

Notes from Solent to the Midlands Multi Modal Freight Strategy – Phase 1 June 2021 and responses by Richard Pill, Chairman of English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) July 2021.
<https://ertarail.co.uk/publicity/>
<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Solent-to-the-Midlands-Multimodal-Freight-Strategy-Phase-1-June-2021.pdf>

Summary: The report is very extensive and a good summary of the status quo, mapping out demand and growth opportunities and bringing together the road and rail windows.

What ERTA can bring:

If we are to see modal shift from road to rail more, if rail is to capture a greater share of the huge market on offer, it is clear more capacity not just on existing routes, but also duplicate routes and some new rail build is needed. Tinkering with the odd sidings here and here, flyovers and longer trains, more advanced signalling can all play a role, but we desperately need more capacity, routing options and not an ‘all in one basket’ scenario of minimalism. We face a Climate Emergency and should remember one locomotive of any descript can haul more than 14 juggernaut lorries per time, so a doubling of daily freights from 32 to 64 let’s say, reduces emissions and congestion which exacerbates emissions straight away with wider on and off rail benefits. We need more lines, duplicate routes and new-build sections for more options. We need to weed out what is Birmingham/West Midlands specific and what could go via other routes. If we reflect that radial north-south main lines from London are at capacity now, that HS2 is not a panacea, is a long time in coming and will not cater for freight, a load of default in a context of growth is roads market share for want of rail expansion resolution. The study seems somewhat remiss on exactly what windows it could or should be looking at beyond the progression of the Oxford-ECML East-West Rail for example.

ERTA's preferred options:

1. See what different ports can do and spread the load: Southampton (main), but also Portsmouth, Shoreham, Newhaven, Dover, Poole and what of Falmouth (less time at sea/speed up land-based use and utilise lines with more capacity e.g., Bristol-Hereford-Shrewsbury?)
 - a. Shoreham needs a new west-north curve and rebuild Shoreham-Guildford as a direct line with curves linking with Horsham (passenger-wise) and ensure a through linkage between Guildford-Woking-Heathrow-Old Oak Common (tunnel and direct linkage) to Chiltern Main Lines, diaspora – Banbury, GC Rugby and Leicester via Narborough (can have a western curve for Nuneaton/WCML as well) and East-West Rail to WCML/Bletchley, Bedford/MML and ECML at mooted Tempsford for example.
 - b. The Shoreham-Guildford line and indeed a curve off the Arundel line to Guildford line (rebuild) would enable 24x7 especially away from residential areas like Heathrow workings through the night. Shoreham could cater for aggregates traffic as well.
 - c. Guildford enables via Heathrow, OOC and Chiltern Networks. New-build Grendon-Calvert GC as it avoids urban noise via Aylesbury. On the back of rebuild, a network of passenger operations from Brackley, Milton Keynes and Bedford can go to (if more is provided) terminal bays or through running at Old Oak Common Interchange and beyond. Relieves Marylebone and spreads the load and interchangeability.
 - d. Guildford also enables another route to Reading and beyond approaching from the east, albeit many existing lines including the via Basingstoke-Didcot direct line, has intensive and growing passenger requirements, so spreading out more and balancing more makes practical sense.
 - e. GC corridor, new domestic twin-track lines alongside HS2 trajectory to east of Brackley (new-build) onwards via GC Corridor (as HS2 veers off) to Rugby WCML via new-build south of Willoughby via Barby to link onto Northampton Loop Line for WCML/Rugby and a proposed Rugby-Leicester rebuild with links to Magna Park, Lutterworth (M1, M6 and A14 Interchange) and Leicester via Narborough (new link to Leicester-Nuneaton line). Some further-afield freight could go via

Knighton-Burton for Derby and onwards, whilst others via Leicester which has capacity routing issues already.

31-May-2021

Joined Up Vision For Increase Rail Capacity



**West Midlands
Birmingham**

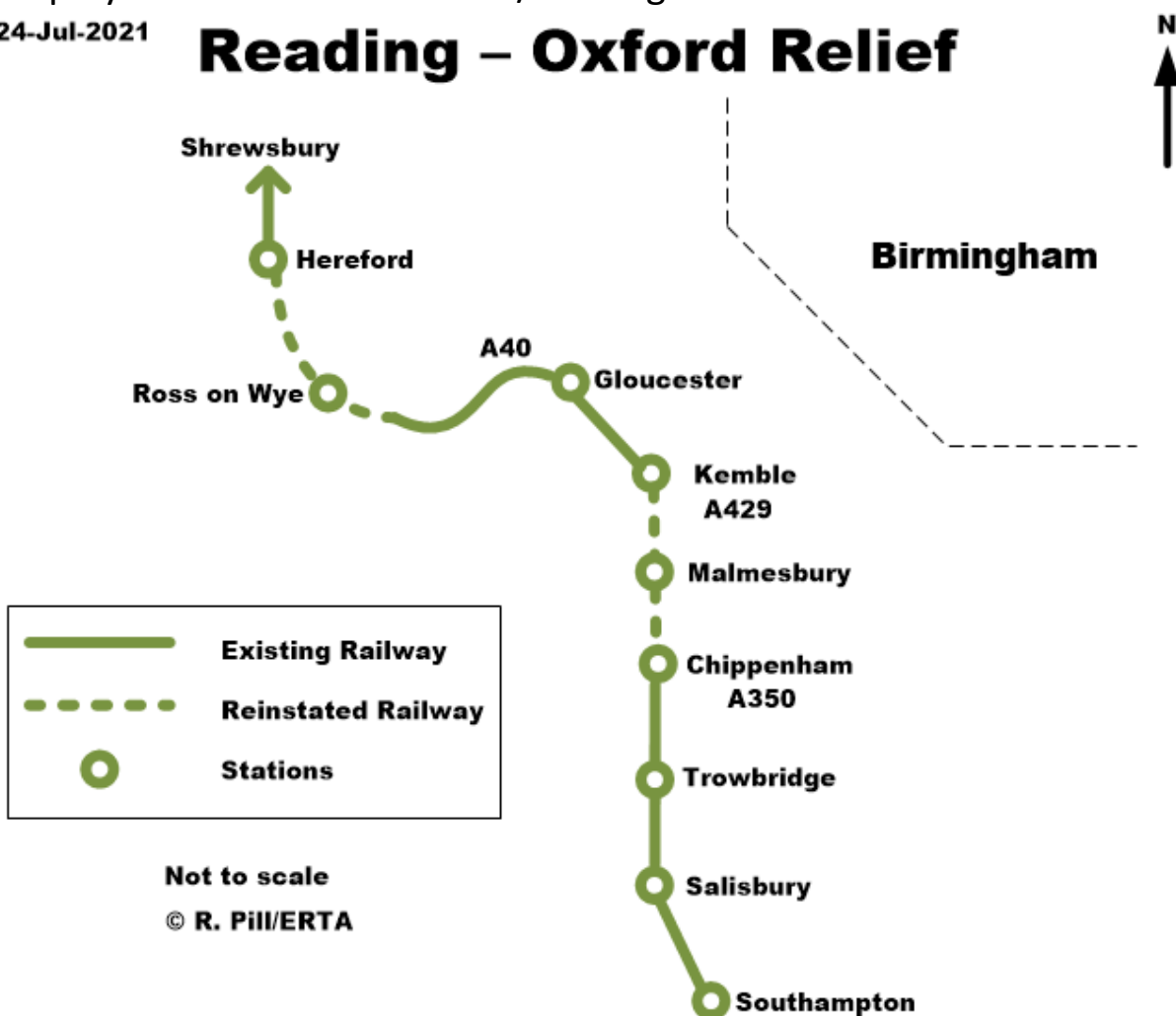


ERTA's preferred options continued:

To the west, for traffic beyond Birmingham and The West Midlands, it could go via Southampton-Chippenham and new-build via Malmesbury area to Kemble and via a new-build direct link via Ross-on-Wye-Hereford for northwards to Shrewsbury and beyond. That frees up paths on the core routes and on the back enables new highly desired visitor area all-year-round rail passenger services to reach new audiences – ANOBs by rail more, has to be good and challenges road dominance, rail deserts and missing gaps for modal choices. A40 being upgraded due to high demand, add rail to that scenario and maybe demand for road is reduced and consequent land use parking demand pressures eased which can be used for other purposes being housing, employment and conservation/farming?

24-Jul-2021

Reading – Oxford Relief



Not to scale
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Notes from the text and comment:

Paul Mahon, Managing Director, System Operator, Network Rail and Elliot Shaw, Executive Director, Strategy and Planning Highways England. Ironically, whilst the report says about making the industry more accessible, the contact details for these gentlemen seems remiss.

Page 3 “The Solent to the Midlands route is one of the most important freight corridors in the UK. It links the major port of Southampton with numerous distribution centres and economic hubs of the Midlands, North and Scotland.”

Page 3 A34 links Solent Ports with Midlands.

Page 4 Comment: Time scales need to come down. Report as per is common/fashionable/Governmental, talks of 2050 but the significance of the irreversible climate change of 2030 needs to be born in mind. The time-scales are out of sync.
<https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/ga12131.doc.htm>

Page 4 ERTA: There’s a sense of a. doing what we can ‘now’, b. doing what we can by 2030. Starting with pivotal decision making, let’s decide once and for all is it road or rail and if the balance tips more towards rail as a main emissions reduction mode x whatever power is deployed, obviously green-cleaner welcome, but green as is contrast road is still in favour of more by rail if logic was the only consideration?

Page 5 ‘Solent Ports, Southampton is main.’ ERTA considers we need to spread out more and ensure the rails can do more radially of these other places like Poole, Shoreham and Portsmouth for example.

Page 5 references the Golden Triangle, Northampton central and Lutterworth. WCML at capacity, so more links to both are needed. Bedford-Northampton and Northampton-Market Harborough

rebuilt would enable criss-cross rail connectivity following trajectory of M1 which constantly comes to a standstill of miles of traffic and junction congestion. About 50% is juggernaut lorries, rail needs to take more of that market share plus factor in growth. Main Lines are requiring more passenger use, so alternative and duplicate routes with more space for more freight by rail makes sense. Is the Government and rail industry picking up on these rail links and working back, ensuring corridors are protected and studies committed to ensure the case and do-ability listing is enhanced, not lost? It starts with a directional leadership, and finishes with more green-clean options rail-based, enabling more in a context of growth and factoring in rail-based sustainability. A reader: <https://www.bis-hendersonspace.com/is-the-golden-triangle-still-the-centre-of-uk-logistics/#:~:text=The%20Golden%20Triangle%20refers%20to%20an%20area%20of,being%20home%20to%20the%20biggest%20names%20in%20retail.>

Page 5 Winchester-Oxford A34 links M3, M4, A303 and M40 and A421. An option to study could be a new link north of Winchester alongside the A34 bypass to Didcot, new flyover connecting to the Oxford lines, would alleviate Basingstoke-Reading-Didcot more, enabling more. Heat is then on for Oxford. Newbury gets a new rail passenger service on the back and A34 a growth demand traffic check, good for the environment and reducing congestion, ditto A339. Equestrians by rail historically was done... time to reinvent the steel wheel for turning once more?

Reader: <https://blog.greenflag.com/2019/tyre-particles/>

Page 5 Core Route: Southampton-Basingstoke, Reading, Didcot, Oxford – Birmingham, still leaves Leicester as gateway for East Midlands, East-West and linkage distributor and the issue of bypassing Birmingham/West Midlands with non-centric traffic, freeing up capacity and ensuring quicker end-to-end times. West Midlands as per London and Manchester for example, needs more orbital distributive rail networks to be developed now.

Page 5 [Southampton] '32 trains per day arriving and departing' – to reduce traffic/inform more to rail/modal shift we need more like 64 trains per day. To achieve this, we need more lines to/from and creative utilisation of other ports and radial links to/from them. Bring back alternative routes. Tough decisions are needed and third-party delivery vehicles can help shoe-horn this in.

Page 6: "In all scenarios identified for rail freight growth there is expected to be an increase in the number of trains needed per day to 2050." Double in 30 years? Not enough, so we need delivery of duplicate/additional routes and capacity sooner than later.

ERTA: Rail is right for long haul. Rail needs to be able to organically expand and to reach more markets.

Page 12 'Flexible Capacity' "...that ensuring that flexible capacity is available is key in growing the rail freight market share." Report references DfT Rail Freight Strategy (2016), Freight Network Study (2017), Long Term Planning Process (LTTP).

Page 14: Loads of reports over many years, but how much per volume is it translating to rail on the ground? Retention, expansion and real systemic and network growth is urgently needed now. The Government's Reversing Beeching much touted agenda, could be integral to this modal shift revolution if a freight and passenger plan line-born from day one is developed and optimised.

Page 15 "The National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) central finding is that through the adoption of new technologies and the recognition of freight's need in the planning system, it is possible to decarbonise road and rail freight by 2050 and manage its contribution to congestion. Achieving this requires Government to outline clear, firm objectives, and begin working with the energy sector, freight industry and local areas to ensure that the infrastructure required for

alternative fuels and land for efficient freight operations is available when and where it is needed.”

ERTA: 2050 again! 30 years to turn the ship heading for a proverbial iceberg (irreversible climate change) is too little, too late. We need to heed the warnings and take evasive action now. Nurturing these duplicate and alternative rail routes to enable rail more, is a relatively painless and cost-effective mean’s-ways to achieve modal switch in a swift time-frame, providing it is done now. Government found £27 billion for new roads, only £500 million for the Rail Reopenings Fund, that must be a real change now, to signal priority and determination to do the right thing by people, places, the nation and the transport industry to enable realigned planning to reflect and integrate to the modal shift leadership and direction. It is not rocket science, it is about courage to act and redirect priorities and associated funding packages.

Obsession on fuel emissions whilst laudable intrinsically, it should be remembered however fuelled or powered, one locomotive, can haul 14+ juggernaut lorries per train, so what impact would more of that have on reducing overall emissions, congestion, pollution, public health time-costs, waste and other efficiencies? A pro-rail Government credit should be awarded to all and whoever gets this and acts commensurate to enable more positive pro-rail solutions to these issues.

Page 17: A key output: “... is that it highlights the need to provide additional freight paths from the Oxford corridor to East-West Rail. This will provide a new route between the Solent, the Midland Main Line and the East Coast Main Line. This may open up potential new markets that currently do not exist.”

ERTA:

1. If segregational east-west and north-south tracks are designed at mooted Tempsford area, this integrated rail system will not work and cannot be expected to. So, ERTA calls for joined-up rails between East-West Rail and the East Coast Main Line (ECML) where they meet whilst at the design stages now.

2. A west-north curve from the East-West Rail to the mooted new domestic rail link alongside HS2 to serve A43/East Brackley area and beyond re-joining the GC corridor to Rugby and Leicester, would be quicker, new-build / rebuild rail corridor, saving time, speeding end-to-end up and enabling more capacity and volumes to be transported by rail.

Page 18 ERTA: London. London centric and London orbital rail links bypassing London needs weeding out and rails commensurate to cater for more and both at one and the same time.

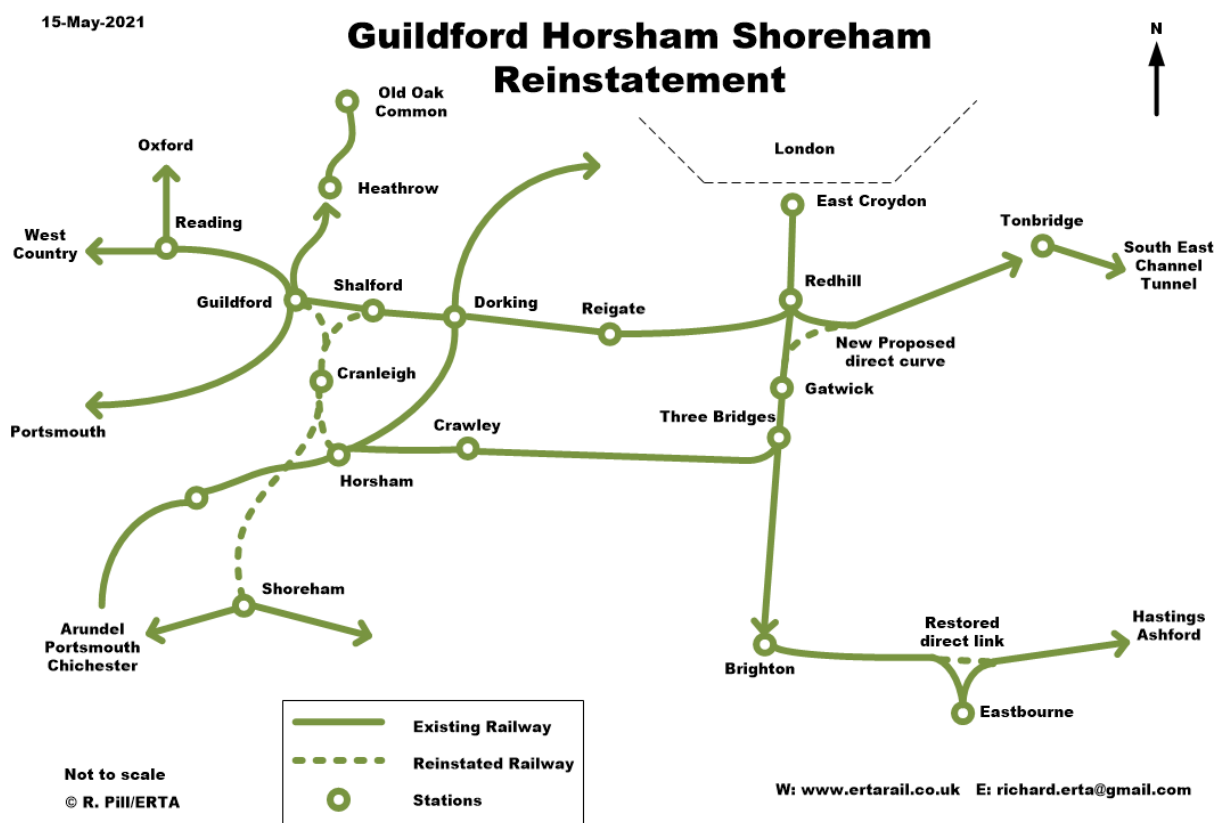
Page 20: Southern Regional Rail Freight Modular Study (2020) Network Rail. ERTA: A reinstated/new-build Polegate-Stone Cross rail link would shave 20 minutes off Brighton-Ashford direct running, still leaving plenty of scope both for slower trains via Eastbourne and more London-Gatwick-Resort centric feeds also. Freight like smaller consignments could also benefit from such network development flexibility. South Coast rail is under-performing because it cannot compete with direct roads being upgraded on the back of a lack of the direct rail connectivity being more robust in design terms. These upgraded roads take a land-use environmental toll.

ERTA: Report focuses on dealing with growth on existing lines and makes little provision for new/duplicate additional network growth and capacity enhancement away from busy core existing routes. E.g., Guildford-Shoreham direct, Lewes-Three Bridges (from Newhaven) with a flyover for direct running to the Portsmouth Line. Action is needed now to protect option of the direct Polegate-Stone Cross as development pressures and political weaknesses and compromises

means if lost, it locks in status quo in a world of growth and opportunity which defaults to roads with subsequent urban congestion more with spin-off exacerbations.

Rye – Ashford with a new-build direct link to the Canterbury lines should be looked at and likewise, curves linking the two lines at Canterbury could also enable more flexibility for passenger and freight as well as new flows business opportunities.

Page 30 Mentions Southampton, Portsmouth and Poole but leaves out Shoreham, Newhaven and Dover (re-rail Dover Western Docks for example). Shoreham-Guildford direct and a new south-east Arundel curve have all been flagged up.



Page 43 The South Western Main Line (SWML) between Southampton area and Basingstoke is a heavily used railway.” ERTA: The need for duplicate and alternative rail route options should be obvious now and then. Government and Reversing Beeching agendas need to be

deployed inclusive of such and more joined-up here integral to core network needs and expansion more. It comes across as rather isolated schemes and somewhat arbitrary beyond direct line merits, net-work and integral enhanced reach, range and access can have inadvertent markets newly tapped to rail – local, regional and wider through enablement. Markets grow, develop and are not always clear when no rails or capacity exists, but switch to rail more should be common-sensical to plan for now.

Page 49 The rail route from Solent to the Midlands is one of the most critical freight routes in the UK.”

Page 49 “Rail freight in the Solent area is focused almost exclusively at the Port of Southampton with over 32 trains per day on average arriving or departing. The route to the Midlands passes through Basingstoke, Reading, Oxford to Birmingham sharing lines that are already congested with passenger services.”

Page 48: It references East-West Rail but says the Western Section is due to be open in 2024, but recent Ministerial announcement is 2028, so any real reason for the delay? Likewise, Southampton-Leicestershire, Northampton and (Bedford?) could benefit from a Bedford-Northampton rebuild (off WCML) and Northampton-Market Harborough (off MML). The report is full of what is, but is short on new-build or rebuild duplicate routes and/or solutions other than default in upgraded roads.

Page 60: Shows 33.5% of freight out of or to Southampton is for the North West which adds to our case for Chippenham-Kemble new-build and Kemble-Ross-on-Wye-Hereford for Southampton-Shrewsbury et al and add to that core route the 9.6% for Gloucestershire and South Wales. 24.7% goes to the West Midlands. 0.03% to the East Midlands, but growth and better, more direct links by rail like our GC corridor re-rail suggestion, could boost that and free up existing lines. 21.70% North East, Yorkshire and Humber, again

could utilise our GC corridor via Leicester area suggestion capacity creation.

Page 65: Road is taking a bigger proportion than rail by a huge volume differential. In a Climate Emergency, this needs to change and quickly. How do we do it without our ideas being implemented? In addition, what more recycling more by rail – raw materials to processing plants from collection depots and finished materials recycled to production outlets for example and what of the zero-waste economy?

Page 82. “Other organisations across the UK parcel and rail industry are showing a keen interest in the expansion of what is being called ‘express parcels sector’ to take pressure off the existing road network.”

ERTA: You cannot achieve this without more rail capacity and growth in reach and range with hubification expansion and are balanced with rail ownership/stewardship to rail-road all in one experience?

Summary: Report is a good overall umbrella summary bringing together numerous reports, sourced and cross-referencing. However, good East-West Rail is, the route will still leave us non-the-wiser on capacity via alternative routes between Southampton/South Coast and Oxford-ECML East-West Rail platform of distributive by rail networks. Indeed, as noted hitherto, there is some uncertainty of whether physical linkage with ECML at the mooted Tempsford area is being inclusively designed for physically interconnective or not? If not, the plan comes unstuck as no clear linkage to ECML until post-Leicester and all current north-south main lines have capacity issues with or without HS2. Time scales and increased other services and demand all have to be weighed in the balance. Add to that any ‘green’ drive to modal shift from road to rail and new/rebuilt capacity rail-based arteries become essential. ERTA has ideas, which we would welcome industry and government to look at constructively. The default to growth remains roads and a missed opportunity if demand

is driven partly due to a straight-jacket of a lack of rail-based options and solutions. The 'now' and 'then' is in the balance and time or resource is not on anyone's side for quick resolution.

Page 82: ERTA would like to see a click, send/collect portal outlet for at least every station over 5000 population catchments within 3 miles across the UK. Rail has a growing network and around such a hub, you build customer interactive services to coffee shops, other retail outlets, services including medical access and public facilities like toilets, parking and post offices, all of which can bring in more footfall, spend and send by rail. Stations can double up as community hubs. They can be gateways to using existing services (passenger and freight) alongside places for jobs, training and investing in people, places and wider rail services and growth. This growth pattern can self-perpetuate. It can mean a win, win for the environment, help cut emissions, revitalise town centres, integrate and make bus integration more purposeful and save on road wear and tear costs and congestion, if more goes by rail as a more amenable and natural choice. The Borders Line Reopening, is a model of how a terminal branch, in a majoritively rural location, can on and off the rails turn fortunes around positively: <https://www.railstaff.co.uk/2018/09/06/borders-railway-more-than-4-million-journeys-since-it-opened-3-years-ago/> Government has a pivotal role and responsibility and all tiers of government can be instrumental to nurture these progressive patterns and more where areas currently lack rail access within say a 5-mile radius of where people live. It needs systemic growth, market induced growth, but also, given both the benefits and environmental imperative, good leadership, direction, planning and block replicate repeating models for nationwide applications and indeed export best practise to the wider world for adaptation on the way future transport needs-must are done.

Richard Pill
ERTA Chairman
29-07-21