

English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

	Patrons: Sir Edmund Verney, The Rt Hon. the Lord Newby OBE + Others welcome of professional, business or other acumen and of good repute.	
	ERTA Acting Chairman and Nationwide Coordinator, Also Responsible for the coordination of administration including Finance, Delegated Meetings, Recruitment, Administration, Membership, Teams (Great Central, Westminster, London, Northern and Southern Teams etc), the oversight of all forums, forwarding the route protection/reopening agendas, West Country Area Rep, Consultations, Media Officer (Newspapers, Magazines and main Spokesperson) and Railfuture Liaison Officer: Mr Simon Barber, 20 Fitzherbert House, Kingsmead, Richmond, Surrey, TW10 6HT T. 0208 940 4399, E. simon4barber@gmail.com	
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Newsletter No. 35	January-February 2021	£1.00 Where Sold

The Missing March-Spalding Rail Link is needed now and going forward! ERTA calls for joint working together – otherwise it is a roads and congestion future!



Above: The old signal box at Cowbit on the old March-Spalding rail link. ERTA wants the rail link reopened/rebuilt/new-built and we need to a. keep options open and b. raise funds including Councils/MP's seeking the Government's Rail Reopenings Fund. The study can look at options, re-routing. Development sprawls, roads expand and yet the rail option still needs a coming together and agreeing it has merit and then to commit to finding a solution which adds up to re-railing for passenger and freight capability. The quest continues, it should be obvious. Time to get active, not passive!

ERTA notes the following: a. Ely-Peterborough will reach, if not already, capacity and then what rail-wise into and out of East Anglia? b. Ely-Peterborough-Spalding is a great way round, taking time contrast direct and upgraded roads. c. Werrington is good, but Peterborough-Spalding needs more capacity; with passenger considerations Deeping St Nicholas being a hot spot - a mere twin-track railway, growing need for more and better passenger operations and more freight and maybe longer freight by rail? Yet it is the nearest now you can get a connection to the Spalding line, as the old junction has houses on it. A new March-Spalding line would enable more by rail. Although a far-fetched for rail thing, a recent Railfuture Rail East Newsletter (Ed. 187, Sept 2020, Page 21), reports on freight by rail to Spalding and then sending by lorry to Kings Lynn - could there be other freight which rail could bid for were a new link built? Some may say that for any scheme, but this links North-East/Lincs with East Anglia, Cambridge commute and Stansted. We have a supportive MP but councils are cold. A team of reliable volunteers can make or break it! Join ERTA NOW! Can Railfuture get involved?

A brief history of ERTA's Predecessors

<p>Richard Pill Chairman: I was born in August 1967 to a family who used public transport. We had a car after 1981 but before used buses, walking, cycling and trains. Annual Holidays included Cromer*, Minehead, Swanage and parts of Wales. My family liked trains and railways and be-mourned the withdrawal of rail services and lines. One Saturday in 1980 my Great Aunt showed me a flyer advocating a new group to help save the Bedford-Bletchley Railway from closure threats. She asked me if I would like her to join me to enjoy the news they may put out. I had been on the Bedford-Bletchley Railway and liked it, but felt sorry for it especially its run-down status. *Required a Bedford-Cambridge bus.</p>	<p>BBRUA: I went to the first Bedford-Bletchley Rail Users Association (BBRUA) AGM Chaired by Mr Richard Crane at St John's Church Hall. Guest Speaker was a Mr Trevor Garrod. He manned a small table to the back of the hall and on it was a booklet which caught my eye 'Local Trains into the 80's'. Sadly, I did not possess any money, but he kindly let me have it on the proviso I send the money on later. Some may scoff, but it was full of ideas, of what could be and painting a more optimistic future for rail if it could be grasped, accepted and acted upon. In 1984, Richard Crane asked me to join the Committee of BBRUA which I did 1985-1987. It was an eye-opener! I fell out with Richard over issues of expansion rather than just retention of status quo with modernisation. Reopening east and west I felt was the way to go. Both of us have been mutually and respectfully vindicated!</p>
<p>Railway Development Society (now Railfuture): Richard Crane, whilst on the BBRUA Committee in 1985 took me to a Rail Users Conference in London organised by the voluntary Railway Development Society (RDS). It was a good day out, but what I recall is my photo was taken by a Mr Ray King and again the base-note of potential was evident, but the lingering question of whether Government would buy into it or whether it was wishful thinking remained a matter of heated debate. 1982 the Serpell Report announced closures and whilst most was rejected, some lines were lost including Woodhead, Tunbridge Wells - Eridge and Northampton-Market Harborough!</p>	<p>Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee (OBRAC): Whilst on the BBRUA Committee in 1985, there came to our notice the announcement of singling the line between Calvert and Bletchley and discussions were a threat of complete closure. I had read the Bill Simpson Books Volume 1 and 2 of the Oxford-Cambridge Railway and felt that the reopening of part or all of it was the answer to the ailing Bedford – Bletchley 'remnant'. It was like a body with severed limbs, of course it was dis-abled and thus unable to find and court optimum markets. A man called Mr Chris Wright was floated and I was elected as the BBRUA Liaison Officer to take an interest and bridge between the two lines. In short, a public meeting was held at Centre Com in Dec 1986 followed by an inauguration in February 1987. I served about 18 months.</p>
<p>Bedford and Sandy Rail Reopening Association (BASRRA): I felt I was seeking to bring people together and campaign for reopening of Oxford-Bicester-Milton Keynes and an Aylesbury leg. However, feeling redundant over styles of approach: I wanted a BBRUA style, others wanted a more professionalised covert approach it seemed. I stepped down and picked up the baton for protecting the 10-mile route from Bedford-Sandy, that being the minimum necessary for a Bedford-East Coast Main Line Link, Cambridge via Hitchin or later Huntingdon-St Ives-Cambridge. It broke up in 1990. Blockages abounded; realignments were called for.</p>	<p>Transport 2000 Bedfordshire Branch: I became a rep for that national body of which RDS was an affiliate member. I grew their local support base, advocated Bedford-Sandy rail reopening, but had a lot of opposition based around age, conceptualisation of whether relaying 10 miles of railway could/should be in the frame and most opposition was authenticated by rail fraternity itself fuelling scepticism elsewhere "if so-on-so says it, it must be plausible realism" sort of mantras. This lasted 4 years and in 1994 I handed on and it was closed down. After a lull of 3 years the Bedfordshire Railway and Transport Association (BRTA) was formed (1997) and spent 10 years for East-West Rail and other projects. In 2015 BRTA became English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)! Most improvements come from campaigning.</p>

Simon Barber's Column

Westminster Energy, Environment and Transport Forum's Conference 'The Future of Ports' I had joined as an observer at the above Conference which was held on-line in early December 2020. There were about a dozen panellists, plus a number of observers. The panellists consisted of people working in the ports industry plus a few Councillors and representatives from transport consultants. The Government is investing £160 million in modern ports, and it was felt that this was a vital move since port areas in coastal communities are among the poorest in the United Kingdom. It was also felt that decent port infrastructure is a top priority, since this would control the ports' external carbon footprint. This last point of course is where the ERTA would come in, by developing rail infrastructure and improved rail links.

Delegated Meeting with Maritime Transport:

One afternoon in December, three ERTA members (Colin Crawford, Sara Homer and I) had met up with James Tierney, who is the Rail Development Manager at Maritime Transport. The company is involved with container logistics, domestic distribution, warehousing and rail operations. The primary reason why the ERTA decided to meet up with that company is that they have at least two depots at Brackmills, which is just outside Northampton and neither of them have any rail connection. However, Brackmills is part of the old track-bed of the Northampton – Bedford railway which had closed in 1962 (although the section from Northampton to Brackmills was used for freight to serve one or two businesses on the Brackmills Estate until about 2000). Indeed, the ERTA wish to see that line re-opened both for freight and passenger use. We pointed out that the ERTA also wishes to see other disused railways which could act as strategic freight routes creating more capacity on existing routes and major roads such as the M1. Mr. Tierney indeed was very supportive of our aspirations and he would be prepared to attend our public meetings. He will also bring the ERTA's aspirations to certain organisations such as Regional Transport Bodies.



Top Left: Class 230 Train approaches Cauldwell Street Bridge Bedford en route to Bletchley. ERTA is producing a Kempston Retail Station Report.

Bottom Left: Simon Barber and Richard man the ERTA Stall in pre-Covid19 times at St Paul's Church Antiques and Collectors Fair. Check-us-out!

Top Right: Containers on the Maritime Site at Brackmills a few years ago. Could one day the Brackmills Branch re-railed take trainloads of this off local roads? We shall see.



The past can be telling and informs a mirror to the future, improve or yearn for 'yesterday once more'!



Caption Left: From the Article in British Railways Eastern Region Magazine 'West of Cambridge' Autumn 1962 by Roma Branton celebrating the centenary of the Bedford-Cambridge Railway a Class 108 DMU passed Willington where the old trackbed is now the Danes Camp bird and beverage complex on the Sustrans Route 51 cycle-path.

Bedford-Cambridge Conundrum: £10 million for professionals to come up with a toxic rail route not fit for purpose! The route proposed by ERTA avoids most hills and crucially properties which would inform NIMBY objections. Less so than going via Renhold and Ravensden where affluent built locations can read, write and command lawyers in opposition to the intrusion of a railway. Circumvention via Corby to Peterborough, doesn't address the issue of the cross-country Bedford-East Bedfordshire/St Neots-Cambridge 'gap'. It must be a railway fit for purpose able to handle passenger and freight. Modal choice and rail alternatives are what is lacking these long decades. Buses only take us so far; the majority will tend to drive/send goods by road if no rail exists. That synthetically fuels demand for more road upgrades, which at cost just heap congestion to urban areas which lack the means-ways to handle the volume of traffic and the environmental, social and economic impact is not lost on us nor the effects of pollution.

Caption Right: 1984, the day of demolition for the former Goldington Power Station. The short stub of the Bedford-Cambridge Railway served it with coal trains until 1978. My mother recollects that my dad, who worked there during the 1960's used to walk across this field, then sidings for coal trains and wave to her as the passenger train made its way to Willington where my aunt and cousin lived. My Grandmother lived at Chalton and used the train from Blunham for Bedford on market days. The point being, that in those days when many did not have cars, the local railway was the mainstay of public transport. Yes, the peeling back and arguably undermining of it was born of the inability of the state to realise that a local railway is an asset beyond the rails itself and informs valuable footfall and spend as well as ability to keep road traffic levels in order. It's loss, even 54 years later, is not lost on us and increasing others. People adapt, but the glaring gaps continue. Bring back the trains and our tracks!

