

English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

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40th Newsletter Milestone... what has been achieved?

ERTA keeps a record of its previous Newsletters on our website:

<https://ertarail.co.uk/newsletter-archive/>

We have stoked dormant fires to keep those purporting to be advocating rail to do just that and called for fairness in that advocacy with the raising the profile of rail reopenings route protection and lands commensurate to an expanded railway. This, on a par with calls for electrification of the existing rail network. Also, the exact same calls for more stations on existing railway whilst straining gnats and swallowing camels to junk the existing rail network for High Speed. Some argue we need both, others integration will be the outcome. But what a way to find out? Some have argued the HS2 should have been started in the north and worked towards London and elsewhere, not London to Birmingham and then Leeds for example.

On East-West Rail, ERTA has battled to call for the traditional route with new-build for rails east of Bedford and the keeping options open at St John's, not developing over the land. We have brought people together via public meetings, conferences and Zoom Meetings. We have flagged up the need for a domestic rebuild utilising part of the former Great Central corridor.

We have fought a lone campaign to try and salvage the route and prospect of reinstating the Guildford-Horsham-Shoreham rail link for modern train use – passenger and freight – from Reading/Heathrow and Brighton/Gatwick and all in between. We have argued for London-wide improvements, interjected countless to numerous consultations, rekindled the chance for a Northampton-Bedford rail link and flagged up the ailing Bedford-Bletchley rail link which has been almost bustituted pending Secretary of State intervention. We can be proud of our work!

Caption below: Richard Pill and Simon Barber man the ERTA Stall at Milton Keynes, meeting existing rail users and discussing with them how things could get better! Circa 2018.



News and Notes:

<p>Bad News on Guildford-Horsham: On the week of 11th October the Waverley District Council met and decided by one vote after over 2 hours deliberation, to support a canal over the old railway formation. This will scupper the rail hope. ERTA worked tirelessly to alert the public within our means and limited resources. Locally, we felt some sympathy for the railway idea, but the competing interests, the longevity of the closure and the fact the councils seemed at sixes and sevens on what the case was for such a rail link, shows the area had moved on and like so many other places, car is king now with roads as the main transport option, locked-in but loved even as a mirage of freedom and iconic individualism statement. ERTA had pencilled a date for a Horsham Meeting post-pandemic in 2022, but now we need our members to tell us whether to proceed or not. It will be a case of water, water everywhere! The canal is not a panacea and their motors do make noise.</p>	<p>Leicester Forum: ERTA is committed to trying to pioneer but needs someone to assist with marketing these sorts of meetings to generate public interest. It is the local public who in turn can lobby their elected representatives and get the agenda we wish for talked at formal meetings and policies adopted commensurate to what we wish for.</p> <p>Some key issues are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A lack of one-railway for all users. Bedford-Leicester is no longer one train, but requires a change at Kettering. Moreover, the existing principal fast trains are short and standing room only as people flock back to public transport.2. Electrification of the Midland Main Line to Sheffield and Leeds are required for an inclusive railway. The current arrangement is unsatisfactory.3. Rebuilding a Northampton-Market Harborough rail link allowing Oxford-Milton Keynes-Northampton-Leicester services would boost opportunities and local economies. Again, we cannot indulge in the pretence of a tea-party approach, blockages have happened and now we need a third-party agency of Government Policy delegated to an agent with powers to either broaden the corridor as a green transport solution or say “here’s the cheque, move please” in all but name. Why? Because it is a Climate Emergency, we desperately need rail alternatives where principal roads go like A508/M1 for example and enable people to commute by rail to where the opportunities are. Affordability is another issue.
<p>ERTA Activity: We, few, we very few!</p> <p>ERTA personnel is small and getting older. We desperately need younger people to join us and help assist us in swelling our ranks, reach and ranges. Unless we get more members turning out to forums and supporting events, they will be fine-tuned to what does court interest and support and the rest an on-line paper trail baiting potential interest. But as ever, all expressions of interest have to include ‘YOU’ being willing to a. be realistic, b. be willing to contribute time and talent.</p>	

A brief introduction to the Bedford – Northampton Rail Link Reopening Campaign.

Before 1997 when the predecessor of ERTA was formed, I had grown up with some local knowledge of the Bedford-Northampton Railway, opened 1872 and closed 1962 to passenger traffic and in stages cut back and dismantled from there. I wrote to a Mr Brian Welch at Northamptonshire County Council and he came across as dismissive citing no case to justify it. It was a stance he seemed to maintain throughout despite studies done after and in the light of the Bedfordshire Railway and Transport Association (BRTA) lobbying and indeed raising money for its own pre-feasibility study, which incentivised bigger fry to invest £30,000 in their own studies and even Government in the Multi-Modal Study (2003) and others did their ownbeit academic degree thesis' greater or lesser. Government dismissed the scheme as marginal in 2004 and whilst some dived off to leave railway campaigning under whatever auspices, others and I campaigned to keep the idea afloat. Some of you may have read my booklet on the matter. The line reopening in campaign terms was not a straight-forward thing in itself. There were 3 main pockets of work to focus on:

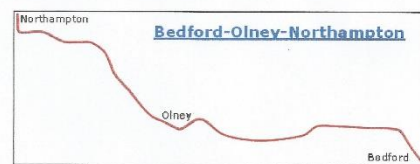
1. The Bedford end – critical land saving and accessibility to link with the Midland Main Line (MML) slow lines which were on the eastern side of the MML contrast former Oakley Junction approaching on-coming fast lines from the western direction. In short, a new flyover and broadening of track space would be needed then and now. Continued/....

2. The Olney area: From the mid-1980's housing was built on the old station area and progressively the old viaduct bridge spanning the River Great Ouse was demolished. Subsequently over 20 years despite our protestations, incremental housing development has spawned and blocked both the old route and a realignment route.

We faced Inquiries about Olney and Turvey where other development was going in and these houses are not cheap, prime des-res sites and landscape areas fetch upwards of £300k. I wrote articles for the Olney Phonebox Magazine which goes to many parishes and courted both town councils and the mother Council of Milton Keynes which went Unitary and covered the rural part of North Bucks.

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 Pili
£4.50



Caption Left Above: The former London Road Level Crossing, Northampton would need a reinstatement. Discussions are on-going.

Caption Left Below: The late Mick Gibson who led the Olney Model Rail Club, was a man who knew what he was about and what he wanted. Bring back our trains and tracks!



I tabled public meetings and social events but progressively the change-over from rural old local knowledge people with some resonance of the railway in their understanding to a new audience Milton Keynes orientated, car attached and what is Bedford and Northampton or an intrusive railway to them?

3. Northampton was another theatre. On the one hand we wanted to court the tiers of Governance the County, Borough and District tiers as well as parishes. We wanted to save the remaining tracks out of Northampton to Great Houghton and Brackmills. Sadly, the response was mixed. On the one hand a common agreement between the main councils was settled, but then reneged on and broken. Bedford had other priorities, whilst Milton Keynes never seemed to grasped the strategic benefits out weighing a sneaky suspicion it would deny their position of 'everything' going via Milton Keynes Central Station, as if it ever could! Capacity issues abounded.

A key early-day factor in the late 1990's was that a Gatwick/East Croydon via West London-Milton Keynes, Northampton and Rugby Connex passenger service was cut back to one an hour and terminated at Milton Keynes Central. This inspired them to invest in looking at Bedford-Northampton either via the Thameslink route or a new Bletchley-Bedford-Northampton loop and link with (then) Virgin Trains at Rugby for other principal places. Alas they did the study, but did not go further. Now we have a new bid for resurrecting the tracks to be re-laid between Northampton Castle Station and Great Houghton and another party has put in a bid for match funding to study the whole Bedford-Northampton reopening again. Deja Vue; but every step helps towards delivery!

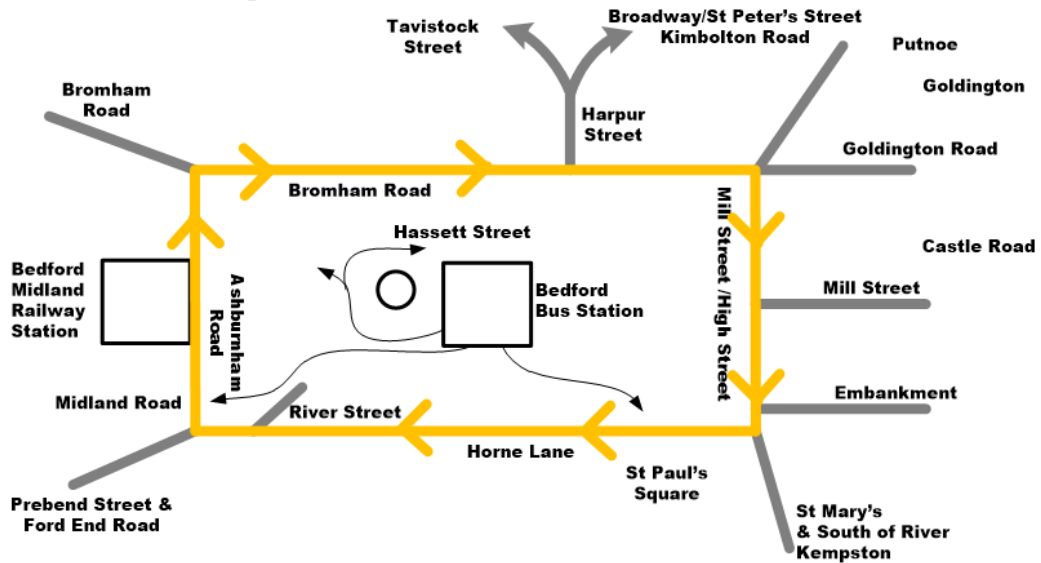
ERTA has recently had discussions with the Office of Road and Rail about 'access across busy roads.'

Bus Links, Value for Money and the environmental dynamic appeal challenge to get more people to use them.

Buses tend to convey a certain core audience. Privatisation saw decline of bus networks and increased costs at the point of use. Today we have Government touting its investment in buses, but the reality is a sticking plaster and whitewash to the mainstay use enhancement of daily, depending on these fragmented networks. Value for money, affordability, accessibility, reliability, cleanliness, driver attitude, company hands-on management and direction/leadership and the adequacy of integration with rail stations. Likewise, access to public toilets of a civilised standard and abundance open during bus operations at very least not part-time. These things attract or repel bus usage on a regular basis or not. In Bedford, out of the 3 main operators, Stagecoach, Grant Palmer and UNO, Stagecoach is probably with the edge in professionalism across the piece. Grant Palmer tries, but like the other day, bus failed at the Bus Station (thankfully) but not a word from the driver (10.30am No. 44, Wednesday 14th July 2021); people had to decide whether to stay or look for another bus at inconvenience to themselves. Likewise, the 28 and 21 wait only a fraction few seconds before departing at the Bus Station and better duration waiting may enable people changing buses from elsewhere around the bus station to have a chance to change, whereas miss it and 30 minutes or 1 hour wait not uncommon. Getting off-peak buses to link with Bedford Midland and Bus Station has been a post-privatisation endeavour, but only of limited response. It should be flagrantly obvious and advantageous. Take buses out and unadulterated car dependency and congestion, add buses in, politicians and car drivers think congestion is compounded, but no! It is a choice and some carrot and stick could draw more to bus usership if the price, convenience and frequency when needed is tuned to what the customer needs and demands. Alas, getting hands-on coordination, rather than aloof science study procedures by people who drive very often is the convoluted order of the day... things must change. Extending the Concessionary Bus Pass to under-65's and making them obtainable for all who want to use them and merging bus and rail cards to enable more public transport lifestyle/environment usage should be seen as a part of the jigsaw to cut congestion, emissions and pollution. It would also fill off-peak public transport - another goal fulfilled. Who pays? We do if we do, we do if we don't, what then tips the balance? Whether you believe in a Climate Emergency or not and are willing to do 'whatever it takes' to optimise the reduction of car lifestyles by choice than dictate. Any Government who gets it right, achieves a great step in the right direction!

Some of you with access to the internet, may find this link to an article which appeared in the Guardian of interest as a reader: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/jul/19/uk-bus-privatisation-has-caused-poverty-and-job-losses-says-un?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

Bedford Station and Bedford Bus Station Loop – Enter and Leave



Not to scale
© R. PIII/ERTA

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Caption Right: There's a place for nostalgia in our recollection of buses as per this historic bus stationed at Northampton on a special run-about service day circa 2018, by the Historical Society which has some old buses, some of which are from the days when the Civic Corporation ran local services for local people as a staple transport. No thought of profit motive, no disproportionality to incomes of likely users. Now, things are very different and balancing out the environmental efficiency of using public transport, is a sense of 'who would use it?' and does it present an attractive alternative to the car/value for money?



The Brackmills reopening Rail project.

I recently met with Cllr Jonathan Nunn leader of West Northants Unitary Council, Chris Heaton Harris (Minister of State for Transport) Richard Cooke from SEMLEP.

The Brackmills reopening of the railway was the topic of discussion and it was agreed that future meetings will be set up to discuss further.

I am meeting Richard Cook from SEMLEP and Cllr Lizzy Bowen next Monday to discuss further.

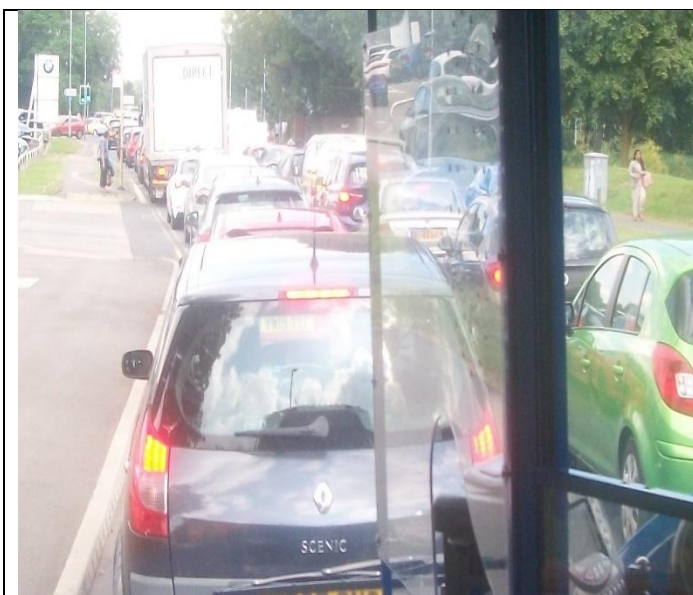
WHO (Wootton Heritage Organisation)

I attended a meeting at the Wootton Heritage Organisation and discussed the potential of re-opening the Brackmills rail line. We looked at its benefits of alleviating the constant congestion on and around the Brackmills industrial Estate area.

With the number of new houses being built brings its own problems with each property potentially having 2+ cars and the knock-on effect of the new people moving to the area. They were very interested and have asked me to do a full presentation in the future. These could be potential new members for the ERTA. There was great interest and enthusiasm from all the attendees present.

Report by Ms Sara Homer. CEO of Brackmills Industrial Estate.

Join her loop directly via: Ms Sara Homer sara.homer@brackmillsindustrialestate.co.uk



Caption Left: A typical day on peak time rush-hour along the Bedford Road, Northampton taken from a No. 41 Bedford Bus! Development is either side of the main A428 road and so widening is not an option. ERTA believes a rail insertion to Brackmills and arguably beyond to Bedford is the only solution to carry and offer bulk passenger and goods options. At Olney, new-build further north is required due to obliteration.

We keep on, keeping on!

From the Chair: Looking back on the year, we see strengths and weaknesses but keep going!

As we look ahead to our 7th year as ERTA, at this end of the year juncture we do well to also pause and reflect on what has been a difficult year on and off the rails. The ravages of Covid have exposed inequality and left no-one untouched by loved ones lost, society shaken and things being all at sea be it economy, prices, cuts or levelling up with a certain uncertainty about it. ERTA operates in such contexts and on the one hand have had new members, and have started physical meetings again. On the other hand, we have an ageing population in and out of ERTA and ERTA itself needs more younger audiences to have time and/or money to join and come on board and help us. We need successors who share the vision, want and believe in an independent voice for more and better rail and all that entails as well as integrated better non-vehicular access to and from stations as well as integrated public transport with civilised conditions of carriage as much as possible. A real issue now, is not just fragments of bus and rail, but affordability and value for money. The privatised models of bus and rail are doubtful as to whether they can and ever would provide inclusion in pricing and access. No, what sort of society do we wish for, how best to achieve it? Market does some things well, but people, places and inclusion mean more than what the market sustains or affords. Does it make sense to run half-empty off-peak buses and trains when audiences who may use or take advantage of spare capacity are priced out? However, the privatised market must seek profit, low costs and subsidies have to come from elsewhere and Government is always telling us Elise's proverbial bucket is broke! Meanwhile we all know travel broadens the mind! Renationalisation is happening incrementally as is a realisation that profit must be balanced with waste. It is a values issue, but if we are to see more going for jobs, affordability of transport is a big issue to remedy on and off the rails without costing the earth.

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<https://ertarail.co.uk/become-a-member/>

Tick if a New Member: Tick if renewing as an existing member:

Membership of ERTA costs £15 per annum. I/We wish to join

Name (Please Print): _____

Address: _____ **Postcode:** _____

Tel/Mobile: _____ **Email** _____

I/We hereby give consent to our data being used and stored for the purposes of communication with ERTA and its purposes compliant with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Signed: _____ **Dated:** _____

Please send completed form and payment to ERTA Membership:

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