparable station on the Midland Main Line because those North of Bedford may want to transfer from East Midlands for more seats, localised journeys minus a change or due to some price variation. However it is unlikely that on the Luton run from Kettering or Wellingborough, they will welcome a longer duration of journey for its own sake, so even on the rails, market share will be less north of Bedford than south. Northampton-Bedford is closer, the timings closer and thus the duration of trains out of Bedford and back, easier to manage for greater gains on and off the tracks.

So if out of 4 Thameslink trains per hour, x2 went off to Northampton (creating a 30 minute timetable frequency) and 2 went off to Corby, the mix and match would be about right coming back into Bedford. But interim, the 20-30 minute headway of through tracks clear at Bedford could enable other trains to pass through the station be they on or off the Marston Vale (passenger and/or freight) and East Midlands to London as for example (from use of the Platform 4)*.

* From above: Platform 4 should be made an island platform to enable East Midlands to have more platform access capacity at Bedford. In addition, Thameslinks going off at Oakley Junction could share those platforms for easy get away and avoiding too many trains crossing over north of Bedford. A new single track River Bridge would enable a clear and long headway for the additional western side of Platform 4 (Platform 5) to be used, coming off at former Dallas Road area of Kempston and Austin Canons.

Educational access gains

Bedford has many private and other schools and draws from a wide range of areas for the annual make up of pupils and students attending places of learning and study. In a competitive world where other places like Northampton and Milton Keynes flex their own educational appeal and marketing muscles, the shoring up of annual pupil intake by better rail links making areas more accessible is an investment in us all. Already some private schools have merged and gone coeducational and already one site has become redundant and let out for other uses. The need to cut costs on massive fleets of coaches and cut the congestion of the school run through better public transport options, combines to suggest that a wide educational and transport coming together for the rail links would be in everyone's interest. This applies in relative terms to Northampton and Olney too.

A new college has opened at Stewartby and so as it offers emphasis on environmental studies, something different, its appeal is all the greater bolstering local Marston Vale Railway student ridership. This dynamic should not be lost to new colleges, universities and establishments along the Northampton-Bedford corridor and as the line passes right by the new University of Northampton Campus, one would hope a station serving it and South Northampton generally, would be well used and serve a healthy dynamic appeal market. If we say stations of Luton-Bedford-Olney and

Northampton, that is 4 stations between airport and campus, say 1 minutes per stop and 5 with slowing down, that is 6 minutes x 4 = 24 minutes plus the 20 minutes Luton-Bedford and 30 minutes or less to Northampton making 75 minutes Airport to campus and vice versa. Certainly beats any road comparative on offer.

For example, with just one train, an overseas student can get from Luton Airport (contra commute) to Northampton Campus with no changes, one train, one ticket, easy and less chances to get lost in an unusual setting or be subject to extortionate taxi fares for want of knowledge about sporadic bus links. For example, the 99 goes from Luton Airport – Milton Keynes Railway Station, then a train to Northampton, then bus to Waterside Northampton University Campus, contrast one train from Airport to Northampton Waterside University Campus via Bedford. Saves cost, time and illustrates appeal of the new railway being put in as such journeys could be multiplied many times plethora.

Town Centre footfall and spend gains

The older town centres of Northampton, Bedford and Olney vary in proportionate size, but the principal issues remain that the railways traditionally brought people and goods to town centres for sales and purchase and that footfall minus the demand for parking which subsequent car dependency has informed, has lent to out of town bypasses and location of multiplex stores with consequential draining of town centres of their share of footfall and spend. They have been drained of quality shops, larger shops and income through the tills. Likewise the switch to a cashless society threatens the very existence of smaller shops and markets which cannot compete with the fast changing situation and with recession, austerity and global melt down due to wars for the very oil which the road/car/lorry society and economy demands, is self defeating by any measure, based on a flimsy set of dynamics now under threat. So in any case, we need to go for a diverse market and energy supply to ensure against market variation. The rail link would deliver steady volumes of people to up footfall and spend to town centres. That in turn would hold up town centres performance and challenge out of town dominance and help cut congestion and parking demand, space which can be used for other things. The idea and concept of curtain sided wagons and pallet sized items being moved by rail for local warehouses and other outlets like perishables for markets, should not be a theoretical nicety but staple means-ways of doing business by rail. If it is not happening why not, if it should be happening, what needs to happen for it to be a reality? One simple answer is that if the tracks don't exist, the demand and supply cannot either. Northampton-Bedford holds out more such potentiality and a plan and starts small and grows a model is what needs to follow reopening or if demand exists now, for that to be added to the case making pot to reopen.

Sports Links

Northampton with its Saints, Cobblers and Cricket, and Bedford with its Blues, Eagles and Rowing make two towns of sporting interest and the potential for rail passengers to visit matches, events and galas would add a healthy band of usership. This also inclusive of theatre and entertainment be it plays, productions, films and in Olney's case, various Festivals and in Bedford and Northampton's case Fairs and Concerts for example. Choice at the end of a train ride, a mere 35 minutes each way, a mere £10 rail-fare for example, opens up a wider variety than being locked into one's own town after dark or fearing the conflict of drink-drive temptations or abstinence.

Sustainable Communities

Whatever the growth in housing, industry or both, without the railway queues and congestion get worse, emissions from exhausts get worse, we breathe it in, filter it via our bodies and the toll it takes is incalculable. With the railway these trends are checked, reduced and we'll be healthier for it. What a legacy to choose!

Commuting to nearest railhead and congestion/demand/capacity off the rails

Some have suggested that the A428 to Bedford is a different A428 to Northampton. They mean of course that Northampton's traffic flows are different to the roads! For example, Felixstowe is on the East Coast, at Thrapston traffic turns off for Northampton and the M1 for the West Midlands. That traffic off and on the A45/M1 is the crux of congestion which bedevils Northampton. Northampton-Bedford-Cambridge rail link addresses this end to end by providing an East-West rail alternative. This is because tracks exist from Felixstowe to Cambridge already, and likewise the A45 passes Brackmills, but requires turning onto other smaller roads to get between it and them. Bedford-Northampton rail link passes right by Brackmills and it is not beyond wit for line-side gantry, forklift and sidings to be installed to rail-serve the industrial business park. The railway must service smaller consignments upwards and the tracks must be put back to enable this. Brackmills suffers from congestion delaying deliveries; relocation is one option to a rail served Business Park like as proposed for Blisworth. However that will rely on paths on existing railways on a North/South axis and capacity to route everything by London which is at capacity and costly in time and energy use. Far better for a more direct cross-country railway and save on relocation with the loss of jobs and footfall and spend patterns which keep subsidiary service providers going. Clearly the status quo is not acceptable, so what gives and what must change means the rail option is important to keep going and retain if not pro-actively encourage and help nurture and foster.

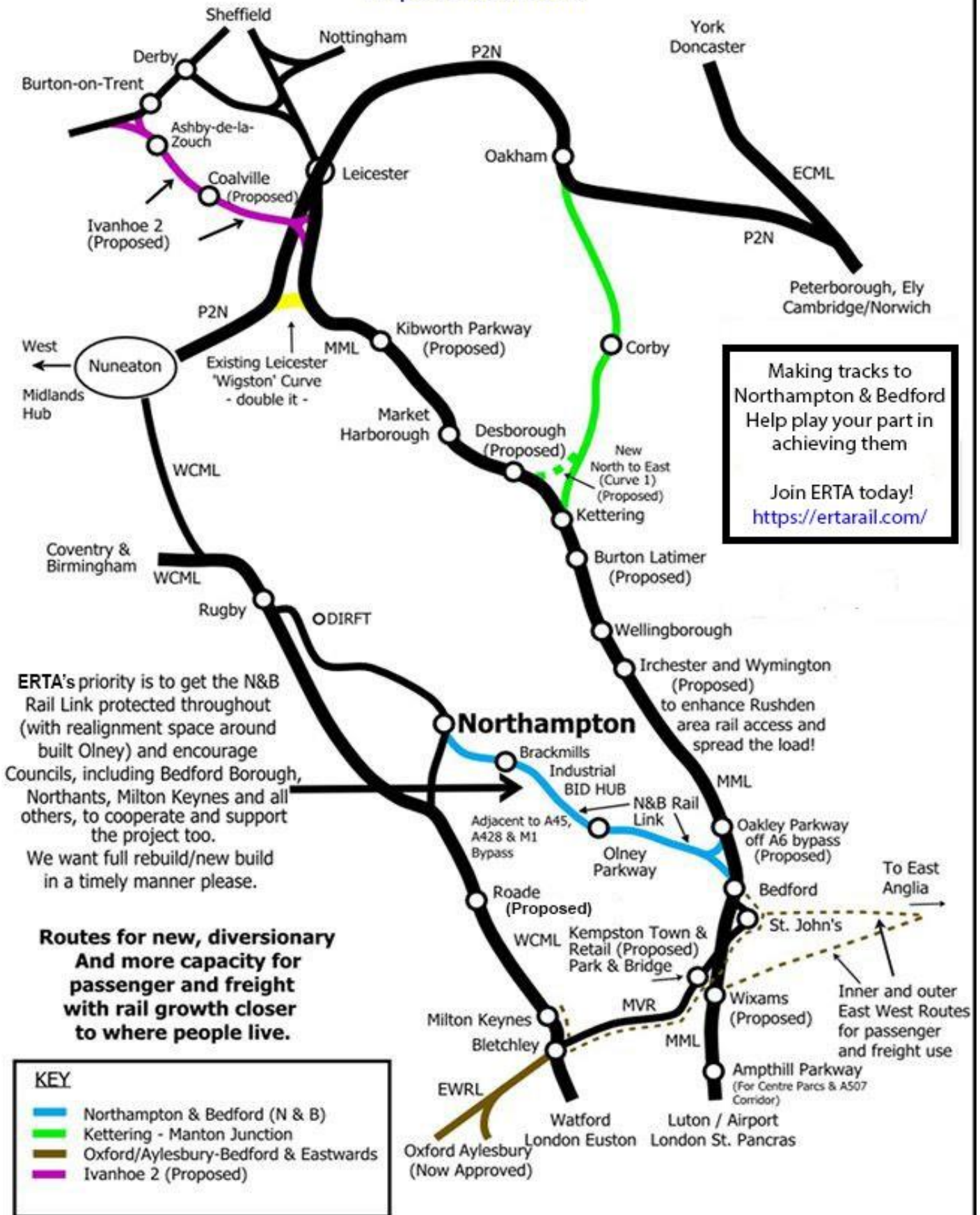


Above: Bedford Midland with Thameslink trains sitting on 2 out of 3 through tracks through the main body of the station circa 2015. Note the single Class 153 Unit which operates on the Bletchley-Bedford alias Marston Vale Service. Woburn Sands is now a growing commuter station on that line, contrast Olney which has no railway and whose prospects for a railway are in the balance. What they have in common is the A509 north-south road.

Making Tracks to Northampton & Bedford

For Birmingham/West Midlands Thameslink Airport Rail Arcs

<https://ertarail.com/>



5. Olney

Population of within a 5 mile catchment of the Handley Alignment*
 * Approximate and as on-line quick reference could enable.

	Place	Population	Place	Population
	Olney	6,500	Astwood and Hardmead	250
	Turvey	1,525	Chichley	100
	Bozeat	1,225	Clifton Reynes and Newton Blossomville	450
	Stoke Goldington	550	Lavendon	1,250
	Newport Pagnell	15,100	Warrington	50
	Horton	433	Harrold	1,691
	Ravenstone	200	Yardley Hastings	745
	Emberton	600	Denton	779
	Sherrington	950	Brafield	656
	Tyringham and Filgrave	250	Gayhurst	150
Sub Totals		27,333		6,121
Combined Population Example Total: 33,454				

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1. Population Data Source:
http://analysis.mkiobservatory.org.uk/webview/index.jsp?v=2&mode=cube&cube=http%3A%2F%2Fanalysis.mkiobservatory.org.uk%3A80%2Fobj%2Fcube%2FPE166e2013_C1&study=http%3A%2F%2Fanalysis.mkiobservatory.org.uk%3A80%2Fobj%2Fstudy%2FPE166e2013&node=0&top=yes
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4. Bedford Borough Council Website, :
http://www.bedford.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/statistics_and_census/parish_profiles.aspx
[file:///C:/Users/FUNKY/Downloads/Turvey%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/FUNKY/Downloads/Turvey%20(2).pdf)
5. Northants: Wikipedia e.g.: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yardley_Hastings

Population catchment 33, 000 within 5 miles drive of new Olney Parkway Station off A428/A509

The town stands to benefit from the return of the railway in providing a regular flow of visitors, footfall and spend, helping to sustain the numerous small shops and the distinctive character of the area. A roughly 5 mile cordon with Turvey on the eastern flank, Yardley on the western flank, Wollaston on the northern flank and Sherrington, Newport Pagnell and Stoke Goldington being southern cordons, the 33, 000 population includes the 6500 approximate population of Olney. There is a peppering of villages and these have roughly a 12 mile drive in any direction to access a railway station for journeys further afield. Beyond the cordon, it is envisaged that existing stations of Bedford, Milton Keynes, Northampton and Wellingborough would suffice, but 33, 000 in the 5 mile cordon would be a good flow of people who may choose to use a rail link, with timings of 15 minutes into Bedford and Northampton, circumventing congestion and parking issues.

Traffic control to Milton Keynes in a context of development growth

Like it or loathe it, not only does Olney come under Milton Keynes Local Government jurisdiction, but acts as a satellite to Milton Keynes, arguably the centre of its northern rural land take. Milton Keynes is a main traffic driver for the place itself, for access to rail services and the M1. This generates considerable traffic long the main link trunk road the A509 which links the A14/A45 corridor at Wellingborough with Olney, M1 and the wider Milton Keynes principal road network. Talk and designs for a bypass have come to nothing and an opponent of the railway but equally against the bypass said of the bypass it would “spell the death-knell to the town” and of the railway “a waste of money”. Obviously that individual is content with the status quo, but Olney’s economy depends on a sustainable something to improve the range of options for getting to and from the location and sustaining it with its own selling strengths. It holds numerous gourmet markets and fairs tapping into niche audiences as well as its own market which bring reasonable priced quality goods to the public consumption.

The old route has been compromised with housing on the eastern side of the A509 and a warehouse on the western side. Moreover north of the trackbed, more development has and is incrementally occurring. The Handley Alignment needs to be adopted as a legitimate strategic corridor and protected and/or revised to a more circuitous loop to avoid development and still connect to the eastern old trackbed across the River Great Ouse and the west of Yardley Road. This will require tight curves and noticeable gradients. A new station may or may not be possible, depending on how far out the railway has to go and interception of the A509 and River Great Ouse. Since 1998 the people of Olney have had a choice and indifference has mainly been the prevailing attitude in a context of Milton Keynes area control and proliferation as a main centre of focus and command. But the benefit for Milton Keynes is reductions of traffic along the A509 and more capacity through Central Rail Station. Alas, this does not seem sufficient to lure the Council to pro-actively protect the rail interest at this pinch point/hot spot area. At the stage of writing this business case, it is not too late to rebuild a railway, but diminishing may render it thus within a 5 year cordon and so this is a last call for action to be taken.

Bus-rail integration opportunity

Olney is served with No 21 and No 41 bus services. No 21 goes from Milton Keynes Central Station to Olney and Lavendon while the No. 41 links Bedford with Olney and Northampton. Both run on a roughly hourly basis. The No. 41 links the A428 corridor with the Olney bus heading south to Newport Pagnell and Milton Keynes Centre and the two services complement each other to a degree. However in Bedford’s interest and the arcing end to end journey time, the kink and deviation from the A428 corridor of the No. 41 to serve Olney is at least 15 mile detour, time and

fuel spent for often a half dozen or less of picked up travelling people. It begs the question, is the deviation worth it? But for our purposes, these buses would be able to interchange with a railway station whereby A428 to rail and vice versa and the A509 No. 21 to rail and vice versa.

Benefits of footfall and spend via High Street

Olney has a good supply of small mini-supermarket shops, a smattering of coffee outlets and then the gourmet shops of art, craft, rugs and specialist supplies including food and drink. Other shops are legal and business services outlets, charity shops and the Cowper Museum. Most shops are clustered at the southern end of the town, around a market square. This is why having a station in close proximity to the existing built Olney High Street would enable walking and cycling access both ways and it is envisaged improvements like cycle lanes could be considered to enhance the safety aspect of the A509 through the town.

6. Benefits for Thameslink

Current 5 per hour, 1-2 waiting over on through tracks

Of 5 Thameslink trains per hour arriving/departing Bedford Midland, which leaves waitover trains on through tracks at the station interface in any one hour, during the 22 hours of operations. East Midland Franchise trains also call at Bedford, whilst the down has its own platform at Platform 4, the up East Midlands Trains have to share and fit in with Thameslink trains and slow into Platform 1 and 3 accordingly. Change of platforms at short notice annoys rail users who have to clamber over the extensive footbridge which lacks ventilation on the overbridge with no opening window or other facility and gets hot in warm weather days and seasons. Clearly if Bedford Midland and the Midland Main Line is to see any new flows of freight, other traffic, operators or even more of existing services with Corby and electrification in mind, more capacity and the freeing up of through tracks to optimum availability needs to be planned now going forward.

Corby is about 35 miles away from Bedford and would take about 35 minutes each way, compared Northampton at 21.5 miles and would take less duration, depending on whether intermediate stations are provided or not. In short, Bedford-Northampton is nearer and could bring more returns. Bedford-Corby is happening because the infrastructure, except for overhead wires is largely there; Bedford-Northampton has to be rebuilt. This means that conceptual appreciation is hard to get across, but not impossible.

Three to Northampton out of five trains per hour would bring receipts but also free up paths through the station (other operators and freight)

Scenario comparison and complimentary diagram potential like x2 off to Northampton per hour and x2 to Corby per hour would seem attractive, alternating the return, freeing up 4 through paths through Bedford Midland which don't currently exist. That can be appreciated and conceptualised by most willing people. The other benefits of so doing this are that if stations are provided on the Bedford-Northampton line then those passengers have not had to drive into Bedford, there's more parking spaces for other users, and by virtue of more free platform path interfaces per hour, more volume can be catered for, easing overcrowding on the one hand and catering for the context of growth on the other. To ignore Bedford-Northampton and just go with the flow on Corby, means A428 commuters still have up to 12 miles each way drive, queues into Bedford are exacerbated causing inconvenience and delays and demand for volume and frequency at Bedford remains but no extra paths to cater for it. The result is overcrowding, 'pay more, get less' being the diminishing return. If you have a short Franchise with just day to day operations as a primary focus, Bedford-Northampton may be seen as outside Thameslinks remit of interest or concern and that is exactly

how we at ERTA are given to understand and experience. This theatre is unhealthy for rail users, the rail industry, solving problems and investing in a better future for local and inter-regional rail.

Even without Bedford-Northampton, more paths through the station are going to be needed. More passenger and freight trains from the West will want to weave through the station 'box' cordon area to head North of Bedford and vice versa. Even with an additional line and platform/concourse re-design and relocation towards the old site of the former Bedford Midland Station; the trains hit the Midland Main Line north of Bedford with 23 Thameslinks to Corby and any addition East Midlands diagrams, let alone any new flows be it passenger or freight as a result of Oxford/Aylesbury-Bedford being operational railway and Overhead Line Electrification (OHLE); more capacity is required and if a station north of Bedford, the reality is that stopping trains at such as location bridgehead, means queues further up and down the MML in a context of higher speeds and frequencies. In short a decent distance between stations is sensible MML wise, meaning Sharnbrook/Irchester are two such for possible consideration; but Bedford-Northampton removed 2-3 trains off the MML per hour, making operational flexibility much more lucrative and versatile. If that is to happen, working back to policies and protection now, invests in the potential for then. Otherwise we have a handicapped railway and that just drives people to the roads and locks-in misery for commuters to and from London, be it cost management, overcrowding, less train facilities and the off-line contribution rail can make, diminished. That is not what ERTA wants, but add to the scenario trains from the East also wanting to bay and/or go through Bedford Midland and the need for those 3 trains off to Northampton becomes imperative, so policies need to reflect that now to keep the option open for 2025 or whenever the East-West Lines are fully operational. They must serve Bedford as well as Milton Keynes and need station access and capacity to be able to reasonably do so. X5 coach is half hourly x 7 days a week and the rail must copy that pattern, as people won't fancy an hour's wait for another train or a timetable which doesn't operate on Sundays and Bank Holidays. Such timetables are out of date and restrictive and fail to allow local train services being marketed as 'leisure lines' to fulfil their leisure potential. In short, customers are short changed and it is hoped East-West Rail will herald a 21st century sea-change.

Contra commuting journeys e.g. Luton Airport-Northampton/St Albans-Rugby arc

The line has the potential to attract contra commuting, i.e. commuting away from London. Trains go into London full and come out pm full and during the day and trains going the other way are less full/half empty. At Milton Keynes, East Croydon-West London-Milton Keynes services is only hourly, but courts a significant flow of contra commuters, more so than Bedford. However due to capacity on the WCML, the Southern service is restricted to hourly frequency, when market potential could inform 2 per hour but for capacity issues.

Not everyone wishes to go to London termini and many potential commutes across London are stifled and wearisome in time and cost because of the need to go in and come out again, often with changes to tube and train to add to the inconvenience. Seamless journeys commend themselves, enabling customers to do work as they ride, read, concentrate, handhelds, tablets, laptops, telephone calls and many other devices used and seamless journeys enable more to be done. From switching off and resting the brain to engaging and getting ahead of the game, the 2-3 paths off the MML just north of Bedford would enable through contra commutes from Thameslink Network (which is growing) to Luton/Airport, Bedford, Northampton and even on to Rugby, Coventry and Birmingham and vice versa. Some may ask why someone would take a slower route to London or East Croydon from Rugby or even Northampton. But like Virgin v Chiltern on the London-Birmingham run, Northampton-Bedford offers choice, fare variation, other linkages and destinations

including 4 airports and University Campus' plethora, which are currently not do-able on a Northampton-Luton and vice versa corridoric basis. Moreover end to end, this is the corridor of the M1 (Luton/Northampton) whereas M1 goes via Eastern flank of Milton Keynes, the rail via Bedford.

So rail, Bedford and choice stand to gain and end to end road reduction could also be a goal of a successful marketing bid with the rails in situ to ensure it can be done, not reliant on a clapped out coach link and 3 changes and tickets and change nightmares which throw visitors and adds to their core customers creating overcrowding. To have a little bit extra duration and have a seat is surely a win, win potentially for rail to reach out and service? It goes without saying that as an integrated railway, rather than the traditional 'main line/them' versus 'branch line/us' whereby branch lines are seen as secondary to core operations and resource allocation, the integration approach would integrate timetables, trains and operators. If that mean Thameslinks to Rugby and London Midlands to Luton Airport Parkway Station informing 4 trains per hour traversing the Bedford-Olney-Northampton railway route so be it, just what a twin-track solution could optimistically hope for and would revolutionise public transport along the A428 and A509 with bus integration at an Olney Parkway Station.

7. Northampton

Traditional town centre access, footfall and spend minus the growth of traffic

The railway would deliver new flows of footfall and spend. Firstly the speed of a train would be an attraction in itself cutting end to end journey times down from 1.5 hours by bus to approximately 37 minutes with one stop each way. It would be quicker than comparable road speed and besides the drive-time; you face queues at Bedford and Northampton ends, congestion, cost of parking and location of parking relative to the town centre. Out of town shopping has gone hand in hand with bypassification of traditional towns from ring roads to full-on bypassification – the result has been a drain of brand names from traditional shopping areas, high quality footfalls and spend have diminished and Empty Shop Syndrome (ESS) abounds* (see below).

* **From above:** (ESS) is not a generalised and localised market adjustment to more or less of one type of shop or business occupancy with another, but a systematic downward spiral of empty shops and business premises representing a shrinkage across the board and that emptiness affecting other business' such as they too succumb to a need to move or close, thus cascading. The root cause is the car, lorry, road and oil basis of the operation of our society in dependency and logistical terms leading to a demand for speed and efficiency in delivery, distribution and access which close proximity spaces in traditional town centres cannot provide, which due to high volume to roads designed from horse and cart ages cannot accommodate in volume or parking land-use capacity terms without destruction of fabrics and land clearances leading to a pocked landscape of red brick and glass-steel, traditional and open plan haphazardly clustered, but congestion is a fact and drives and pushes demand and supply outwards, leaving the traditional market-centred landscape bereft, drained and uglified in a lack of consistent presentation and character. Zoning and quartering has sought to re-gentrify, but this doesn't translate to local living and spending, rather commuting to better jobs elsewhere and dormitory engagement apart from perhaps visits to service providers and entertainment venues for example. The closure of the railways in the 1960's played a structural hand in changing patterns of behaviour and whilst we cannot wind the clock back, the principal point is that the restoration of some strategic and local combined rail links could play a role in re-populating traditional town centres in footfall and spend terms, raising their viability and reducing ESS as a result. Other engineering could be to downsize supermarkets and bring them back to town centres and emphasise bag fulls and healthy lifestyles than bootfulls and car-legs.

Market sustainable audience

The railway delivers quicker transit times, making a dynamic appeal but also delivers volume of people minus their cars, the congestion, the land-use dilemma of parking, housing or retail space for example. Taking an 8-12 coach Thameslink unit every half hourly, that could deliver 300 people per hour to the Northampton urban area and vice versa to Bedford and proportionately half that to Olney. The appeal of time saving, cost and choice as well as the modern ambiance a modern Desiro Train offers, would lure people to use the train much more and its dynamic appeal would increase frequency, volume and the commute/work v leisure/shopping balances with contra both ways built in to what the railway could offer. It is the only way to cut congestion through choice. It is the only way to rejuvenate a town centre pitted on a sustainable environment for everyone and it contributes to enhanced safety of pedestrians and cyclists who would have fewer hazards to engage with. There is a likelihood of more walking and cycling for example if the halt for University/Delapre Abbey takes off near Bridge Street for leisure and likewise, better cycle lanes from Castle Station to the town centre via Gold Street and other access thoroughfares to encourage a pro-cycling and pedestrian access culture. The trend has been to reintroduce cars to Abingdon Street to boost sales. But what this does is to miss the point of what is systemically wrong with the whole system, principally a lack of footfall and spend. Most bulk shopping is at retail parks and most bulk sellers provide home delivery anyway. So the scope of a free for all road-wise is counter intuitive to pedestrians, safety, ambiance, clean air and dynamic appeal for bringing higher volumes of real shoppers to a location.

Congestion check and possible reduction

Northampton suffers from chronic gridlock congestion. The principal structure of the road landscape is that the A14 from Felixstowe via Cambridge and Huntingdon feeds into the A45 to Northampton which meets the M1 for north/south transits in urban cordons of Northampton. Some turn off the A45 and head south along the A45 from Wellingborough, others going west hit the A43 from Northampton and/or the A508 for the A422 via Roade and Buckingham respectively. Buckingham has a bypass, Roade doesn't, nor does Olney for that matter so they are subject to continual traffic and many juggernaut lorries pounding the road surfaces, structure and vibrating. Going north, one would think that A14 beyond Thrapston to Lutterworth whence M1 and M6 meet with A14 would be logical were it not for the fact that Milton Keynes (A14-A421) and Northampton (A14-A45-M1/A43) are principal regional logistical and distribution hubs and as they sit on the spinal nodic corridor of the M1 and 3-4 regions (Eastern, London Southeast, East Midlands and West Midlands) attract a lion's share of juggernaut lorries and huge warehouses with many loading bays and 24x7 operations. One only has to look at Grange Park and Brackmills to see what one is dealing with and the new Blisworth Freight Depot, whilst rail connected will still be a huge lorry movement generator along with expanding Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT) means that unless we have a strategy to get more freight on rail, more rails following the principal freight arteries (modal choice) and that means putting strategic tracks back and even considering brand new ones able to address faster transits end to end e.g. Newmarket-Northampton parallel to the A14 arcing across the developed hubs south thereof. Unless these bigger principal spatial matters are addressed, the lack of space, the growth of demand and supply and the clustering of these establishments will mean one thing, gridlock congestion in, around, across and through Northampton for decades to come. Polluted air, litter tossed from windows, grime, dirt, erosion of ancient stones, noise and waste of time and energy, adds costs, reduces dynamic appeal and falsifies marketing photogenic portraits, which means a lot of cost and effort to market, but a lack of return in repeated fashion as more accessible beauty spots or specialist thematic win out – Chester and York (historical preservation), Milton Keynes (all steel and glass), London, Oxford and Cambridge (more real job

prospects across an arc of employment grades and dynamics). Northampton has a rich history, but like Bedford and Coventry needs to decide which way to go, new, old, mixed but in any case, the rail would help, the congestion will not.

Ease of parking demand pressure/land-use conflict

Bringing in more people is best done by better rail links. You can't build your way out of congestion if much of it is through traffic anyway and bypass upon bypass with growth in between exacerbate problems unless something gives like a rail link dynamic to challenge and enable modal choice options. It is interesting that Milton Keynes is running out of parking as growth ensues and unless they play a part in protecting the route at Olney, throws away options for more rail access to their principal station.

Therefore the actions at Olney or not, affect 3 regions traffic and transport, people and planning interests and should be taken seriously with compensation for a lack of protection knowing full well the reopening of the railway is being requested and the case is growing all the time in a trans-regional and local context.

A14-A45 rail parallel end to end (Northampton-Bedford-East Anglia)

The endless stream of the A14-A45 feeds huge volumes of traffic into the Northampton area and is the principal eastward artery. The congestion on the M1 meets this east-west feed at Northampton and causes a clash of interests. Whilst a new, direct and speed-orientated Newmarket-Northampton rail link would make some logical sense for roll-on, roll-off freight and end to end limited passenger operations, the cost, culture and upheaval to get such awaits a champion. Meanwhile however Northampton-Bedford-Cambridge would with just 50 new miles of rebuild on former trackbed largely, be an economical (relatively to road building costs and lack of benefit) solution to actually giving modal choice, reducing road reliant journeys and reducing the negative spin-off consequences like congestion and emissions, whilst inputting goods of inward investment to traditional town centres and landscapes.

Choice of commute and consumerism

Northampton and Bedford share the central geographical belt areas together. Northampton is approximately half way between the West Midlands and London, whereas Bedford it is East Midlands and London. Northampton is south of the Norwich-Leicester-Birmingham artery but north of the Oxbridge Arc. Thus the link between these two large towns by virtue of a rail link means they can share these markets and flows and make the best of it in a sustainable fashion. Currently, this is only done by road and the poor condition of the A428 contrast the A421 and A45 shows how the link between the two towns is weak and not at optimal realisation. The mere 21 miles is still the length of the English Channel and only the speed of rail can bring that spatial gap closer and bridge it successfully. Road upgrade by way of village bypasses creates more brown fields, that gets developed but where does the traffic go? To existing stations in existing towns like Bedford, Northampton, Milton Keynes and lesser extent Wellingborough, the railway puts that growth on a sustainable footing. The wars for oil have proved costly and to stem that cost drain continuing we need to move from mass consumption of oil to better stewardship of what energy and assets we have.

Brackmills access

Brackmills, like Grange Park is a large industrial estate and business park which boasts a number of regional logistical operations. Loading bays galore and juggernauts on 24x7 operations means having a free flow road system is critical. Alas the A45 flows, stacks back from the M1 eastwards and that means access to and from the Brackmills Estate is subject to congestion. That causes time-delay penalties and erodes the operational efficiency of the location. The worse it gets, the more the lure of relocation beckons. Indeed some businesses on Brackmills, having lost the rail connection, seeing the congestion – delay trend are taking an interest in the rail served Blisworth Industrial Park idea. Albe it, the WCML has limited spare capacity for more freight and since HS2 will probably not cater for normal freight operations; the forcing of freight by multiple lorry consignments means M1/A45 clashes of gridlock in the Northampton urban cordon will recherch  around the area, reverberating and impacting negatively. The St James' Link Road will fill up and there will be nowhere to go for decades. It assumes the course of old railway and so blocks options for relief and has arguably been ill-thought through in the design solution of what needs to be done. In short only by offering modal choice can congestion be stemmed. Growth means that the ratio of volume to road space is critical and since no give, congestion is bound to happen for the foreseeable future. The rail link offers a genuine relief option and thus should not only be retained, but proactively sought even at the 11th hour. It is in Northampton's interest that this should be the case, failure to realise this is a dereliction of duty and care, fobbing people off that congestion is inevitable, when in fact solutions have been lying idle for decades for want of a wakeup call.

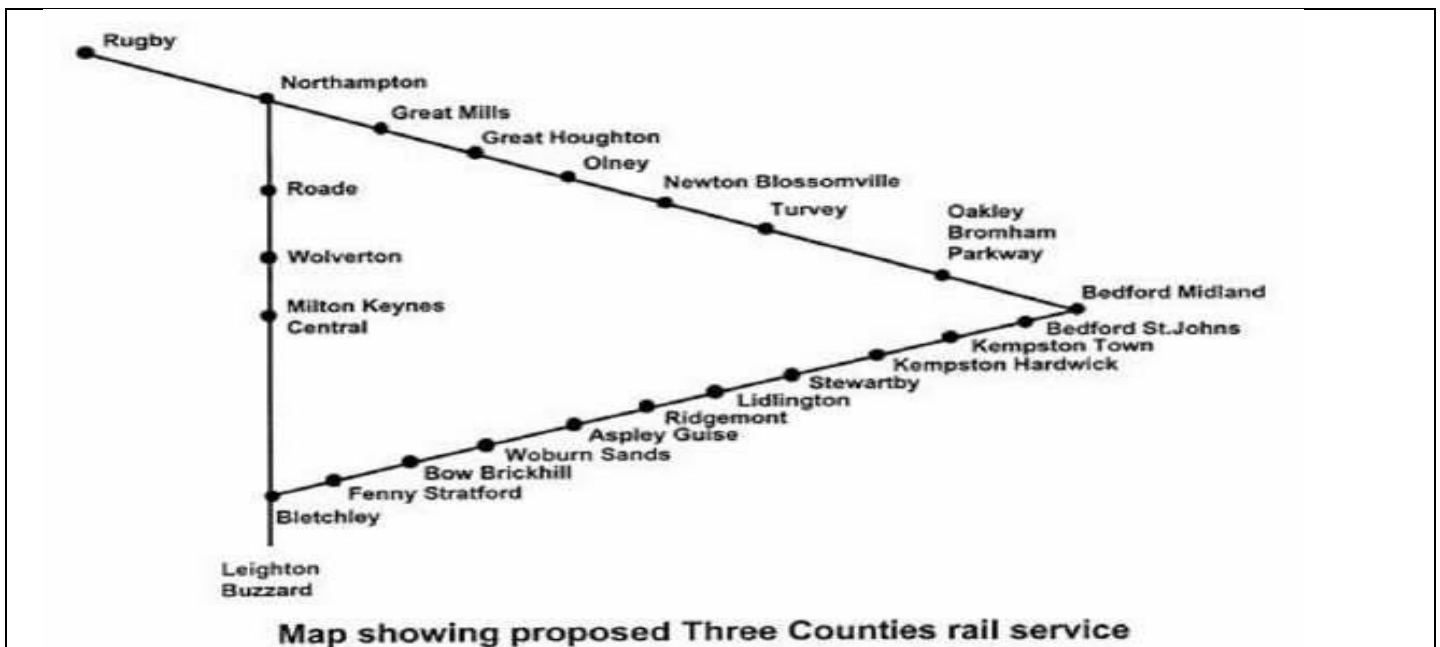
Sport/Venues and audience access ranges

Northampton boasts thousands of people flocking to it and a global notional connection be it on Rugby, Football or Cricket for example and these flocks of people would be better served with a rail link to Bedford with its Blues Rugby, Eagles Football and Rowing on the River emphasis'. The two towns could have derby's and people could use the trains en masse for these transport requirements, again unclogging roads, freeing up parking space and informing healthier options for all.

Education and School audiences

Like Bedford/Northampton enjoys a mix of colleges, private and state schools and University Campus'. These generate traffic and wider audiences flocking to the area and given the poor rail link connections, majoritively within a 20 mile radius and thus by car. That's all traffic entering the urban cordon and demanding land to be used for parking. It adds to congestion, air pollution, delay and frustration for all. The schools often have to buy in fleets of coaches (cost) to ship pupils around vast village trajectories. There's a real problem here and the railway would help boost footfall and cohortic reach, range and in-take whilst tapping into key journeys:

- a. Airports to campus'
- b. West Midlands to Bedford, South of Bedford to Northampton and Rugby for example
- c. Some places like Olney having more in and out choices
- d. More capacity on existing transport routes



Above: In the early days of the reopening campaign a Marston Vale local service was envisaged with possible integration to serve the growing Bedford-Milton Keynes-Northampton development triangle.

8. Central Milton Keynes

In the early 1980's it was a local joke that despite the emerging size of Milton Keynes, British Rail had turned down successive invitations for a new station north of Bletchley to specifically serve the area on grounds that there was no case and even in quasi-privatised days the same attitude of response is often met at the outset. However by the mid 1980's the emergent 'go ahead' attitude of Network Southeast under Chris Green took a more interested attitude and when the new station was built it exceeded passenger expectations and has become a principal regional rail access serving point.

Central Station access/easing of parking demand/pressure off A509

Growth of Milton Keynes and surrounding locations like Buckingham means the Central Rail Station serves a 10 mile radius of audience and due to the fact that there's no railway access (station) for 15 miles to Northampton, 12 miles to Olney and 5 miles to Cranfield, the catchment is quite large. However this means you have high commuting demand and capacity constraints on parking. This spills over elsewhere around the city and even sends drive time south to save money and find spaces – places like Bletchley, Leighton Buzzard, Tring and Flitwick over on the Midland Main Line's Thameslink all take a share of Milton Keynes commute business. The urban area parking overspill means parking places are taken at the expense of other parking demands such as the business quarter adjacent to the railway station and the shopping area further up the hill. In addition local estates streets take a share. There has been a resistance to building multi storey skylines around the Central Milton Keynes area but that may have to change in coming years. When Milton Keynes was built the trajectory of the A509 from Olney to Hockliffe via Woburn Sands was changed to link with the A5 north of Milton Keynes Central. So there's a main trunk feed right into and besides the Central Station quarter. This means that commuting is a way of life for many and build up of pressure in volumes of cars, people and demand outstrips supply any time soon. Tailbacks where the A509 meets the M1 are a peak hour standing issue adding an extra 20 minutes to journey times sometime. H5 Portway, H6 Childs Way, A509 all clog up and are busy arteries from the western fringe of the town to the central hub.

The Commute distances

Although, as previously mentioned a 10 mile radius approximately is the catchment the station serves, the nearest other radial north-south main line axis equivalent station is Bedford Midland and to the south Flitwick. So that's up to a 20 mile drive each day, adding cost, congestion in the urban junctioning areas and flooding the station in intense am/pm peak periods with activity.

Congestion

Congestion at M1 Junctions and other interceptor points: The delays of congestion around Junction 14 of the M1 adjacent to the Milton Keynes Coachway means that coach operations like the X5 can be subject to delay by congestion blocking exists and access' to and from the M1 as well as the A509 which is single lane between Newport Pagnell and the M1 junction.

Nature of rail passenger and freight, constraint of track and access capacity

The sheer volume of usership continues to outstrip the facilities the modest station offers and the diverse nature means that growth is going to meet a barrier without some structural redesign of the whole station aesthetics and track-way access capacity. For example, you have your London commute am/pm peak time, you have your West Coast Virgin Intercity services linking to and from the North West and London, and you have your contra commuting services from Croydon-West London-Milton Keynes. The WCML is one of the busiest railways in Europe taking a variety of passenger and freight workings through varied hours of the day and night. However 3 miles north of Bletchley Junction, it is served by 2 slow lines and 2 fast lines. Some remedial loops have been put in over the years but the foundational issues are a basic lack of bays for stabling trains between rosters and trains sitting on through lines put a deterrent on them against other trains coming through the station. Moreover capacity on the West Coast constrains more services from Bedford, Aylesbury, Oxford and Southern's own Croydon-West London-Milton Keynes services from having access to the station. Southern's own West London-Milton Keynes service carries a lot of contra commuters seeking work in the main central business quarter but is limited to a one and hour service frequency. Thus, as new housing goes in around the circumference and beyond it, more demand grows but the constraints means that demand cannot adequately be catered for. Higher costs and overcrowding does not deter demand, as the drive for work outstrips the local ability to supply. An Olney park and ride station on the A509 nearer to home, catering for a 33, 000 5 mile catchment of villages would create new capacity in parking terms, reduce A509 congestion and help spread the load.

Business, choice and diversity

The goal must surely be to give rail users of all types' choice. Olney Parkway would do that and lever in more trains in all directions to the Milton Keynes location generally. It may be troublesome to provide more baying capacity at Milton Keynes, which in turn denies it of its potential in-take of usership and business on offer. One solution to the physical baying of trains has been the call for a single long platform to be bolted onto the east side London bound platform at Wolverton, allowing trains to terminate there in a limited distance to Milton Keynes Central, thus not eating into paths needed by other through services. Wolverton boasts good road links to places like Newport Pagnell, Stony Stratford, Deanshanger and Hanslope for example. More baying capacity here would be useful, also layover and loading time too. This layover, allowing other trains to pass by and allowing more trains to call on through tracks at Milton Keynes Central would free up spare seats and allow other trains like Southern's, Bedford, Aylesbury and Oxford to enter and use current baying capacity being followed back by the Wolverton layover trains.

More train paths south of Rugby on the WCML

Northampton-Bedford rail link would enable Thameslink to serve Northampton and possibly run on to Rugby and vice versa, London Midland Desiros to serve Bedford and possibly Luton Airport in a contra commute fashion. If x2 of each ran per hour, that's 4 trains doing the local service between Northampton, Olney and Bedford and vice versa. This means more seats on the existing Northampton-Euston run and thus aggregately allows rail to cater for growth on and off the rails. There is a need for diversionary route options south of Rugby.

Bletchley-Bedford-Northampton-Rugby loop

The Northampton-Bedford rail link would enable a loop between Bletchley-Bedford and Northampton. This would enable through and local passenger services more scope and enable a loop off the WCML to enable more trains to plough through Milton Keynes Central. Things like empties and non-time-critical freights could use the loop and cater for more. The current Blisworth development should be made to, as a pre-planning condition that they contribute towards the reopening of the Northampton-Bedford rail link to ensure their extra trains do not take capacity on the WCML exacerbating the overcrowded nature of the line and conflict with passenger and speed operations.

South Midlands LEP Transport Completeness

The LEP is rarely covered in local media, so members of the public have a hard job to establish what they are about, what they are doing and whether it is what is needed or mere toying with a set of dynamics on a drawing board. However if their remit is the strategic transport and sustainability of the regions they serve (Northampton had its own LEP), then conundrums of the lack of a rail link between two large towns, two main lines and the dilemma of Milton Keynes with congestion, parking and access issues, is just the sort of thing we would wish the LEP to be championing, commissioning studies to make the case and informing trickle down policies on route and deviation space protection from piecemeal development which could deny the local communities and both ends (Rugby-Birmingham and Bedford-Brighton) of a link between these 2 corridors for a continuum of flow, footfall, spend and environmental checks and balances.



Above: The M1 near Ampthill in Central Bedfordshire. This motorway links Luton with Northampton via Milton Keynes/A509 and carries a high volume of juggernaut, van and car traffic. It is not unknown for anywhere south of Leicester for this motorway to bung up with congestion. This is where the volume of traffic to road space is exceeded. The knock-on effect is to congest junctions on and off the motorway and can take hours to clear. Given regional growth, unless we act and reopen rail choices, these patterns will be compounded and locked-in as a more frequent experience, which is dysfunctional for all.

8. General Rail Case

Luton Airport-Northampton (M1 end to end)

There is the localised A428 commute and corridor growth angle and impact upon the end to end and migration south to the Milton Keynes Central zone, then there is the larger macro corridor end to end being joined up (Brighton-Bedford and Northampton-Birmingham) but between these cordons of scope and potential, we have the more quasi localised journey potential end to end being rail served, giving choice; principally Northampton-Luton Airport via Bedford and vice versa. The M1 links Northampton-Milton Keynes-Luton; the rail would link Northampton with Luton via Bedford. But on speed, on avoiding congestion, on one-train and no changes, on joined up public transport, Northampton-Bedford-Luton Airport makes good sense in a practical and choice fashion. It enables for example direct access by rail to Northampton University Waterside Campus. Many universities are looking for overseas students to boost their annual pupil intakes. Students represent income to university establishments, so having clear and easy accessibility to and from an Airport like Luton and for Bedford, Birmingham and Gatwick as two north-south extremes, means optimum access, attraction and marketing dynamic appeal. What foreign students don't want is complicated journey's, need for changing rail – bus and timings or portal of departures separate requiring walks in unfamiliar areas and differential ticking, cost and handling varied currencies, informs a nightmare and may make students choose less confusing options. Northampton-Bedford offers one change from plane to train, one ticket, and one journey to a station adjacent to the campus or within a 10 minute journey walking, cycling, bus use or taxi. If a new station was provided at adjacent to bestriding the London Road crossing, then a 5 minutes' walk and visual sighting of the campus would be accommodated as well as access to South Northampton generally including sights such as Delapre Abbey.

East-West Rail impetus and beneficiary

The well-established East-West Rail Consortium's Oxford-Bedford-Cambridge agenda moves forward incrementally in the time-scope of this booklet. Northampton-Bedford would meet the Oxford services at Bedford, which would enable wrap around terminal options than just Bedford. The battle at Bedford is for more track access from St John's through Bedford Midland to link with the cross-over north of the A428 Bromham Road Bridge for heading off to Northampton. These tracks are necessary as increased through passenger and freight operations will require them anyway with or without a Northampton rail link; more so with a Northampton rail link. Thus station re-design and extra tracks and platform capacity needs to be sorted in a timely manner. Passenger and freight workings from East and West will arrive at St John's and will need access to Bedford. Bedford, Northampton and Milton Keynes Central all share a lack of baying capacity. You either have to provide more or accept more through workings elsewhere or both. Land take is required, bridges widened in their span and track widths widened for things like a flyover to take from the slow lines to the Northampton line north of the River Great Ouse adjacent to the A6 Clapham Bypass. But the benefits of Cambridge-Bedford is that with a Northampton rail link you would have a A14-A45 rail alternative (Felixstowe-Northampton arc) meaning Brackmills can be served from the east, DIRFT can be served from the East and much more. This frees up West Coast paths for more trains (passenger and freight) as well as into, across and out of Central London, the current route of Felixstowe-Birmingham freight trains. It also cuts the time-distance scenario, cutting emissions, using less energy and making modal shift from road to rail more dynamically appealing.

Midland Main Line

Northampton/M1 greater market share integrated/real rail alternative: Whilst it may stretch the imagination (it shouldn't but sadly we are where we are) to envisage local freights between Luton and Northampton or DIRFT and vice versa, the idea of the London-Northampton/WCML utilising the trunking via Midland Main Line and WCML, sharing spare paths, using up spare capacity and catering for growth as well as keeping things moving, has some appeal to bear in mind. Without Northampton-Bedford, one of these exciting options are do-able, so a lot is at stake and is a real test for whether our railway structure is fit for purpose as to whether this cusp of opportunity can be realised or whether we're back in negative response territory as BR was on the prospects for a Milton Keynes Central Station 45 or so years ago.

South Midlands Southern Link: Cambridge-Northampton-Birmingham Cross Country.

Passenger-wise as well as local and medium distance and range services, with East-West Rail's Central Section (Bedford-Cambridge), the prospect of trains coming into Bedford and going on to Birmingham via Northampton cannot be ruled out. Likewise vice versa to Cambridge or integrated and beyond to Ipswich, Norwich and Stansted Airport.

Potential for more freight by rail

Clearly if tracks do not exist, the contemplation of more freight by rail at best remains just that! Currently we have 150 miles each way of trains traversing tracks from Felixstowe in the East to West Midlands in the West via the North London Lines (NLL) and the West Coast Main Line (WCML). These trains take paths which other passenger and freight operations could use, going into, across and out of the busy London line theatres. Cambridge-Bedford-Northampton, a mere 50 miles would help enable direct traversing off main lines giving a time-speed and energy use advantage over current operations. In addition, places like Brackmills and the better access from WCML to MML on a north-westerly to south-easterly axis means more options for routing freight via this new network of rail links. This means that main lines can cater for new and diverse flows of passenger and freight as well as more necessary paths for greater speeds and breaking distances required for such. Speed means you get more trains in the frame but must have adequate breaking distances for safety. There is a balance between volume and speed and one criticism of projects like HS2 is that at great cost, they are mainly self-contained and whilst offering speed, fail to cater the volume which raises questions on their capacity creating capability impacts for other lines such as the busy WCML. This in a context of growing population, development, movement of people and goods and rail's share of the market in business terms, but the vital security of platforms our society rests upon such as how operations are fuelled (energy), costs and the environmental responsibility we all share. A majoritively road dependent, oil and quarry dependent transport infrastructure cannot go on sustainably and so shifting from road to rail is a sensible option to develop incrementally and allowing the sheer convenience of it being there to be a resource British businesses can use. Northampton, with its developing DIRFT, possible freight depot at Blisworth and much more will see more freight trains either for it or through it as a half-way mark off the WCML. Northampton-Bedford could play a role with managing that and ensuring passenger capacity is not squeezed out. But most of all, competitive railways means that impacts of congestion are reduced and the attendant health benefits lower costs and wasted time elsewhere.

Bletchley-Bedford-Northampton/Rugby loop

Northampton-Bedford would form a rail triangle at the heart of the central belt of southern central England linking principal places of Northampton, Bedford and Milton Keynes by rail in complete arcing design infrastructure. The ability to run trains from South Milton Keynes, the Bletchley Junction area to Bedford and onto Northampton and WCML, informs a loop off the WCML which could take non time critical trains such as empties returning to port for reloading, heavier trains which may not be non time critical and new flows born from the line side areas the triangle network covers. Examples are Forders Sidings on the Marston Vale Railway which could allow a recycling by rail operation to be considered. Moreover a Covanta Incinerator proposed near the sidings, could, as a planning requirement be made to install rail access and bring in material for bringing in by rail and take the old ash out for other uses.

Recycling of bulky materials goods like old cars, glass and fridges lend to what rail can convey in bulk but must be done on a regional plan niche and nurture scale. But keeping the hub and having a plan is all important. Likewise Brackmills is a major warehouse and distribution hub off the A45 and the Northampton-Bedford line, with Maritime Containers based there. If the railway is restored, more containers by rail from the major logistics and distribution regional hub Brackmills; links with could again lend itself to new flows of rail use once tracks are available for such hypothecation in planning. The links between north-south main lines and junctioning of Northampton means flexibility in longer distance flows and another gain is more capacity overall across the network. This has to be healthy for catering for growth, reducing cancellations and delays and ensuring places like Milton Keynes Central Station can cater for more trains calling at it. Without Northampton-Bedford, constraints hold back the aspiration of the people in seeking to contra commute, find work, create jobs and enable society to more cohesively function. This job is not down to the instigators of the law and enforcement, but the transport and robustness of a system which allows diverse flows to be delivered in a timely and cost effective manner. Rail could play a greater role with Northampton-Bedford in what it offers but also to the wider adjacent existing rail network and the places served.

9. The Road Case:

A509

This road links the A45 and M1, A14-A45 and roads to and from Kettering, Corby and south to Milton Keynes and beyond to Luton, London, Aylesbury and Oxford. It originally went to join the A5 at Hockcliffe and whilst that artery is distinguishable still to the discerning eye, the A509 'main' was diverted to lead into the Milton Keynes Central area and shopping centre access to link just over the WCML on the A5 bypass, west of the central Milton Keynes area, many miles north of Hockcliffe. Yet for all the growth of the last 45 years, the stimulus of new commuting options, the growth of population and spatial distances relative to time meaning living further out and drive time gains as a lifestyle, the popularity of the trunk road reinforces the satellite residency of Olney to urban Milton Keynes and few gains beyond dormitory living and spending and schooling. The other side of the A509 as a busy artery is that it saves A45 logistical movements accessing the M1 via Northampton, which gets congested to gridlock often, but this results in many juggernaut lorries pounding through Olney causing hubbub, delay and hazards to hard pressed pedestrians, cyclists and other road users. Can anything be done? The idea of a bypass has long been mooted but many local business people are of a view it would dent trade and inform a spiral decline and change of character on the negative side. Moreover, more growth will exacerbate congestion at A509/M1/Coachway and H5 PORTWAY, H6 Childs Way and at the A422/A509 roundabout too potentially where queues of traffic to and from M1/Milton Keynes cluster increasingly. To add a bypass would attract more usership and thus exacerbate the potential which is negative plus put a pressure to find more land for

parking. Olney lacks the public transport infrastructure to make park and ride and lacks the population to make circular self contained bus loops viable. So it enjoys intertwining with wider rural bus services, principally the No. 21 and No. 41 with a smattering of others out of Wolverton on a very part time basis. How might the rail link help? Without a bypass, the rail link would cream off those commuting to London within a 5 mile radial catchment of Olney which includes Warrington and Bozeat and everything south of Wollaston for example. This helps cater for growth (a context on-going like it or not) but also brings in flows of people who would spend their money in local outlets, which is why close proximity to the High Street of such as railway and station with decent cycle paths, is essential to inform an inter-modal coherence. Buses could also link and feed into the station and it to them in distributor access terms by joined up public transport in the quasi rural context.

A428

The A428 links Bedford and Northampton and whilst there is commuting along the corridor between the towns and healthy loadings on the No. 41 bus, the difference is that rarely is there long queues to the A45 from A428 but rather congestion into and accessing urban Northampton within the bypass cordon itself, be it volume of vehicles to road space, other congestion blocking junctions in or out and the volume of demand for parking and limitations of space and ability to make capacity available due to a built situation. Demolition erodes character and character, as zoning and quartering suggests, is sellable, marketable and so of value, a value which has to be pitted against people coming to work or queuing up to do a weekly shop. The sending to out of town means a drain on quality spend and volume spend in town centres, which then drain other shops or businesses. This is the strain Northampton and elsewhere has long faced and is compounded. At the Bedford end, long queues from A428 and A422 into Bedford be it for schools, Bedford Midland Railway Station or wider or other reasons, have been growing over the last few decades and whilst the completion of the Western Bypass and A6 Link in April 2016 has massaged these queues, the changing pattern is underscored by the fact that despite growth along the corridor going in bit by bit, the reestablishment of queues and the current demand-supply discourse on parking and land-use allocations with plethora of need be it homes, jobs or other uses, exacerbates and informs a tussle and with no railway option, looks to worsen rather than improve in the medium term. So how could the railway help? On a larger scale to Olney, the railway would bring people from beyond both ends to the corridor and to the principal towns it would serve, Northampton, Olney and Bedford and especially Northampton and Bedford. That is for Northampton and Bedford:

- Airports to Campus' and Town Centres
- Footfall and spend minus the cars and lorries
- Rejuvenated town centres
- Land for other uses
- A cleaner and pleasant environment
- Savings on road and other structural wear and tear
- Savings in fuel and time wasted in congestion to businesses and members of the public.
- Access to seats on trains for London and contra journeys currently not available
- Infrastructure enabling guidance to be given to use public transport and leave the car at home except for essential journeys. Some carrot in reasonable fares on the one hand, some stick whereby if you insist on driving where there's limited capacity, parking charges will go up including more Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ) for example. Ideally revenues from these schemes could be ploughed into better public transport and to mediate fares to be competitive as possible.

M1

The cordons of the M1 which are of interest to us are South of Leicester and Lutterworth to Milton Keynes, Luton and London and vice versa. This is the scope the rail link could make a contribution to. The M1 between Luton and Northampton 'core route' flow, gets congested and standstills often, and building is blocked by virtue of urban development to the sides of the motorway requiring serious relocation and demolition which could be socially unacceptable and arguably commute the pain of congestion to innocent bystanders than the more humane option of providing the rail alternative. So the rail link would provide Luton-Northampton and vice versa alternative mode of transport and by virtue of it being part of Thameslink, let alone any London Midland passenger and freight e.g. Northampton-Bedford (interchanges) – Bletchley (loop around Milton Keynes Central) which means Northampton-London options and vice versa are tabled as well as the East-West angle of Birmingham-Cambridge and Norwich/Ipswich/Stansted 'South Midlands Link' by virtue of inserting infrastructure between Northampton-Bedford-Cambridge, a A14 end to end rail alternative for passenger and some freight options potentially. This cuts some traffic coming through the A14-M1/M6 convergences at Lutterworth and Leicester-Northampton Loop near DIRFT would enable Lutterworth to be rail served once more and by one line enable Rugby and Northampton-Leicester direct rail flows, saving plethora of other rail reopenings and stewarding limited investment to multiple uses and access' e.g. F2P and P2N – Lutterworth/DIRFT and West Coast, another rail distributor corridor 'not by London' freeing up capacity on north-south main lines and enabling the plethora of rail linked depots seeking to be developed off the WCML to be directed to making use and being investors in as a pre-planning requirement these alternative rail route options and to make use of them even in growth terms of more freight by rail, a stated Government goal.

A6-A5 arc

The A6 North of Bedford goes to Rushden (population 29, 272 source <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rushden>) arcing to the A5 at Towcester is the swathe of optimum catchment the Bedford-Northampton corridor rail link could reasonably serve as it is bang central to such an arc fanning out from Bedford and reverse Northampton. Towcester has no railway and on the A5, one has to drive to Northampton or Wolverton for rail access. Were a station provided on the A508 at Roade, that could court business there otherwise Olney further across via Hanslope and Stoke Goldington (B526). Likewise Rushden currently has to use Bedford Midland or Wellingborough to access rail and again Olney Parkway would be another option notwithstanding if any station North of Bedford on the Midland Main Line is coming about be it Sharnbrook, Oakley or Irchester or all three if wires are extended north to Corby and local services via Thameslink are envisioned. But this vast swathe of countryside peppered with many growing villages makes a huge population catchment the Northampton-Bedford line would potentially serve and benefit as a result.

A508 (Northampton-MK M1 bypass commute)

The A508 is a busy artery from the A5 and A422 (Oxford) to Northampton and M1 thereof. It carries many juggernauts, vans and cars like Olney which thunder through the village of Roade cutting the village in half and making hazardous conditions to negotiate crossing such a busy road in between residential areas like Olney, bringing dust and noise. ERTA has suggested a station to the south of the village with a new road bypass and have leafleting the village asking views which seemed to chime with these twin objectives. Moreover the population distribution was as follows:

We convene forums in the area to bring people together hopeful that champions will emerge and take a lead to get the ideas advanced and widely supported up to a strategic Local Government level.

A43

The A43 which becomes the A34 links Northampton to Bicester, M40, and Oxford and onwards to both Swindon/M4 and Southampton/M3 arteries. It is a principal dual carriageway route and like the A14 carries huge volumes of mixed traffic every day throughout daylight hours. This road ends up at Northampton where it hits gridlock congestion because of and located around the M1 as per the A45 coming inwards from the A14 and the East generally. The A43 bypasses Towcester and blocks the old railway courses which used to link Northampton and Olney to Stratford upon Avon in pre-closure era (1960's). Bedford-Northampton as we have said would help reduce A45 as part of a South Midlands Link and reduce M1 flows by virtue of a Luton-Northampton rail alternative, winning on speed and more options and by virtue of these, help cream off the congestion afflicting Northampton. Moreover Milton Keynes-Oxford rail link and services will help the traffic pressures from Bicester-Oxford and these combined would help cream off A43 traffic volumes at the edges. Obviously if a Great Central rail link was reopened from Leicester-Lutterworth-Rugby-Brackley with links onto the East – West Rail scheme at Claydon, Park and Ride at Brackley for London, Reading or Oxford could be done. But Northampton-Milton Keynes-Bletchley-Oxford by rail has to recognise currently the volume and capacity and pathing restrictions inherent of the WCML south of Rugby and with plethora of demands on limited if any spare capacity, with the push for faster trains on main lines too; the rail option is restricted. However a Northampton-Bedford-Bletchley rail link would help offer new access and paths to serve the Northampton-Oxford flow and end to end attack even more the need to use the A43 end to end when rail be it passenger or freight could offer an alternative.

Clearly you cannot – even if wanted – switch freight from clogging up key road arteries without more track capacity as Northampton-Bedford could inform relating with other adjoining rail links. The situation is that Northampton-Bedford-Cambridge would offer the Felixstowe-Northampton and West Midlands end to end rail alternative which offers time savings and efficiency which currently is not on offer. The A43 Northampton-Silverstone-Brackley-Oxford route is a very heavily used commute artery and delivers, as per the eastern coming A45, large quantities of traffic to urban Northampton whose bypasses and road network often grinds to gridlock and in a context of growth using what exists means that the situation will get considerably worse balanced by the fact businesses are relocating which again runs the risk of losing trade and jobs which then lowers the spend-ability of the area with spiral town centre shut downs and a sense of foreboding. Bedford-Northampton as part of a rail alternative network offers relief and flows of footfall and spend which would rebalance these equations.

10. General

Local Aspects

The rail link would help commuters get a parking lot and seat outside main urban cordons closer to home. It would not destroy the much prized 'drive-time' but reduce the length of it, saving fuel and money as well as congestion. The latter would in turn speed up public transport and local business logistics and deliveries, cutting waste and increasing efficiencies, small savings add up and on slender and competitive finances can make a critical difference to staying in a market or withdrawal. It would allow more options for access both rural and urban landscapes for the plethora of reasons people do now be it work, study, shop, school or leisure. By freeing up urban parking spaces the railway quantitatively helps urban user's access public transport outlets like local railway stations easier, saving on-street parking and street intrusion who naturally want to park near where they live. Town centres would be rejuvenated by new and sustainable flows of footfall and spend from day to day operations but also events and sporting fixtures for example, bringing the crowds minus

their cars. This adds to the economic viability of places but also makes events more patronised and enables growth to be managed properly than spilling over to communities and making it inconvenient for others who may not hanker after them so much as fans be it rowing, rugby, football or any other sport or event. This additional leisure artery enables more visitors and interest in local places like Olney for their own sake and by being part of a nationwide network of rail transport means greater numbers potential. The contra commute and outside peak time extra users filling currently dormant or empty seats makes good economic sense to rail in keeping rolling stock utilised, ensuring power supply is for some good operational purpose than passive and in off peak receipts helping to balance the books of a more even spread of passenger and freight by rail than am/pm peak heavy and scant off peak figures. The benefits of contra commute like Luton-Bedford-Northampton and vice versa, adds new usership to rail and associated wider benefits that offers in lifestyle choice to the individual and empowerment plus the wider community benefits of investment in communities flowing and schemes like local £ as per Lewes in East Sussex, being more realisable and other local promotions to draw in footfall and spend in a competitive market be it retail, consumption of food and drink or entertainment venues.

Regional Aspects

The railway bestrides 3 regions so one investment in it makes a good return x3 specific areas with their own character safely underscored by the revival of a local transport mode hitherto denied for 50 plus years. The investment in the communities it would serve would show faith and confidence as well as a basic understanding of what is needed to underpin the strategic position of the places and corridors the rail link would serve and their robust standing contrast neighbours who may not be rail connected or well served by public transport (buses have been withdrawn in some cases, whilst the railway went in the 1960's). The railway links the Northampton-Birmingham corridor with the Bedford-Luton-Brighton Thameslink corridor and these two would feed each other end to end with the middle part Cobbler Line enjoying the buzz at the centre of a long single train either way joined up rail network of about 170 miles end to end. The impact on luring people out of their cars depends very much on a timely progression to the railway, service, frequency, type of rolling stock attuned to local needs for example adequate cycle carrying capacity, rails ability to be more flexible and turn to serve various markets, in some cases using the same trains e.g. local produce to the local urban centres, perishable by rail, fresh cut flowers in boxes by rail, pushchairs, prams and buggies by rail and so much more. The technology exists for a curtain sided wagon to be loaded and unloaded by forklift and thus pallet-load to small container load to be nurtured by rail. Unless there's a national wish, plan and push and translating to design of adequate fleets of start small and grow wagon potential, these exciting 21st century ideas cannot be realised. Nonetheless a Class 700 Thameslink Train or a Desiro from London Midland, passenger-wise would be totally adequate as a basic passenger stock for most users and far outweigh anything road transport can offer currently.

Journeys from Luton-Northampton, Rugby-Bedford, Northampton – London and St Albans – Coventry would all be possible with Cobbler Line rails being restored; without it the gap remains, business goes elsewhere and losses are ever more keenly felt as more small business' lack infrastructure to compete with larger players in any given market – supermarket beer selling at £1 a bottle whilst a pub does the same pint for £4 and these examples be it on-line shopping, costs of returns of unwanted goods and much else. Bigger players can absorb costs more than small business' and afford the latest technology and marketing deployments – so for small to medium business' upwards the local rail link could make a critical difference, tapping into the audiences of 3 regions on just one rail link. It would put the area in a far more competitive position and able to take advantage of it. On the rail side, the creation of the Bletchley-Bedford-Northampton loop link would

enable more trains to serve Milton Keynes Central, without it, Milton Keynes is being denied its objective potential and is missing out on a trick passenger and goods-wise.

Inter-regional

Traversing from Northampton to Olney and Bedford is to traverse 3 regions. But longer journeys to and from and through would be possible which are not currently. The coming of an East-West rail link (Oxford-Bedford-Cambridge) adds a whole new dimension whereby Birmingham-Cambridge via Northampton and Bedford would tap into a currently unreached swathe or journeying currently entirely road based and help even out the statistics let alone help stem them in a context of growth of socio-economic activity and volumes of survival motivated seeking jobs wherever they are and wanting the time-distance-cost penalties to be reduced to make work pay lower grassroots upwards. Governments seem reticent to grasp these links and equations let alone put a sum to them in cost-gain ratios rather than isolate different transport as if usership with a completely different subjects akin to maths and biology! Clearly if Cobbler Line links West Midlands and East Anglia focused on Bedford – which Milton Keynes cannot do but can on the back of it accommodate more through trains and access from Oxford, Aylesbury, West London and Bedford Marston Vale; then it is a win-win for more diversity of rail solutions and should be seen in that positive light not played one off against another with the only winners being more of the dysfunctional status quo same and more congestion, parking demand, land-use conflicts and tough decision which hurt people, places and community cohesion.

Passenger

If 2 Thameslinks run on to Northampton or Rugby initially and x2 Desiros do Northampton-Bedford-Bletchley (latter would need electrifying), that makes 4 trains an hour during the day and maybe 2 an hour off peak and Sunday services of a similar patterning, remembering we are no longer talking country branch lines, but integral rail operations as part of a wider network. The dynamics are different, the benefits ever present where existent.

Freight

Given the plethora of applications for rail-linked warehouses such as DIRFT growing, Blisworth Freight Depot and others as well as the missed opportunity that is Wolverton, the reality is that they will generate more lorry movements and congestion as well as demand paths which passenger and existing freight flows require unless lost to rail or alternative routes become available. Cobbler Line is an alternative route, it is a capacity provider, it does create potential for new flows and growth whilst consolidating existing flows. That is a vibrant railway vision and given the East Coast is east of the WCML and places like Milton Keynes and Northampton which are served by it; the idea of the current situation whereby freight is hauled by rail from Felixstowe-London-West Midlands for want of a more direct rail link makes 150 miles of taking up paths unnecessarily. We need to create capacity which Cambridge-Bedford-Northampton would offer existing rail operations by going across and out of London and cut end to end timing and length from 150 miles to 50 miles (Cambridge-Bedford-Northampton). This would make savings and catering for new flows coming on stream of passenger and freight operations. The A14 is being widened at £million of Government expenditure whilst the money available for reopening an equivalent rail is wholly inadequate or quashed by the Treasury/DfT citing reducing national debt as a key goal overriding investment like a new local rail link; the disparity is not lost. The A14 will clog up, end to end with stack up and the overall result is a worsening situation compounding gridlock around Northampton, slowing deliveries and sending relocation elsewhere. Clearly these trends needs turning around and not

before time but if it were private gagging to do so or public or a partnership, it is unclear who those candidates might be and yet the common benefit remains tabled here.

Environment

Clearly expanding roads takes up more land than relaying railway does. The constant stream of fumes goes onto the land and hedgerows which pollutes fruit, water courses and crops and erodes the objective purity of production, fauna and flora. Whereas once a train goes by, it emits very little and silence returns. Likewise electric trains emit no fumes unlike diesel and electricity itself can be generated from green-clean renewable energy which powers ¼ of Britain's energy requirements, helping to keep the lights on.

11. Physical

The Old route

The old route veered north of Bedford towards Stevington, Turvey, Olney via Clifton Reynes and onwards through Piddington to Northampton first St John's, then Bridge Street and ultimately Castle Station. Today tracks have long been lifted. The bit between the Midland Main Line is a ploughed field. Beyond that in the Stevington area, it is a public access corridor called The Stevington Walk. Beyond that the trackbed is distinguishable but is in private hands. At Turvey out-buildings occupy the old station track-way and at Olney the old station site is completely obliterated and luxury housing built, akin to Blunham on the old Bedford-Cambridge route wanted for reopening as a part of the East-West Rail scheme. Beyond Olney it is farmland, pond chains and forestry until private dwelling at Piddington and then linear parkland at Great Houghton to Brackmills where it is a mix of disused, fenced off trackbed just redundant and private land to London Road and Network Rail west of London Road to Castle Station. The threats are at Bedford, Olney and Northampton mainly from piecemeal developments which pay no regard to the rail notion and idea to a road-link at Northampton of dubious claim to ease congestion, more likely compound and deny Northampton its chance for the rail link.

Proposed Preferred Route

Our understanding is that the new route would rely on new direct tracks linking Marston Vale/Bedford-Cambridge through Bedford Station (needs remodelling) to link to the slow lines north of Bromham Road Bridge (A428). From there a grade separated flyover would take tracks off towards the west onto the old track-way and slewing the Stevington Walk (which could be extended to Turvey potentially with a cycle-way). Deviation around Station End, Turvey would be required. From Turvey using the old alignment on embankment as much as possible a new route around Olney and river crossing would be required to the north of existing modern day built Olney. This could be the Handley Alignment (see Fig whatever) or a more exaggerated curve, which raises contours and speed limits on a gradient and how a station can be fitted into that design theatre and retain a comfortable proximity to Olney High Street to enable walking and cycling to be access options for most people between the heart of the town centre/market square and the new local railway station. From Olney over Yardley Road and using the old trackbed or adjacent fields where blockages arise; special dispensation would be needed to recover the route through the forest thicket that is part of Castle Ashby Estate and bypassing to the north of Piddington Station. To then enter Brackmills on the old trackbed to link with Castle Station (some remodelling may be advantageous such as baying for London trains from the south as well as crossovers for Bedford trains to enable baying as well as through journeying without changing.

Main blocks and issues on relay

- Cost of Flyover and Bedford Station remodelling
- 2 bridges over Bromham/Oakley/Stevington Road
- Deviation and new road access A428 at Station End Turvey
- Major new deviation at Olney
- Access through Yardley-Castle Ashby Estate
- Diversion at Piddington
- Relaying into Northampton
- New access across London Road Northampton
- Remodelling Castle Station track and platform capacity-wise.
- General relaying or minor deviation elsewhere where old trackbed is unwilling to be given back or more substantial blockages impinge reasonable recovery as per any other reopening of this nature encounters after 50 plus years of closure.

Alternative route pros and cons- The Old route in recent times

A principle of approach has been that we take the former trackbed (the route the railway once followed) as our starting basis. There once was a railway linking Bedford-Olney-Northampton direct. Our approach has been to call for its protection and we started that action in 1997 amidst many sceptics and opponents of any change. By the time we had started some 40 years had elapsed since removal of tracks from Oakley Junction (Bedford end) to (then) a stub of mainly single track which laid dormant except for occasional engineers trains and test vehicles from Northampton Castle Station to Brackmills Industrial Estate which contains many regional logistics hubs for many well known brands and large companies from Cocoa Cola to Howdens to John Lewis and ASDA for example. Indeed in the early naughties there had been talk of Cocoa Cola wanting a rail served facility using part of the route but alas it came to nothing. East of Brackmills the trackbed had been turned into a linear park as far as Great Houghton, a modest sized village quickly becoming urbanised and which acts as a thoroughfare between the B526 (Northampton-Newport Pagnell Road) and the A428 and vice versa. People at the A428 end can turn right and then a left at Brafield towards Billing and eastern Northampton urban spread as well as the A45. This saves engaging with congestion going into and out of Northampton town centre. So it is an appealing route for savvy drivers! East of Great Houghton, we have the old trackbed laid dormant, integrated to agriculture and largely undistinguishable. After Horton Road, we enter private dwelling at former Piddington Station before embarking the Castle Ashby Forest lands before thence more agriculture and conservation ponds before hitting the gap at Yardley Road, the blockage of a warehouse of the old route at Olney Industrial Estate where eastwards to the A509 roundabout the old trackbed emerges as a landscape feature to green steel and glass constructions between it and the sewerage works. A large gap over the A509 at height and gradient exists to be bridged (were we to use the old trackbed) and then the old Olney Station site is now occupied with expensive housing. A gap then exists across the River Great Ouse whence the old trackbed is distinguishable to the back of Station End Turvey where annexes block the line and some luxury housing. Beyond the gap of the A428 we have combinations of private footpaths and then after another gap, the Stevington Walk where the double width of the trackbed is distinguishable. After two more road gaps where the Stevington, Bromham and Oakley roads meet, the trackbed is ploughed land until Oakley Junction.

Realignment suggestions

1. Some have suggested tunnelling under the Castle Ashby forest slightly to the north of the old route.
2. The Handley Alignment is one suggested realignment to avoid blockages at Olney but relies on immediate lands either side of Lavendon Road, A509 and across the River* to ensure continuum of route, station, bus interchange and all day safe pounded commuter parking can be catered for. Alternatives to the north of the Handley Alignment (whilst not being impossible to consider), raise issues of the landscape and gradients from the top of a cutting in a hill to the west to the river basin to the east, bridging the A509 and issues of access to the old route as well as the incline of gradient going north out of Olney along the A509. To continue to Lavendon and avoid Olney completely then begs the question of how you link back to the line at Station End Turvey or cross the A428 at some other point or link to the trackbed onwards to Bedford near the back of Hill Farm Hill.
3. At Bedford it is not envisaged that 110 mph trains will want flat level junctioning at Oakley Junction, so a flyover is needed off the slows north of the grid river bridge, north of Cut Throat Lane, now the Bedford Western Bypass. Whether there's sufficient land to widen the slow tracks for a single or double flyover for on-off trajectory to and from the old trackbed needs to be examined and the protection of the field to the north before Oakley for swing capacity is prudent.
4. Lands need to be protected at Olney and Turvey following the old route with modest deviations. Castle Ashby is dependent upon cooperation with their Estate Office, likewise deviation around Piddington Station.
5. The conservation ponds west of Yardley Road bridge gap will need relocating and these take years to bed in not months, so a long term plan is needed as well as other green belt and conservation features like hedgerows, fauna and flora.
6. We have as we go to press the threat of an inner link road between St James' and London Road, if that goes ahead the ability to link to Northampton as a 200, 000+ population is not defeated per se, but the objective of linking to the West Coast Main Line route and loop at Northampton Castle Station would be defeated and curtails many strategic and integrative benefits that may otherwise be self evident or accrue upon reopening; passenger and freight-wise.
7. A thorough cost benefit comparison of whether the distributor road will enhance the quality of people's lives, especially those who live along besides it in new housing to the benefits of being plugged into a wider rail network and that once a train goes by peace returns, whereas the road will be potentially up to 24x7 noise and exhausts, especially if traffic during peak times stacks up and awaits its turn into London Road amidst a second set of lights either side of its own junctioning. If it all bungs up to gridlock as has happened on occasion now, in the context of regional growths regardless of the railway being hypothecated or actualised; there can be no plan B, as highways tend to, like loss of countryside to development, a long term feature of any landscape. It begs, is our vision objective, is it wide enough and are we being a little too inward looking and missing the wider context of growth, development and traffic management impact?

Route safeguarding action

1. There is a need to curtail all development which may threaten any part of the route.
2. There is a need for Local Councils in Northampton, South Northants, Milton Keynes, Olney and Bedford to work together with stakeholder partners like LEP's, Chambers and educational establishments to agree the principle goal of reopening this line in the wider strategic and local benefit interest respectively and collaborate on whole route protection. Hitherto, we are less the convinced planning and developer applications have had a sufficient signal that this is the intent and goal and thus have not taken it into account and tailored planning applications sensitively to fit the

grain. Indeed we have letters showing this is patently not been the case despite of LSMMMS warnings to do so as far back as 2004.

3. A study of engineering aspects, environmental impacts and remedies to blockages is required to establish a definite route.

4. Studies on services, patterns and demand are also required to be updated, building on what's gone before. Nothing has changed except more development, more traffic and longer queues for anything. The railway offers an alternative and that has positive personal benefits, less waiting time, less waste and less stress.

Posthumous Update at February 2017 on Olney and other pinch points

The platform upon which society and how it affects the railway hope is that development pressures abound and push come to shove be it quotas or 'jobs-worthies' development is blinkered and without any obligation to take into account or consider the implications on what blocking a rail route may spirally have. Unless some policy, action and support translating to a determination of route protection can be nurtured, the railway is but lost and will become more so but for dreamers. Realignment is possible if it can reconcile one section of line to the other, new bypasses and new builds of miles of virgin railway may solve a problem in one spot but run into another elsewhere equally as challenging. New railways still need to junction and link with existing lines and main urban centres and if corridors or junctioning access is blocked or made prohibitive given new construction such as a flyover to slow lines rather than ground level as at Oakley Junction north of Bedford or the challenge of accessing roads where Network Rail's policy forbids a level crossing and gradient of road or rail bridging both adds costs and may be impracticable from a variety of evaluations including visual impact, all works against reopening the line. Conversely if the case exists and demand also, the cost of not reopening may be a compounding of negatives, a missing out on opportunities and the question of how long can a status quo of let's say congestion and emissions in urban areas proliferate and go on in a context of growth which translates to compound that negative trend with no cure in sight – paints a depressing scenario and that is what Bedford, Northampton and in various ways Olney and Milton Keynes face. This railway is pivotal to cure and whether it is one scheme or a chain of schemes with the ultimate re-railing and link up in mind, you have to start in the context you find and again, if a large backer can drive it through fine, otherwise it is likely to be incrementally nurtured by lawful means and ways to inform a re-railing ultimately.

Some situations we are aware of at March 2017 are:

1. **Northampton:** Threat of inner relief road from St James' to London Road plus removal of level crossing over London Road and residential growth informing an anti-rail bias and presumably a not wanting 24x7 traffic parked or emitting sulphur and nitro-dioxide which people passively have to breathe?

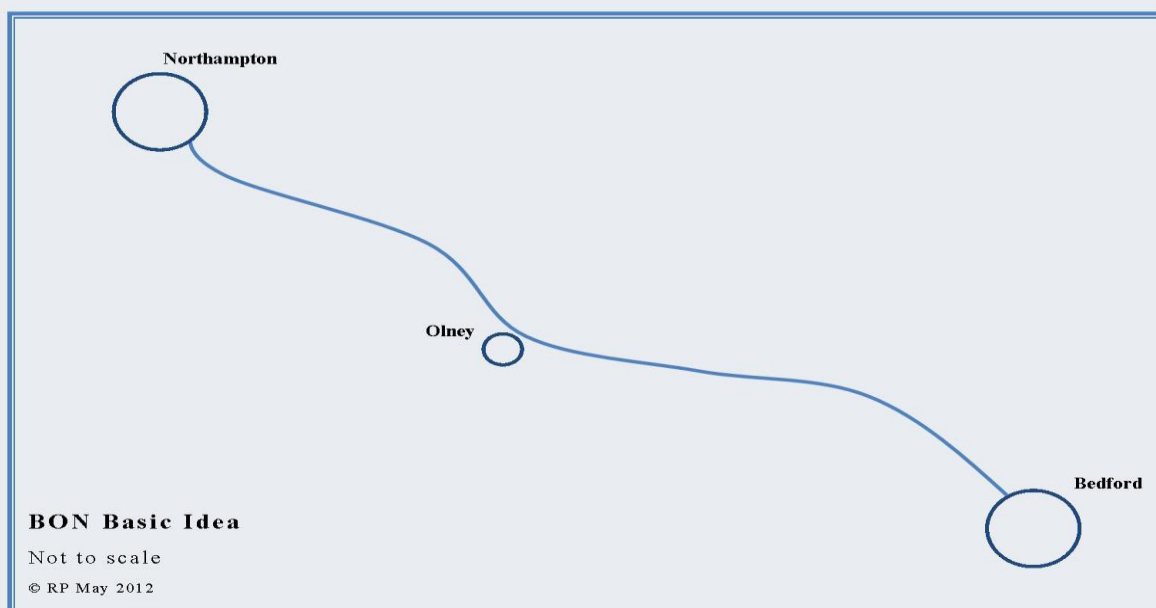
2. **Olney:** The new office and other development proliferation means that both the old route and Handley Alignment 2001 is lost. Thus a £30,000 study is required to assess what can be done, whether a new route is feasible and policies to protect such i.e. does Olney want a station with more parking for its vicinity on offer if a railway is pursued or will it object or seek to block that? A discussion and some soul-searching is required. Most traffic goes north-south on the A509 and a road bypass for Olney has long been seeing growing support and most of the through traffic does not park and the ratio of vehicles to parking capacity along the High Street is not matched and with growth will deny small business' of trade which otherwise may have been because the top fields are compromised with development sprawl.

3. **Turvey/A428:** Talk has been of a dualling of the A428 with bypasses from Bromham – A509 west of Lavendon. Whether this would assume course of old railway or be on other fields is uncertain but the brownfield created would command increasing development which would add to more traffic and commuting patterns. Given the nearest stations are Bedford Midland and Milton Keynes and/or M1 to Flitwick and Harlington for example, the parking demand and where to put it all is clearly a conundrum which some thought may need to be given plus location, location, location!

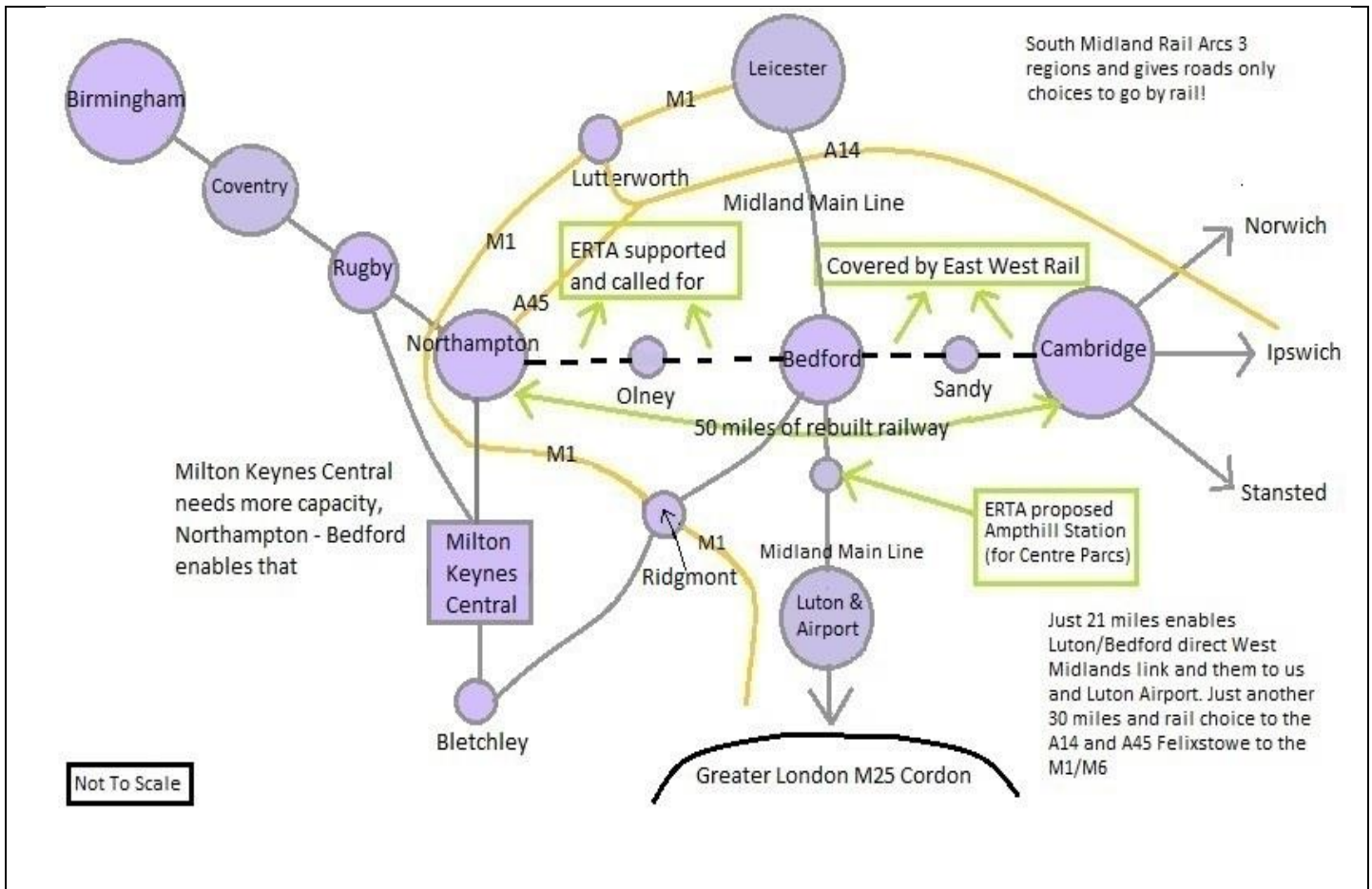
4. **This list is not exhaustive,** but just a headline start of a field work which needs to be taken into consideration. Again, to do nothing doesn't sort the problems out, they are now with us and proliferating, cost managed with winners and losers. Contrast the railway offering local commuting for the majority of populations who cannot or choose not to live a London centric commute existence.



Above: The newly reopened Borders Railway between Edinburgh and Tweedbank has far exceeded expectations of usership and the footfall and spend it has brought to mainly small towns and outlying areas. It is used by commuters as well as visitors to the area and has created jobs both indirectly and directly too. It is now being considered to extend all the way back to Harwick. It started with a vision and actions to bring it about in a context of other priorities and protractations, but succeeded.



12. Photographic and commentary



Above Caption: Diagram above shows how a Northampton-Bedford rail link would relate with East-West Consortium aspiration for a new Bedford-Sandy-Cambridge rail link to inform a cross-country direct east-west railway capable to bring people and goods from East Anglia to the Central South and East Midlands areas and offer end to end wide regional relief.

Caption Right: The old station house at Turvey Station End is now in private hands. A



realignment or new railway would be required with new configuration aided if landowners want it or not and whether more piecemeal housing and getting over the A428 will help or hinder reasonable rail route recovery.



Above: Welcome to Northampton indeed! Northampton, one of the largest towns in England with probably one of the fewest rail destination choices for a town of its size anywhere. It is on a loop off the West Coast Main Line (WCML) and thanks to the closures of the 1960's lacks radial rail links to neighbouring places like Oxford, Leicester, Peterborough, Wellingborough, Kettering and Bedford. The English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) and its predecessor the Bedfordshire Railway and Transport Association (BRTA) have advocated reopening the line to Bedford formally since 1998.

Below: When BRTA was set up in 1997, about a year later the Northampton Rail Users Group (NRUG) was also set up. They have focused more on advocating improvements to existing services. Indeed they have expressed a lack of support for a reopened rail link to Bedford at various times. The simple fact is, laudable as the new railway station may be and lifts to go with it are, they cannot compensate for a strategically central geographically positioned place such as Northampton is and the need for a rail alternative to total road reliance and gridlock. Indeed, left to existing trends, failure to reopen means growing land-take demand for parking.





Above: The new station at Northampton has attracted other development of a similar design nearby. However ERTA's focus is not so much on aesthetical considerations as whether the layout of land and tracks and platform accommodation is such as to cater for any expansion of existing services and indeed a reopened rail link to and from Bedford and the wider connectivity that could engender in terminating passenger workings at both ends and indeed more freight by rail per chance. Will Bedford be any different?

Below: Certainly another platform and track for London terminating trains could be slotted into the western side of the Station informing a cascading of tracks and services, but whether this would engender room for a double-track junction off the Brackmills stub of the former line which linked to Bedford remains to be seen and some work will be required to redesign and accommodate in years to come. Railways deliver bulk of people and goods and the overall relief and investment of footfall and flow following from such needs appreciation.





Above: Looking south from the road bridge (circa 2014) immediately south of Northampton Castle Railway Station. The car park occupies land once used by railway tracks and whilst connection to existing lines is possible with this layout, it would need remodelling to ensure fast transition into and out of the station. Reclaiming this land for an extra track would still leave plenty of room for cars and even another tier on top, but whether the track could continue given the new station design and proximity on the northern side of the bridge remains to be seen.

Below: Taken circa 1998, this southern facing picture clearly shows the Brackmills Branch going off to the left of the picture with the remnant signal box then still in situ. It is this single track which is a critical access to start any reopening towards Bedford.

It would be a new railway using the old trackbed where possible as a starting point in design work with realignments where blockages exist. BRTA and ERTA have spent much time seeking route protection including lodging objections to encroaching development threats and in the 2001 pre-feasibility study, showing how realignment can be done at Olney for example. These twin tracks on the Northampton loop are principal arteries for freight and growth in the sectors requires capacity.





Above: The modern railway commands a commuting following of growing proportions. Overcrowding and the cost of Season Tickets are often in the news. The cuts to local feeder lines have concentrated commuting to the nearest main stations in urban areas bringing huge numbers of cars and subsequent rush-hour congestion. The new station has doubled the car parking capacity at Northampton with growth in mind but this model of planning only takes us so far before more land-take is required. Brownfield land is not always easy to lay hands on adjacent to stations and other demands such as housing or employment means competition and cost ratios are considerations in such expansions.

Below: The Brackmills Branch in 2014 looking westwards from Towcester Road Bridge. In the process of dismantling a new road link from St James' to Bridge Street/London Road threatens to add a blockage to the reopening corridor. Given Network Rail's anti-level crossing policy and costs of bridging (if such could be done), the prohibitive configuration of reopening faces this and Bridge Street/London Road as obstacles needing to be tackled. Key is, does the prize of reopening with the capacity for existing rail users and services outweigh the pain of scaling back these roads or making exceptions given bridges may not be do-able? A flexible approach is required. Again corridors are not passive; they need proactive management and instigative plans of protection by lawful means and ways.





Above: Taken in 1998 when the Brackmills Branch was still operational, we look towards the former site of Bridge Street Station, the Network Rail Engineering Depot and in the distance Far Cotton and the crossing over London Road. All this is now residential development and space only for a single track railway has been retained just. However once a train has passed, it is quiet, whereas a link road could engender 24 x 7 traffic flows with subsequent noise and where congested, standing traffic with exhaust fumes. The harmful effects of exhaust emissions are being better understood and action should follow.

Below: The new order taken 2014 from Towcester Road Bridge looking eastwards. Clearly if cleared, this railway corridor could be recoverable. Surely such is far more preferable than an urban race track? ERTA argues that given the A45 and Victoria Parade with London Road gets congested; feeding more traffic into these corridors may be detrimental. Knocking out Northampton's last remaining rail reopening to the East; it would lock-in congestion, fumes and in a context of growth saturate the urban landscape with congestion. Detrimental to health, detrimental to accessibility. The rail link offers relief. This corridor needs a determination for the railway to give direction; otherwise the default is overgrown wasteland and blight or new road expansion with consequences.

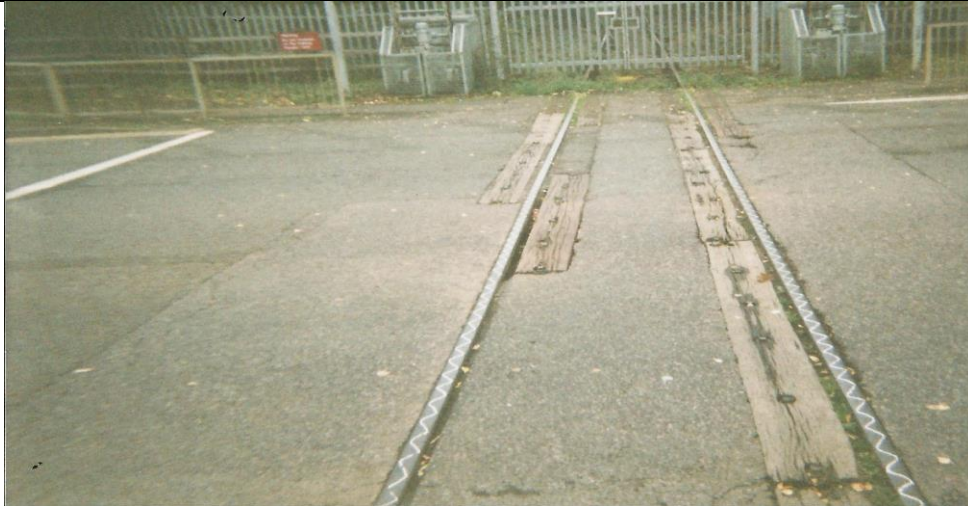




Above: Taken 1998, picture shows the Brackmills Branch just after where the Bedford and Wellingborough lines split. Indeed you can just make out the Wellingborough line on your left with its characteristic low bridge whilst the Bedford line, alias Brackmills Branch continues ahead. New warehouses went up then and new ones are going up all the time. Northampton is a main centre for logistical operations being located fairly halfway between London and the West Midlands and sitting within 20 miles of 3 regions South East, Eastern and its own East Midlands. The A14-A45 brings substantive traffic from a wider constituency to the urban area.

Below: The containers are stacked up on the Brackmills Estate ready for loading onto lorries. Modern Chinese ships can carry some 18, 000 containers per time and if we continue to have no rail link to the East, that's an awful lot of drivers and lorries pounding the road network, a proportion of which will do the A14-A45 Felixstowe – Northampton run. With Northampton-Bedford and East-West Rail's Bedford-Sandy-Cambridge rail link, a genuine 'not via London' rail direct link access will be on offer giving business' choice, flexibility and time saving options. If the UK economy is to work well, we need this rail link. A point is that if rails are not there, operators have no choice but to rely on road haulage. Road usage is subject to congestion and having the rails back, at least prospects the potential for more freight by rail and off the roads.





Above: Since the campaign for reopening the rail link started we have had some notable successes in defending the old trackbed from encroaching development. However the dismantling of the Brackmills Branch served as a psychological and televisual set back. Here we see whether the railway went across the main access road at Brackmills. It was envisaged that a station/halt could be provided here to help workers get to the growing industrial estate which commands its own bus services. Many of the warehouse regional hubs operate shifts, so a 22 hour per day half hourly Thameslink timetable would be just the ticket.

Below: A London Midland Passenger Franchise Operator liveried Desiro train at Bletchley. If the rail link to Bedford reopens these could operate over it from Birmingham to Bedford direct and/or Thameslink trains from Bedford could extend to Northampton and possibly bay at Rugby with faster West Coast connections. These smooth running modern trains are a far cry from the steamy images many perceive the railway from the past and would deliver journey times into and out of Olney of just 15 minutes each way, competitive with any other form of transport. In both cases of Bedford-Bletchley and Bedford-Northampton you could have a situation where multiple train operators provide alternate hour services informing a half hourly frequency. Just what we would relish.





Above: In 1998 the Brackmills Branch was still there and here we see the London Road level crossing and signal box. Alas by 2007 this was all swept away with the rails being taken out of the road-way in 2016. Thus it is a major challenge as to whether a level crossing would be put back or the road tunnelled under the railway. Resolving this and that of the St James' Road Link conundrum would be a major step forward in the reopening of the line. London Road is a busy road with junctions leading off of it. Whilst a reinstated level crossing could cause some inconvenience, the wider gains of less traffic generally may tip the balance in rail's favour.

Below: 2007 and the charred remains of London Road Signal box and crossing gates. We have to look below the surface and plug deeper into the wider context of Northampton, what we are trying to achieve and how the railway would fit with a transport management system which transfers journey's from roads to rails. The view for example that the A428 into Northampton is a lightly used road may well be true in itself but the route of the A14-A45 from Cambridgeshire and that of the M1 from Airport Way, Luton means that a wider catchment of which reopening the Bedford line is a necessary component if flows further afield are to be checked and won to rail as an alternative especially in local commute terms.





Above: With a doubling of the parking capacity at Northampton Station, there's still room for growth. However peak rush hour times informs a clogging up of main arterial roads around Northampton and the wider combination of traffic flows means that a combination of solutions needs to be found. Development generates traffic and as places need regeneration and development to create jobs and inform investment to areas to replenish themselves, so the growth of traffic increases even as the urban road network is constrained. ERTA identified halts/stations for Bridge Street/London Road, University Waterside Campus and at Brackmills as Northampton urban catchments for rail usership.

Below: Where the old Wellingborough line veered off from the Bedford line (right) in 1998. We looked at the Wellingborough option but the severance of the Wellingborough end with housing and the blockages around Whitworths and the A45 seemed insurmountable contrast the Bedford line which is essentially majoritively there given the Handley Alignment at Olney and a need to realign at Turvey Station End. Moreover whilst the Wellingborough line would have been handy from a Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough-Northampton commute perspective, the Bedford line offers access to Cambridge and Luton Airport as well as a second route to and from London. This is the acid test for where are the queues of entrepreneurs?





Above: An example of new industrial units springing up at the Brackmills Industrial Estate circa 1998. It is home to several regional distribution hubs for leading brand retail and other chains and commands a major haulage component. Ease of access off the A45 has been a growing cause for concern as congestion means delays and time is money. Competitive by ease of access means anything to check growing congestion and retain accessibility is crucial and the railway would offer much more. All development requires land for parking and growth in developed areas constrains it.

Below: We did toy with the idea of a Light Rail operation from Castle Station to Brackmills using what is still there with a Park and Ride facility. However the same issues of getting across London Road, costs, lack of a backer and scale of demand management and leadership which we were too small to muster meant the idea waned in favour of the wider reopening with the better links to the Midland Main Line, East-West Rail and 4 airports (Luton, Gatwick, Birmingham and Coventry) by one train. People who support Light Rail on the basis of cost, it being cheaper than conventional rail need to do and present the sums. Light rail on road makes more sense than conventional rail.



The Bedford – Northampton Rail Link



Reinstatement Pre-feasibility Study



Commissioned by
The Bedfordshire Railway
& Transport Association
(BRTA)



Initial Engineering Assessment

October 2001



E4



The Handley Partnership



Northampton like Milton Keynes, sits on the edge of 3 regional boundaries within 10 miles of each other, is well placed as a strategic logistics and communications hub. Yet despite this logistical concentration, due to the closures of the 1960's when the direct link to Peterborough was lost and Bedford, all subsequent development has informed east-west freight to be forced lion's share to go by road. The glaring gap in the network 'North of the North London Line, south of Peterborough-Leicester-Nuneaton, west of the West Coast Main Line and east of Cambridge' is approximately 100 miles north-south x 50 miles east-west. Such a gap means that when in 1973 Britain joined the EU and the Port of Felixstowe grew to take container freight, the development of containerised freight handling combined to make new roads a must. So we have the A14 from Felixstowe-Thrapston and beyond to the M6 at Lutterworth, we have the M1 from London to Leicester, again meeting the A14 and M6 at Lutterworth – which has no equivalent rail link of any description serving it – means vast sums on widening the A14 and repairing other roads including the A45 are perennial costs which could be turned to savings. The provision of an east-west rail alternative e.g. Cambridge-Bedford-Northampton would give choice, freedom, relief and give businesses the edge on logistical time-take and operations.





Above: Another shot circa 2007 of the burnt out relic of London Road signal box and level crossing. Whether it can be tunnelled for the road to go under the railway as per Bicester in Oxfordshire (proposed) remains to be seen otherwise the policy of Network Rail could be the deciding factor deterring reopening, which would be a great shame. We've had highs and lows in this campaign, including the Connex Saga when we thought a Train Operator would fund reopening to gain operational access to London given paths to Northampton were not available, alas somehow it did not happen.

Below: 2007 looking east from London Road, the extensive yard will be swept away by the Waterside University Campus. We are told the trackbed will be protected and not encroached upon by the University which if true is a welcome consideration as we very much see the potential in a station south of Northampton for student and wider public to use for rail access in and out of the area without recourse to Northampton Castle Station necessarily. The area around former Bridge Street Station is an immediate walking distance extensive population catchment with new housing infill development, Delapre Abbey, which is a growing visitor scene and the University with diverse and wider catchment audiences.





Unknown

Above: Given to us and salvaged from an old signal box this rare photo shows Blisworth Station which was a junction where trains from Bridge Street Northampton met with fast West Coast Trains and then went on to Towcester for the Midland and Stratford Joint Railway which went to Worcestershire. Again, whilst the railways suffered a post war blip in usership amidst Governmental constraints and subsidised bus and road competition, if the M&SJ and other lines survived, would they have been well used now? People look at Bedford-Bletchley and take a mixed impression, whereas Oxford-Bicester commands longer trains and a high train frequency.

Below: Olney has 2 buses which serve it lion's share.

They are the No. 41 Bedford-Olney-Northampton and the No. 21 Milton Keynes Central to Lavendon Cross via Newport Pagnell and Olney. As far as Olney is concerned, the No. 41 seems to pick up and drop off around half a dozen per bus, whereas the No. 21 seems to carry more people. Here we see a No. 21 bus heading south along the Yardley Road. These buses with the No. 37 play a distributor and feeder role on linking A428 villages with Olney and Olney with Big Brother Central Milton Keynes. Olney traditionally looked to Bedford and Northampton, but now is a satellite dormitory town; an extension is micro scale of Milton Keynes catchment for work, commuting and shopping, Bedford and Northampton being secondary.





Above: Olney Industrial Estate circa 2015. Believe it or not, these properties back onto the former Bedford-Northampton trackbed. The trackbed comes from the west over Yardley Road and diagonal across the Olney Industrial Estate. This is where units have been built on the old alignment. It emerges at the southern edge of the industrial estate. BRTA representatives made representations at an Inquiry on development of industrial offices and it was maintained that the old trackbed gave a benefit of landscaping quality which should be maintained. The other side was Drift Way which is a new link road between Yardley Road and the A509/Lavendon Road roundabout.

Below: Drift Way in all its splendour. It may be that if and as Olney expands, it will be better used; now it is mainly a part time used road. The hedgerow provides some screening for the Industrial Estate as well as a wind break onto the road itself. A new railway alignment is needed to be found north of the Sewage Works to swing round to link with the old trackbed east of the River Great Ouse, earth from a cutting could be used for embankment for bridging roads and river alike but it means extra cost, engineering challenge and a wedge of money for studying it and showing it can be done relative to the merits of doing it. Ideally a large backer would make that case and court the higher powers of Governmental interest which such a scheme requires.





Above: The A509 ploughs through Olney. As Milton Keynes has grown, so the radial roads take a toll of traffic to and from it. The A509 links not only Milton Keynes urban and Olney – a satellite dormitory town now – but also M1 – A45 at Wellingborough and links from there to A14 to Cambridgeshire, links also to Kettering, Corby and the East Midlands. It carries a weight of car, van and juggernaut lorry traffic of which, only a small proportion stops to shop in Olney. Crossing the main busy High Street has been known to take up to 20 minutes such can be the constant flow of traffic to and from along this main road. There have been calls for a bypass.

Below: Olney High Street/A509 carries a weight of traffic; but Olney has many small to medium sized businesses and shops which rely on casual trade which in turn requires sufficient parking. As the ratio of vehicles seeking parking to the capacity of road side parking slots to accommodate such widens, so parking pressure becomes a premium and that balance of demand and accommodation x the costs of running a business and rents in the des-res area juxtaposes to inform a delicate balance which highs and lows of income and spend can make the difference between staying open or bust. Olney is a 10 mile commute to M1 and Milton Keynes Central Station and the Milton Keynes end gets congested.

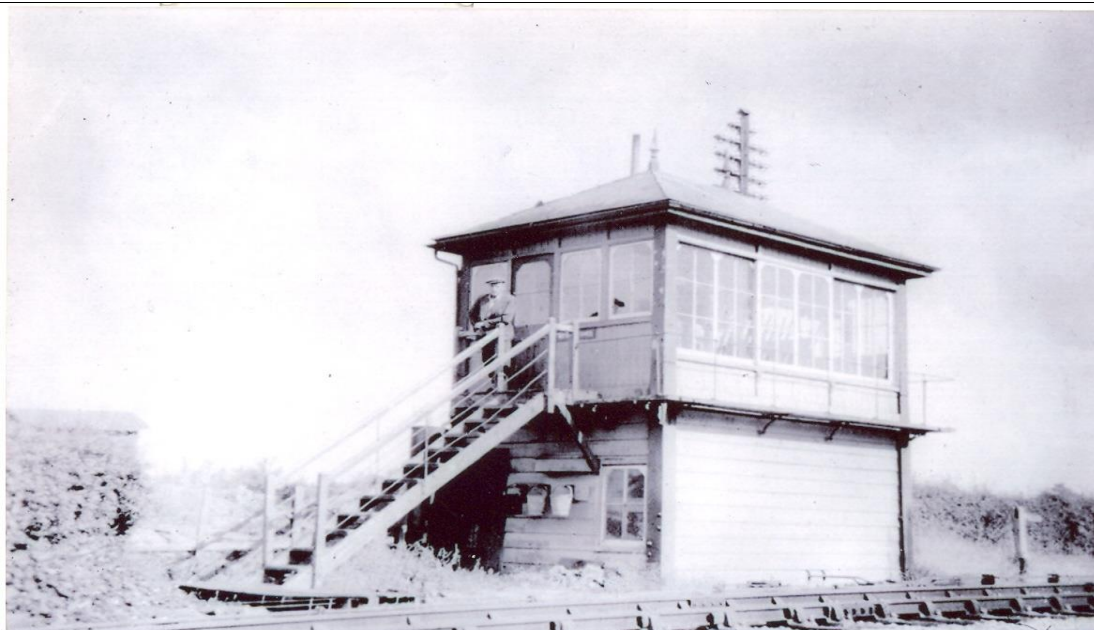




Above: The Brackmills Branch and view how it was for 15 of our 20 years of campaigning for a full reopening. We were disheartened when finally after years of dormancy Network Rail decided to withdraw the track, points and crossings to leave a fallow trackbed at nature's mercy and developer whim. It is vital that this route into Northampton is retained as development means that the only other entrance to link with the West Coast Main Line is at Roade and even that is now subject to development pressures eroding it as a fallback option. The Brackmills Branch is brimming with potential for want of a vision and funding.

Below: Passed to us at a model railway exhibition discreetly in a brown envelope, we are lead to believe this photo is somewhere near Yardley Crossing, west of Olney and a mid afternoon train winds its way eastwards. The Bedford-Northampton originally was a link built under the auspices of the Midland Railway whose rivals were the London and North Western Railway which merged with the Midland Railway to become the London, Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS) which was a most comprehensive collection of lines serving places great and small. Records including Fred Cockman's The Railway Age in Bedfordshire Book, shows that the local links and trade between the two larger towns of Bedford and Northampton was a key ingredient.





Above: From the same collection this Midland Signal box portrays a pride which local people and local railways combined together and it was personal; friends and families all had to do with the railway. It sustained local businesses and also created new employment. Until the 1955 Modernisation Plan the railway was used for diversionary traffic, freight, through movements of stock and the local service plodded along. In the early 1960's the Transport Users Consultative Committee (TUCC) proposed merging the Bedford-Hitchin Line with Bedford-Northampton and maybe running a regional service to Birmingham out of Kings Cross bestriding the cross-country arc. Alas this fell on deaf ears.

Below: A typical 1950's local Northampton-Bedford train ply's its way through towards Olney.

Olney had industries related to leather and so forth and freight and goods were brought in by rail. In these days when there is so much talk about 'cohesion' and mending society, one way is to restore a local railway to local people for their empowerment and convenience. You could attach a post office to local stations of sizeable populations and design in Guard's Vans to allow passenger trains to handle small loads too be it pallets, buggies, bikes, letters, parcels and boxed goods. This may seem like anathema to modern hard-nosed railway operations wanting Driver Only Operations (DOO), but more business is not to be sneezed at either.





Above: Richard Pill mans the BRTA Stall at the Olney Model Railway Exhibition. Starting to write letters to Brian Welch at then Northamptonshire County Council prior to 1997, as a part of the BRTA Richard insisted it takes over the effort for a Northampton-Bedford railway. Learning lessons from the 10 years earlier Bedford And Sandy Rail Reopening Association (BASRRA) he sought to build a team and set about orchestrating to raise £1500 for a pre-feasibility study, one part looking at the engineering aspects and the other at the basic case for reopening in service patterning. These actions courted public attention.

Below: Trackbed in Bedfordshire shows how, were certain agreements to come together including land owners, public, politicians and railway industry at large, the reopening of this railway in some places is a straightforward reclaim and relay job. A flyover at Oakley Junction would be required, new bridges put in, realigning Olney is the greatest challenge and getting into Northampton likewise. Apart from that it is a matter of reclaim, install new drainage, relay the trackbed, reballast and lay track. So out of 21.5 miles of railway, probably only 8 miles present engineering challenges, the rest is mainly relay. Paths and cycle-ways can be slewed either side with a fence to inform a sustainable public transport corridor for all.





Above: The fallow trackbed circa 2004. This is how it was near the Castle Ashby Estate which the old railway used to go through the southern end. Once a railway is reinstated ideally, fauna and flora could be managed to a degree to balance the lawful rail operational safety requirement – avoiding ‘leaves on the line’ with the proper nurture and sustaining of line-side vegetation and wildlife habitat be it birds and animals to newts and amphibian life. It is envisaged that were this railway restored as a core A428/A509 corridor relief agent and sustainability precursor to ensure that the balance between countryside and living quarters is retained pro-actively.

Below: Some of the old trackbed in nearly 60 years has of course been allowed to be virtually lost or integrated with modern day situations of urban and rural design. It is envisaged that a railway could also sport a cycle way and footpath alongside integrated with local road links to inform a leisure and visiting corridor whereby people have safe options to use modes of transport which are environmentally friendly. We are aware of ponds occupying the old trackbed west of Yardley Road for example. But with careful realignment on adjacent lands of the railway or relocation of the ponds to allow railway recovery, could be sensitively nurtured in a cooperation approach which does justice to dual interests rather than conflicting. It can be done, if there is a will to see the bigger arcing picture.





Above: The Yardley Road and the bases of the former abutments upon which this country lane takes No. 41 buses, carried the railway over the road. This road links Olney/A509 with Yardley and the A428 going West to Northampton, contrast the exact opposite Lavendon Road (A509-A428) goes eastwards in a similar fashion. If the railway is realigned North of the Olney Sewage Works then it is likely a new alignment and bridging would take north of this older location. That is why a new study with a professional consultant needs to be commissioned to establish a new route for the railway around Olney. There is no reason why managed hedgerows could be run parallel to a new local railway, informing nature and wildlife.

Below: Looking south towards the same abutment bases along Yardley Road. This tight bend is amazing that few if any accidents have happened and ideally would be cleared and the road lowered and straightened. But it is essential that the works include consideration for a new railway crossing and height clearance just north of the alignment with the Olney Sewage Works and at such a curve as to avoid farm houses on the west side. It can be done but needs qualifying in professional terms to draw the route specification and work up things like landscaping and the new cutting besides the Sewage Works, the earth displaced could be used to build new embankment for a level railway on gradient towards the River Great Ouse new crossing East of the A509, north of the Sewage Works. Land must be protected.





Above: Taken from the heights of urban developed Olney, central middle focuses on the distant factory tower on the corner of Midland Road, Olney. Olney is built on the side of a hill mainly with the River Great Ouse lapping two sides of the urban settlement. This puts a perennial flood plain and preservation of meadows associated with local poet William Cowper, pitted to an expanding population. In short to expand Olney has to go northwards or westwards. The intrusion of an A509 bypass – which is long overdue – would not create more brownfield as it would traverse flood plains mainly to link south side of the River Great Ouse. Either near Emberton or parallel to A509 to link at Chichley Roundabout.

Below: Looking south along Yardley Road, the gentle hillside views, the being located in countryside and relatively tranquil setting apart from the Olney High Street, means a des-res buy in as a dormitory overflow population from urban Milton Keynes moves in as traditional folk who remember it as a rural quasi light industrial location on the border of Beds, Bucks and Northants die off. This change in size, landscape and demographic reckoning means that the mindset has also changed. Whilst some richer folk send by the coach-load their children to private schools in Bedford the majority stay local, comprehensive and look to urban Milton Keynes and Newport Pagnell as progression trails to upper and college level education. However this shift from rail to road and direction does not mean a new local railway would not be used, it would!





Above: Off Yardley Road, is the Olney Industrial Estate where Souls of Olney Coaches are located amongst many other hidden gems. The railway old formation crossed from the north western corner across to the south eastern corner before crossing the A509 and entering the then station. The Handley Alignment 2001 sought to take into account that the old route was developed on, first with housing on the old station site off of Midland Road but also the impact of the sprawl of industrial units. Could these units be flexible to relocate to another industrial location if provided? That sort of trade-off needs to be explored by some local leadership.

Below: A509/Olney High Street looking northwards circa 2015. The roundabout in the distance is where the old railway would have crossed. It would have had to be raised anyway to make clearance for the many large juggernaut lorries which plough through the heart of Olney town centre and market place. Much of this through traffic is radial and constant and does not park up to shop at Olney. Olney lacks a large supermarket but does boast a comprehensive Coop and other smaller one-stop-shop type of outlets. Since Brocks Garage closed a few years ago, there's been no petrol pump forecourt. Sainsbury's was mooted to the field immediately north of the roundabout for an all in one experience, but floundered at the planning stages partly because of the other shop drain effect and partly due to highway safety considerations with other associated add-on development.





Above: Looking west circa 2014 at the remnant old alignment formation as it comes off the industrial estate on its diagonal axis to join the old formation east of the A509. The old railway always was on a gradient at this point but the development of luxury houses down Midland Road was an early loss of formation and now bridging the A509 at this point would be a major construction. If you get an Olney A509 road bypass, it would remove the juggernauts and some through traffic, but you still have to realign the railway to avoid now and future Olney sprawl onto virgin soil as it develops and grows as a dormitory satellite town of Milton Keynes. Nothing is straightforward!

Below: The new offices sit on what we called the Handley Alignment, which sought to avoid current as was developed lands when we started following our commissioning a study in two parts ending 2001 out of fund raising appeals. These modern offices bestride the lands south of the Sewage Works north of the old formation and industrial estate and the A509 roundabout. What amount are fully occupied, what amount are local employed people is for those so interested to ascertain. But a new railway alignment would have to come from the West over the A509 at an arcing angle and a cutting north of the Sewage Works and an exact trajectory to link up with the old formation east of Clifton Reynes is something a commissioned study would need to do, not us.





Above: View looking south circa 2015 along the A509. To the right is the new industrial unit slap bang on the Handley Alignment. This means that a new alignment north of the Sewage Works is now required. The field to the left (East of A509) is now to be developed, not as a supermarket but other ribbon development. Concerns are that the highway for reasonable and safe pedestrian access to these plots of development is not commensurate to the volume of traffic, the dual junctioning of access' and proper paths need to be made up in the Drift Way 'Milton Keynes' tradition of a Redway extension possibly beyond these developments but to incorporate Warrington and Lavenon.

Below: The field to the east of A509 where the Sainsbury's development was to go, which were it joined up planning would have provided a fuelling point adjacent to the northern access portal of a A509 Olney Bypass. Alas we have nothing like such a configuration now, but piecemeal sprawl taking fields and marking more and more land-take without properly thought through bus and rail provision now and in the medium term. This in a context of 'known' context of growth arcing the regions on all sides of Olney within a 10-12 mile parameter which will bring more cross-town traffic to its road network – East and West Street gets rat runs to circumvent queues of traffic as the sole lighted pedestrian pelican crossing turns red by the Bull Hotel to let pedestrian cross safely spirals and makes circumvention ever more attractive. East Street has no formal pedestrian or cycle pathing or lanes and has many driveways literally at right angles to it. The Highways need to play catch up!

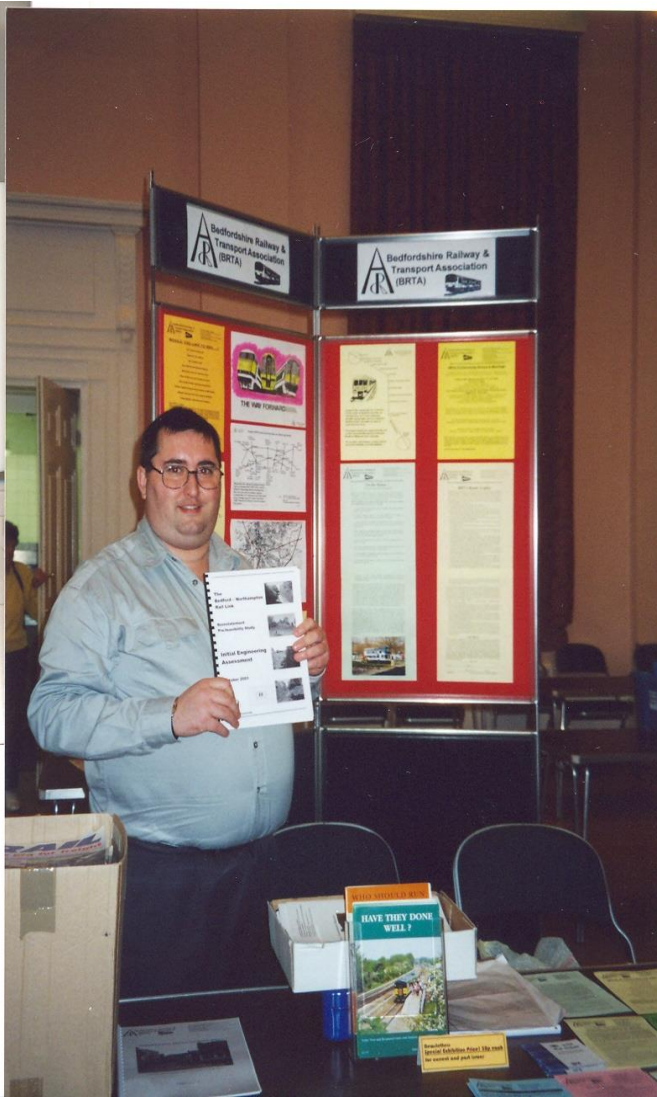




Above: Another shot at the A509 and Drift Way intersection at the roundabout with old railway formation to the right surrounded at ground level by a hedge and conifers. Inquiry ruled that the old trackbed must be left with its hedgerows for landscaping purposes but we fear more erosion of the old trackbed, clearances and loss of hedgerow habitat here and either side of Lavendon Road will make it less resilient for wildlife generally and uglify the landscape to a bleak 'roads are all' future for Olney locked-in. Whilst individuals live in isolated community bubbles around work commuting, school runs and town talk, opportunities are being compromised to roads only agendas.

Below: Lavendon Road, looking eastwards off of the A509 roundabout. To the right is land sandwiched by the old railway embankment and the road, which commanded two lovely hedgerows either side, now being systematically curtailed for piecemeal development. Call it 'progress' if you like, but the idea of a station on the left served by a local rail link to Bedford and Northampton would have given added parking capacity to Olney High Street and shops and been within walking and cycling distance of the High Street leading to the Market Square at the southern end of the High Street. Now a railway would have to go at a diagonal arcing angle to link from North of the Sewage Works on the west side of A509 to north of this field and arcingly at an angle to cross the River Great Ouse to rejoin the old trackbed formation.





Caption Left: Richard Pill (circa of 2005) poses to show a copy of the Handley Report at a display the predecessor organisation to ERTA, namely BRTA which stood for the Bedfordshire Railway and Transport Association (BRTA). It was as a member of BRTA that he instigated the drive for Bedford-Northampton, the first public group to call for its protection and nurtured restoration as a fully functioning Thameslink style modern railway. Studies confirmed that it would offer Olney-Northampton and Bedford apiece timescales of a 15 minute journey halving that taken by No. 41 buses, but which could derive more patronage by an interchange of bus and rail stops at Olney. The railway could include more parking for visiting Olney as well as all day commuter pounds for longer stay. It would court a population 5 mile radius of some 33, 000 people and save people money on less distance drive time to a nearest rail access namely for getting to and from London as well as other more local commutes for all pocket sizes for work, college, school and other visiting and travel further afield. It would also open the area up to a world audience and create capacity as well as inform lucrative levels of footfall and spend, sustaining local shops and character, which sells.

Caption Below: The Church Of The Holy Sepulchre, Sheep Street, Northampton is the tip of an iceberg of rich foundational history trails Northampton boast but for want of better public information boards, dedicated link walk-ways and guided tours uncovering gems and monuments which have informed our heritage.



New Warehousing which may have to be demolished



Caption Above: The Handley Alignment 2001 can be clearly seen in the dark marked trajectory of railway realignment to circumvent blockages to the old route around northern Olney, forming a natural boundary against further ribbon development and demarking the fine-line between urban sprawl and countryside retention. Alas that route itself has now been blocked and a new alignment needs a qualified consultant to study and come up with a realignment of a realignment which links east and west old trackbed. Even if you have a railway which starts from scratch, as Olney and surrounding villages to a 5 mile radius inform a population of 33, 000 people, you would be daft not to take it into consideration. Besides, if you go off from the Stevington Walk which runs between Bromham and Stevington-A428 minor road and privately owned trackbed from Stevington-Turvey Station End, you still then have to negotiate the Great River Ouse, Turvey and Lavendon and if Lavendon wants a bypass, which would probably come off the A428 east of Turvey near Bromham and go to the south of Lavendon to join an A509 Olney Bypass north or south of the hill between built Olney and Warrington, the options are few. So it is in the interests of those other and higher than ourselves who see the strategic benefit in having a railway restored to plan its route now and get in before the road developers move in and close-down the railway hope, infill brownfield created with lots of housing estates and queues into Bedford spiral to try and catch a train to London as part of the commute to get to work before 9am. An Oakley Station on the Midland Main Line would create rat runs over bottleneck single carriageway Oakley Great Ouse River Bridge. That is seen as a sub for not getting Northampton-Bedford rail link. It isn't going to work and Park and Ride adds to journey time. Milton Keynes is struggling with parking now, land is running out, growth continues. Something must give.



Caption Above: Circa 2015 side-on shot of the new and emergent Northampton Station. Some have described it as 'not fit for purpose' but the aesthetical considerations and landscape fit apart, it answers the main push and pull factors of a demand for more parking, retention of lifts and street level pedestrian access. Segregation for disabled users to have to use another entrance as the street access informs a large flight of stairs sets back cohesive and integrational agendas by decades. Moreover it sits on archway potential railway access corridor space which would have been handy for a single re-rail access off of the Brackmills Branch.

Caption Below: Looking east from the footpath adjacent to the new Northampton Castle Station with new office development on the right. This busy dual carriageway highway gets congested and pushes for bypassing it with a new St James' Road Link to link congested St James' with congested London Road is seen as a desirable progression to traffic solutions! It is rather more likely that all urban roads like this will fill up with traffic in a 10 mile radial contact of growth – road based from day one as no alternative, locks-in the potential for relief, air pollution reduction as it is a well known fact that sitting congestion emits exhaust sulphur and nitro dioxide into the air we all breathe and that can have knock-on health implications and costs. Choice is the operative word!





Caption Above: A freight train trundles through the aesthetically new Northampton Castle Station. A single line connects the Brackmills Branch – the stub of the former Northampton-Bedford railway course – to the Northampton Loop which is the slow track part of the four track West Coast Main Line (WCML) which for historical reasons becomes a twin track bypassing Northampton at Blisworth to the west of the urban town. The Northampton Loop carries large amounts of freight as well as the London Midland high frequency passenger operations. Rival train operators are constrained on capacity issues, enter our railway!

Caption Below: A freight train circa 2015 snakes though just south of the new Northampton Castle Railway Station. To the left one can see the car park immediately south of Northampton Castle Station road bridge and that leads onto the Brackmills Branch. A twin track Northampton Loop configuration fans into 4 tracks with one through in the middle for non stopping trains and freight to make use of. Were a Bedford-Northampton rail link to be rebuilt; a new dynamic track realignment would be required to accommodate it and the points to and from it from all tracks going and coming north from the station to enable Bedford trains to access the existing platforms. It can be done, the determination is should it be done and consideration of what if, if we don't do it? Which body picks up these questions also needs to pick up responsibility too.





Caption Above: The Northampton Bypass looking east circa 2015. From this picture it may be hard to believe that peak times all year round this whole bypass can clog up with gridlock traffic crawling along at about 5 mph. Clearly as regional development drives more and more traffic to these sorts of road arteries, the situation will get worse before it gets better. That is bad for people and communities as well as the competitive appeal of the location for courting jobs on the back of regional distribution hub development for example. Since the closure of local radial rail links, all traffic movements are locked into road usage and only by restoring some local rail links and maybe a Light Rail Scheme can that pattern be broken.

Caption Below: Looking west along the Northampton Bypass, built in the 1980's, it is now surrounded by considerable development which has grown up to make it a fixed part of the Northampton urban landscape. Town centres cannot accommodate the huge volumes of traffic and so these bypasses and link roads have been provided which are now themselves clogging up. Urban traditional town centres were built and layouts emerged as a result of growth but around the horse and cart. Land use for parking is land which cannot be used for employment and housing of which there is always a demand. The shift to out of town shopping and entertainment venues to the perimeter of town centres attached to relief roads, ring roads and bypasses means a drain on what traditional town centres can offer, accommodate and consequently suffer a drainage effect on trade and footfall and spend which spirals.





Caption left: Another Olney Model Railway Exhibition, Richard Pill poses for the camera 2005 with a copy of the Handley Report on sale to raise funds for the BRTA. Engaging with the public on stalls is not just selling ideas or listening, but trying to make people aware that this railway is an investment in their communality and as such they would be well advised to take an interest, give support and help us inform a team which can tackle the many facets the project engages with and faces. That is a hard job when everyone is wedded to a car based lifestyle non dependent upon public transport which is seen as secondary.

Below: Northampton A45 Bypass links to A14 at Thrapston in East Northamptonshire which in turn delivers traffic to Huntingdon/A1, Cambridge, Bury St Edmunds and ultimately Ipswich and Felixstowe and vice versa East Anglia to East and West Midlands via these spinal trunk roads. It really is critical that a Northampton-Bedford-Cambridge rail alternative is made a priority. That means route protection, which means studies and case and engineering appraisals and qualification on practical considerations. But crucially if we don't act, the current situation will just get worse.





Above: Bedford Midland circa 2012. From Bromham Bridge looking south, we see a class 319 EMU sitting in the sole northern siding north of Platform 1 at Bedford. Thameslink operates an intensive service which terminates and starts from Bedford Midland Station currently. This involves many trains sitting in wait-over time on through tracks before they return to London and beyond as far as Sevenoaks and Brighton for example. This means that East Midlands London bound fasts and freight has to weave time and space through the tracks which informs a bottleneck.

Below: Same view as above but circa 2003 at the time when Government was studying the Bedford-Northampton Railway for reopening as a part of the Government supported London South Midlands Multi Modal Study (LSMMMS) which in 2004 the Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling M.P., Transport Secretary of State long grassed and dismissed along with extensions to Manchester Tramways. The Manchester Metro schemes were later reinserted into Government delivery programmes, but alas Bedford-Northampton was not. That it got to Government level interest is in no small part to the hard work of BRTA and its members tirelessly campaigning and extolling the sense of it. A new team of fresh people need to pick up the baton and make a run with it.





Above: Looking north circa 2004 from an over bridge near Clapham just North of Bedford. An HST hurtles towards Bedford. On the right is the work of building the A6 Bypass and to the left is the formation, now fallow, of the stub of where the Bedford-Northampton railway veered off to the left, westwards called Oakley Junction. The quest and challenge would be for a flyover from the slow lines on the right (east side of the Midland Main Line/MML) north of the Great Ouse Bridge to swing over the MML to head west. Thus route protection means protecting the fields from Oakley Junction and just north to the Stevington Walk on the Bromham-Oakley Road crossings.

Below: A modern level crossing over a busy road at Bicester London Road, Oxfordshire shows how train and road can interface on ground level safely to each other. Another fine example exists at Woburn Sands. However due to some lesser crossings having ‘accidents’ and a health and safety ‘risk’ de-facto added to inform caution, the Network Rail approach as we understand it is to insist all new applications are turned down and bridges or tunnels over or under the railway are – at increased cost – installed instead. Practically you cannot necessarily do that in dense urban landscapes where proximity of buildings or road with negates it. London Road, Northampton is one such example and a more flexible approach of horses for courses is to be hoped for in the wider interest.



Concluding remarks

On the one hand, If private is the way to see delivery grassroots rail and other infrastructure projects upwards, than just expensive cherry pickling top down as in 'big is beautiful'; we may expect to see them queuing up to offer niche rail choice, but probably after expenditure by public sector on the infrastructure itself. Whereas the Dartford Tunnels were a private investment and then capacity tolled to public use. Oh for such a thing to be available today for local rail! Where are the private rail infrastructure investors? HS2 and that is about it and it will be totally irrelevant to this theatre. The origins of the railway were led by private speculative investors. Now we have a situation where neither public nor private are prepared to step out, be it can't, won't or don't! Yet the rail infrastructure is required to put operations on a sustainable in every sense of the word, way – socially, environmentally and yes, it makes good economic sense to have more than one option too be it logistics, access, travel and sheer choice. Currently too much depends on road, oil, quarrying and London centric on and off the rails too; it must change for everyone's interest and you could be that instigator. You would not be alone, but we just need enough entrepreneurs to work together and make it happen, grassroots upwards, top-down where suitably placed also. Otherwise we face increasing paralysis and lost opportunity predicating on exploiting diminishing resources and increased costs from extraction to the purchase of basic goods, namely inflation predicated on resource platform utilisation consumption, demand and supply balances and costs and diminutives of finite resources where recycling and sustainable platforms need nurturing to remedy the negative spiralling patterns and turn bads into good by rail.

Richard Pill

March 2017



Caption Left:

The gates to the Network Rail Depot Northampton are closed. We very much hope that the railway one day will return and be open for business, both passenger and freight. Until that time the current trend of growth and impact on local communities in the form of traffic, congestion, air pollution and hubbub will continue with gridlock causing injury to business and the public at large. The rot must stop, we need this railway now!

Dear Sir/Madam,

National Infrastructure Assessment (NIA) for Friday 10th February 2017 ERTA Final Submission

Our main propositions and secondary considerations:

1. Northampton-Bedford railway reopening
2. Bedford – Sandy-Cambridge East-West Rail Link.

1. **Northampton-Bedford.** We and our predecessor organisation (BRTA) have been arguing for this rail route to be protected and reopened for 20 years. Key merits we see:

- Link Bedford and Midland Main Line South with Northampton and West Coast Main Line/direct Birmingham-Luton Airport arc.
- Offer rail choice locally (A428) and regionally M1 (Northampton-Luton parallel) and Northampton-Bedford-Cambridge (should be part of East-West Rail) rail parallel end to end A45-A14 Northampton/M1-Felixstowe arc.
- Revolutionise public transport between Bedford, Olney and Northampton, saving time, boosting frequency and integrated with local buses at Olney.
- Would cut congestion into existing stations of Bedford and Milton Keynes and demand for parking/land use pressure.
- Would bring footfall and spend to Bedford and Northampton traditional town centres
- Would link 4 airports (Gatwick, Luton, Coventry and Birmingham)
- Would provide a loop off the West Coast Main Line (Northampton-Bedford-Bletchley) allowing non-time-critical operations which in turn frees up paths and capacity to serve Milton Keynes Central
- Northampton and points North West and Bedford and points south and east are growing population centres.
- The volume of traffic and emissions overall is unacceptable. This rail link would help in providing much needed transport choice and cut congestion emissions long and short distances.

Studies have been done hitherto: Handley Report 2001, LSMMMS 2003, Capita Symonds 2004, Laurence Gregory 2004 – all favourable. Route hasn't been protected very well, blockages at Olney and road threats at Northampton. It needs a champion, backer and agency home. It, with East-West Rail offers more scope to break the roads for everything monopoly from conception to assumption, from design and planning to practical readiness for courting what may be on offer. It is lamentable that lack-lustre performance of Marston Vale units inform unreliability giving a diminished impression and experience of rail when we're trying to promote a positive image. We know of no one agent seeking pro-actively to foster conditions for line-born freight and Forders Sidings and Bletchley depot lie idle and everything seems postponed for future-future, when need is now and retrospectively. This brings some disillusionment to all but the hardest of enthusiasts who want more freight to go by rail and believe rail to be better for the land use and environment. Local Councils tend to say they cannot support Northampton-Bedford because they are stretched with East-West Rail whereas an integrated approach would see grades of interest and action informing a consumatory conclusion of real delivery and progress on an incremental scale. Getting a station at Retail Park, Kempston (population 18, 000+) would add considerably to footfall on local Marston Vale off peak services making the case for more and better frequency, Bank Holiday and Sunday services on what is marketed as a 'leisure line' and for work (localised commuting). The franchise

system here seems to be being used against doing it 'now' and abates to 2021 before any improvement can be done, which is rigid and inflexible and doesn't do justice to hitherto studies making the case (Steer Davis Gleave circa 2000/2001) which said the Retail Station would add 100 extra passengers off peak per day to Marston Vales service – part of East-West Rail.

2. **Bedford-Sandy-Cambridge:** Part of East-West rail yet blockages and debates on exact route abound amidst walls of silence. We interpret traditional as Bedford-Sandy-Cambridge. This needs to be confirmed and the following ironed out:

<p>Bedford/Bedford St John's</p> <p>Will a triangle be reinstated at St John's? The old station is constrained to just 4 coach length trains as London Road Bridge blocks expansion eastwards. The inner route demands trains go into Bedford Midland and out again. Will we be able to sustain 1984 St John's Halt and reopen the old St John's? Nothing here is straight-forward and we're keen to see a design specification from the Consortium spelling out how they intend to tackle these issues. The 1984 St John's Halt would have to be slightly modified to accommodate the curve into St John's and a group seems entrenched against any changes or accommodation?</p>	<p>Cardington Road</p> <p>Here the old bridge was swept away and a dual carriageway inserted for Tesco. However you could insert single carriageway fanning out to two east of the railway theatre. However, level crossings are unpopular and making a road bridge given the close proximity of Longholme Way - Rope Walk junction and roundabout, makes the road bridge idea prohibitive. A level crossing would be cheaper than bridges and less intrusive. The other factor is that a Sandy-Bedford rail link could be creaming off traffic along the A603 and cuts queues anyway.</p>	<p>Willington</p> <p>Some have added to their gardens across the old trackbed, Danes Camp bestrides the course of old railway, it is a narrow gap hedged in by the lapping waters of the River Great Ouse. Before you approach Willington, you have the spectrum of a rowing lake and development being threatened to be resurrected as a scuppering technique. Scuppering by default as the training lake rules out an island pillar for the railway to bridge the lake and thus rules out the railway. Outer routes have their blockages especially between Cople and Willington for example and linking with the Midland Main Line even at a Wixams Station, then denies Bedford Town Centre.</p>
<p>Blunham</p> <p>Housing estate blocks old trackbed and old station site. Realignment would require using some land which is currently a garden centre cum agriculture. Realignment then has to cross diagonally over the old River Ivel Bridge and fit in the Sustrans Cycleway. In-keeping landscape practise means that high gradient viaducts may not be in-keeping and so getting the railway through this pinch point remains an issue.</p>	<p>Sandy</p> <p>If you go around Blunham to the north of modern built Sandy, you then have a huge curve to swing back over or under the East Coast Main Line, into Sandy and beyond. Old route via Potton and Gamlingay is blocked and so a railway bypass or new route would be required. This means virgin soils or new blockages have to be tackled and destination Cambridge could help determine best route.</p>	<p>Shepreth v Trumpington</p> <p>If, as proposed the new railway links up at Shepreth, you have to share twin tracks to Shepreth Junction; then share just 3 tracks with the Bishops Stortford lines into Cambridge, through Cambridge to Norwich and Ipswich respectively. To enter Cambridge by the former Trumpington Junction requires either slewing the road space or cut and covering the Guided Busway; and things like bridging the M11, clearing a track through the Trumpington Park and Ride where a new halt could link road, bus interchange and rail.</p>

I submit these two as main considerations and would also like to draw your attention to our Campaigns page which has many other schemes we endorse for further study and assessment. Local Government is strapped for cash, LEP too remote – never answers our emails and letters – and parishes like Olney seem bent on development and dismiss the railway restoration as pie in the sky – but that locks into oil/road/car/lorry reliance and Olney gets via the A509 Milton Keynes radial artery, more than its fair share of traffic and should ideally be rail served and bypassed. Our campaigns page is: <https://ertarail.com/campaigns/>

I attach a copy of the Handley alignment which shows how a new rail route could have been done to correct existing alignment blockages. Alas, due to nil support and a lack of resources, a new alignment would have to be studied by a qualified consultant. We just lack £30, 000.

I trust this submission accords with what you wish and we remain interested to engage any way we may within reasonable time and resource thresholds.

Yours faithfully,
Richard Pill,
ERTA Principal Officer,
February 2017

Notes:

1. Cockman, Fred. (1974) The Railway Age in Bedfordshire [BHRS Vol. 53]
2. Cowper and Newton Museum: Orchard Side, Market Place, Olney, MK46 4AJ, UK
<http://www.cowperandnewtonmuseum.org.uk/>
3. East-West Rail <http://www.eastwestrail.org.uk/>

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Bedfordshire Railway & Transport Association (BRTA)
Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT)
East Coast Main Line (ECML)
English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)
Felixstowe-Peterborough (F2P)
London South Midlands Multi Modal Study (LSMMMS)
Midland Main Line (MML)
North London Line (NLL)
Peterborough-(Leicester)-Nuneaton direct rail line (P2N)
West Coast Main Line (WCML)

Membership – Join ERTA and help make our voice stronger

- The English Regional Transport Association is a voluntary unincorporated membership based association seeking to restore strategic missing rail links and improve the environment as a result. The English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) started originally in Bedfordshire in 1997 as the Bedfordshire Railway & Transport Association (BRTA) and has mushroomed in reach and range to apply principles on coherent networks and foster conditions of access and service to suite a wide and diverse range of customers. We advocate passenger and freight by rail, unblocking our roads and improving air quality we all have to breathe! Any other feedback as well as any donations or membership can be sent with a filled in form below on this flyer.
- ERTA leads delegated meetings to decision makers and seeks to ensure that doors are opened to the subject and practical building blocks to optimise reopenings put in place like:
 - a. protecting corridors and adequate spaces for realignments where blockages exist
 - b. making it in developer's interests to court and work with rail interests and rail infrastructure pre-planning stages not an afterthought or nice addendum if someone else pays having made a profit on the development itself. Please fill in the form and send with remittance.

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Please send completed form to ERTA, 24c St Michael's Road, Bedford, MK40 2LT

<http://ertarailvolunteer.blogspot.co.uk/>



Summer 2016. Some members of the ERTA Executive Committee pause in their deliberations from the work of ensuring ERTA is properly run. Our thanks go to them and others who have put in the hours over the 20 odd years since a formal campaign for Bedford-Northampton was initiated by the ERTA predecessor, the Bedfordshire Railway and Transport Association (BRTA) 1997-2013. Here's to the next generation!



Above: For the last 30 years congestion in Northampton, Olney and Bedford has been growing in the urban cordons. Here a typical scene in Midland Road, Bedford which emits more exhaust creating bad air and delays including for buses. **Below:** A Midland Main Line express heads north near Rushden in Northamptonshire. Corby, Kettering, Wellingborough, Rushden, Higham and Irthlingborough stare at each other across the Nene Valley yet all lack a direct rail link to the County Town of Northampton – how long is this discrepancy to remain unaddressed? Some have suggested Light Rail as a more versatile solution. Either way, something rail-wise must be done to enhance public transport mobility.



Written for the English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

A voluntary membership based association committed to making a contribution for the retention and enhancement of public transport.

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