

English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

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East-West Rail Route announced Friday 26th May 2023 as more-or-less 'Northern Route E'
 (See: <https://www.bedfordindependent.co.uk/breaking-news-east-west-rail-corridor-announced/> and <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/routeupdate> for more details).

The new east-west rail route came as no surprise to ERTA as since 2019 more-or-less it has been the only considered option give or take amendments. On Tuesday 23rd May did the new-broom Conservative Elected Mayor invite a representative of ERTA to meet officers to discuss it – before the announcement – as to what Plan B may look like. ERTA had long held out to former Elected Mayor Cllr Dave Hodgson (Lib Dem) to meet but he was adamant our route idea of east of Bedford via St John's was not feasible, locking focus to Northern Route E. This 'preferred route' requires 60 houses to be knocked down, contrast very few if any on our route. Our route flounders on Office for Road and Rail (ORR) demands that no new level crossings can be used for new railways (about 4 may be needed via our route) and so that went against us. But the morality of pitting clipping the edge of Priory Park, Bedford contrast 60+ homes, seems a dubious set of values? No, politicians have deliberated for a route nobody wants, but which is being thrust upon us. Many went to a public meeting in 2022 at St Cuthbert's Church Hall and praised the Northern Route calling for electrification, now are raising concerns over 6-tracking and impacts – like what DO they want?! Politicians seem to want cake and eat it, and now it is made available, they pretend they are against, when they have done virtually nothing to challenge it these last 4 years. When since 1997 the old route – a variant of what we wish for – went east of Bedford via St John's – yet they pitted connectivity with Bedford Midland, pours all movements through the station box and to pretend you can do this given it is already congested, and deny new and extra capacity will be needed is just political opportunism and a head-in-sand approach. ERTA has been firm, resolute and called for reason to avoid putting all eggs in one basket. We will continue to flag up our route preference, even

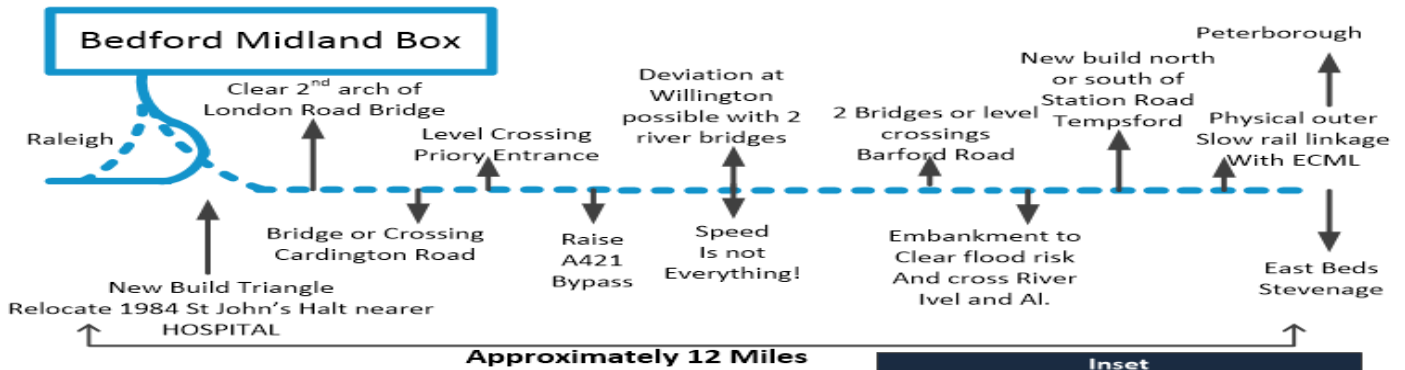
as the battle for rail or not continues. We may not object to the Northern Route E, but just continue to flag our preferred option in case it collapses. Likewise, we call for arms to provide physical linkage to the north-south main line at Tempsford for south of Peterborough, East Bedfordshire and north of Stevenage to have direct passenger and freight access to Bedford and the Oxford corridor. There's no need for a segregated station at Tempsford if the arms enable people to get on a train where they live like Sandy and travel direct to/from Bedford. To wait up to 30 minutes for a train to Tempsford, get off, walk, or lift down to segregated railway platforms and wait for a train from Cambridge and then travel to Bedford, will be hotly contested by a quicker direct bus or driving attraction? Likewise, even if you plant 300 houses (yes, a load of infill development awaits in the wings of this 'theatre' of accommodation), there's no guarantee they will automatically commute to Bedford or Cambridge per se, as contrast say London magnet draw for example? Our view is to save money on a station and curtail the development and install physical linking arms to enable optimal market share of the railway net-work effect. Likewise, a north-east curve would enable Huntingdon and St Neots folks direct rail-based access to Cambridge South new station which will serve the Addenbrookes Hospital area; saving a need to drive across Cambridge City area, which is currently and has been long congested over many years and will get worse before it gets better as the new Black Cat A1 Roundabout and A428 dualling provide ample capacity for traffic growth and regional development sprawl, fills it to stand-still? So, no railway means a very dysfunctional set of default dynamics indeed with congestion wasting time, pollution accruing and people, communities and public health and well-being suffering in such wakes as is proven elsewhere. There is a good case for the rail alternative, but not at all costs, rather, if we're going to spend £5 billion, to choose a flat, straight and arguably versatile route we put forward over Northern Route E, which needs fine-tuning if not switching to our suggestion.



Caption above: From the end of Station Road, Tempsford which has green flat fields north and south of it. Looking north there's plenty of land for arms to physically link the north-south railway and east-west, likewise to the south of Station Road, Tempsford. In years to come, infill development will fall on it as a curtain on a theatre! Time is running out to get it right.

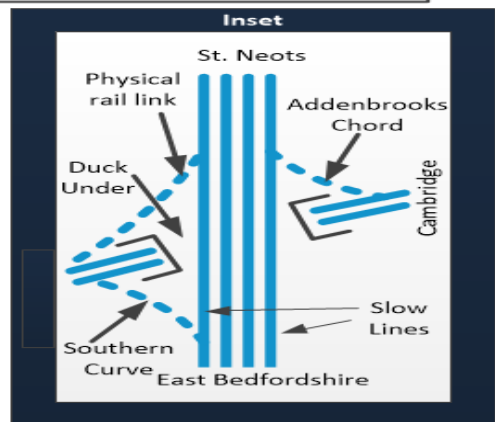
Below: our suggested route detail:

Bedford to ECML Breakdown



Key
 - - - Reinstated or new build railway
 — Existing Line

- 1) Compare and Contrast with Northern Route
- 2) ECML = East Cost Main Line
- 3) Our proposal is shorter, flatter, clearer and reaches more...



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Not to Scale
 © R.Pill ERTA 1 Dec 2022



Above left: Taken in the late 1980's/early 90's, view from over-bridge of the East Coast Main Line (ECML) just north of what would be Sunderland Road wrap-around link road in Sandy, Bedfordshire. ERTA's predecessors argued a rail deviation north of Sandy and studies showed it could be done.

Above right: From exactly the same over-bridge north of Sandy (2023), extended warehouse style development to the left, remnant field to the right. Hence, both suggested routes, ours, and that of the East-West Rail Company, backed by Government, lands at Tempsford instead. There are no panaceas, just a need for rail choice.

Our promotional poster breakdown – sadly has fallen on deaf ears and now the 11th hour!

9-Oct-2022

Bedford to East Coast Main Line How to Make it Happen?

	Bedford	
What Needs Doing?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straighten track south of Bedford Midland to St John’s area • Reinstate a triangle to the St John’s area • Unblock southern underpass of London Road bridge • Relocate Stagecoach car park • Cardington Road level crossing or a new bridge over railway and single carriageway with 20 mph speed • New cycle / footpath • New level crossing Priory Park entrance
What Needs “Can Do” Approach?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise A421 Bypass for rail to pass under • Study deviation or reinstate through Willington • Bridge or level crossing Willington and Blunham Roads • Route north of Blunham • Cross A1 and rivers • New north/south physical rail links with East-West rail
	ECML Cambridge Ely	

Not to scale © R. Pill/ERTA Visit us at www.ertarail.co.uk E: richard.erta@gmail.com

A brief history: In 1987 Richard Pill called a Public Meeting which inaugurated an association to call for a reopening of a Bedford-Sandy Rail Link as a minimum to enable people to get across and change or trains go onwards to Cambridge via either an Ickleford Curve or a rebuild of Cambridge-St Ives-Huntingdon railway. Many detractors said “Sandy is built on, so you can’t do it” We were told to commission studies which cost avarice sums then and now and were beyond us and then traded in ‘realism’. However, despite opposition from all sides, when the East-West Rail Consortium was founded circa 1994/5, it commissioned a study by Steer Davis Gleave which showed Bedford-North of Sandy rail link could be done and suggested linkage via a curve at Ickleford to join the Hitchin-Royston Lines. Now development curtails it at Sandy, but nothing like knocking 60 homes down in the Bedford area for Northern Route E! Suffice to say the original railway should never have closed, the old route should have been protected and we should listen to the ‘still small voice’ sometimes!

Photos of our successful Public Meeting at the Quaker Building in Bedford on 25th March.



Cllr Tom Wootton in the middle, now Elected Mayor!



Top left: An observer counted approximately 40 people, with 3 in the hall-way because they could not get in. The meeting discussed East-West Rail.

Left: We were delighted to welcome Mohammad Yasin, MP for the Bedford and Kempston Constituency and the meeting was chaired by Colin Crawford, ERTA Vice Chair.



Bottom Left x2: Richard Pill, who also spoke at the meeting, presents the MP with a reopenings booklet which had kindly been donated. We recruited new members on the day as well.



Bottom Right: One of our Patrons, Mr Trevor Garrod had come all the way from Lowestoft to the meeting and others from elsewhere meant a mix of local and wider sentiment both appreciating what a new rail link could offer, but also concerns about which route, how trains could reverse into a twin bay passenger interchange at Bedford Midland and freight, via reinstated triangle at St John's need not be required to pass through Bedford Midland.



Dates for your diary:

Annual General Meeting (AGM) and associated: Saturday 15th July 1pm food, 2-3pm business and from circa 3pm a discussion on transport issues in Central Bedfordshire including the narrative on Ampthill Station. All welcome. Venue is The Swan Pub (opposite the railway station served by regular Thameslink trains). Plenty of parking as well. Address: **The Swan Pub, 1 Dunstable Road, Flitwick, Bedfordshire, MK45 1HP**

T: 01525 754777 E: steph@theswanflitwick.co.uk Website: <https://www.swaninflitwick.co.uk/> This is your association, please come and hear accounts, reports and engage. A vote will be taken on raising the membership rate to £20 per annum. We need paid-up members to consider joining and serving on the ERTA Executive Committee (EC) all offers via Richard Pill richard.erta@gmail.com ERTA is as good as its membership informs. We are growing! Make a difference!

Shrewsbury Forum: All welcome! **Saturday 22 July at the Montgomery Tower, Lower Claremont Bank, Shrewsbury SY1 1RT 1pm lunch, 2-4pm business. Phone 01743-239080** <https://www.jdwetherspoon.com/pubs/all-pubs/england/shropshire/montgomerys-tower-shrewsbury> .Agenda via richard.erta@gmail.com and any further details via Mr Simon Barber T. 0208 940 4399 E. simon4barber@gmail.com All welcome.

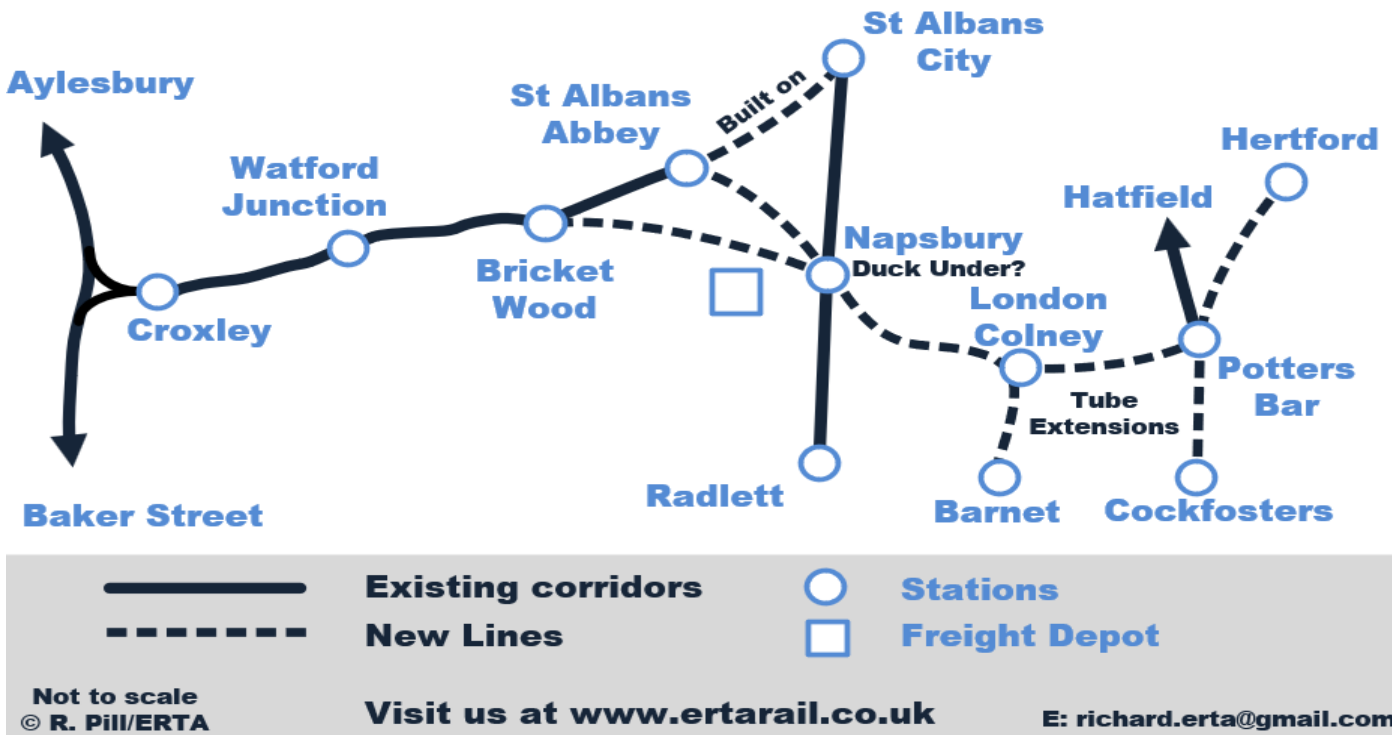
Brighton Forum: All Welcome! Saturday 19th August 1pmk food and 2-4pm business. South Coast Rail Matters and getting direct from Brighton to Reading and Heathrow by rail and an Arundel curve and what it could offer. Venue: Upstairs <https://www.jdwetherspoon.com/pubs/all-pubs/england/east-sussex/the-post--telegraph-brighton> The Post and Telegraph, 01273 827540, 155–158 North Street, Brighton, East Sussex, BN1 1EA Contact Simon Barber to let him know you are attending.

Northampton Public Meeting – the big one! Saturday 30th September at The Northampton Quakers, Quaker House, Wellington Street, Northampton NN1 3AS <https://www.quaker.org.uk/meetings/northampton> 2pm-4pm (core time) with Guest Speaker (asked) and sales stall (old magazines, please bring cash with you). ERTA has an agenda for Northampton, we want a new-build Northampton-Bedford (linking with lines to London and Brighton as well as emergent East-West Rail to Cambridge and East Anglia) and a new-build Northampton-Market Harborough. These lines need studying, the formal case to be worked up and routes including new-build/deviations factored in designs. Cycle, walkway and nature corridors can go alongside trunk roads as per A27 Lewes: <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/23445960.a27-work-complete-cycle-path-built-east-lewes-scheme/> Too long we've thrown everything at former rail routes, whilst denying their re-use as a railway, but instead entertain unadulterated increases in road traffic, congestion, pollution, toll on public health and well-being, loss of habitat and so much more. If amenity is what NIMBY's want, that can be done, but if they object to a railway whilst entertaining a status quo of roads like A508, M1, A14, A428 and more, then we must challenge whether that is a truly 'green' mentality or head-in-the-sand blinkeredness?

Association News:

<p>CEO and Executive Committee (EC): On Thursday 25th May the Executive Committee decided to name Richard Pill as CEO of the association, given he does a 'lion's share' of work. ERTA has 5 emergent regions in various states of being: Southern Guildford-Horsham focus with alternating meetings as and when resources and opportunity informs. South Midlands, which includes Bedfordshire and surrounds, East Midlands which is an area we need more helpers with and The Northern areas which our members Mr Chris Hyomes flags us up from time to time, but we still wish to inform a regular forum to bring people together. Now looking west, Reading, Oxford, Bristol, Shrewsbury and Welsh Borders as are tentacular linkages we wish to shore up and consolidate with new members, area reps, tabled forums, and campaigning to advance the rail reopening agenda and progress rail links. May we thank everyone for their support!</p>	<p>Articles for Newsletters please: ERTA welcomes photos and articles which support what we do and makes the case for more and better local rail reopenings, freight by rail and helping save the environment in such wakes. Ideally articles need not be more than 500 words, on word docs and emailed to richard.erta@gmail.com Likewise photos Jpegs to exact same email with any captions x1 photo or diagram per time. It is subject to editorial review and fit of space at any given time and may feature in on-line social media like Facebook as well as a future newsletter or not depending on priorities.</p> <p>Woodhead Rail Photos Calling: Our report advocating a Woodhead rail link new-build (reopening in all but name!) needs more diagrams and photos for fleshing it out and illuminating the report which is pro-positive. If you wish to work with Richard and provide these photos, please email him and liaise to take it further.</p>
<p>Membership proposed to rise to £20 per annum to cover rising costs and enable more. On 25th May the EC agreed to raised the membership rate to £20 per annum pending a vote at the AGM on the 15th July (see separate notice). Yes, we have a cost-of-living crisis, but also inflation has driven up costs across the board. We want to do more and better; we wish to ensure we can afford to operate and engage as best we may. Printing and postage, travel aid to less well-off volunteers, but also as we expand, hall hire to table credible public meetings all costs money. It is still less-than £2 per month. Still cheaper than some other outlets. Our association needs more members and volunteers who want to roll up sleeves and get involved. If you want more and better, then ensuring the best funding of your association is a key way to enable that potential as well.</p>	<p>Ampthill Parkway Station idea – a volunteer needed to work at it: Further to the last newsletter article, we are keeping the project on the back-burner but will flag it up from time to time until the development march on the western flank blocks the station parking access off Fordfield Road. We desperately need local people to get on board and offer to work with our coordination as volunteers to take the project forward via advocacy, leafleting, coffee mornings and raising both membership, awareness, and support. Ampthill Town Council is opposed to a station in their name citing other rail industry views as well. Meanwhile others demand referenced business cases, but that technicality is beyond our ability and yet they don't offer to work with us to enable that to be done. We are for the long haul if a modicum of support can be realised.</p>

Bucks Herts Options



The above diagram shows what ERTA would like to see the powers that be identify and pursue as a rail-based transport strategy across Hertfordshire. Our member Tony Houghton has been very active flagging up a rebuilt and reopened Croxley Rail Link and we want it to be linked with the Met and Chiltern Lines and run through to Watford Junction and maybe a new direct through link to the Watford-St Alban's 'Abbey Branch'. Whether such can be done remains to be seen, but should be looked at as to feasibility in any case. Such a link could lend to passenger and more freight by rail, taking congestion off local roads, even as not all residents see it that way, sadly! <https://www.hertfordshiremercury.co.uk/news/hertfordshire-news/st-albans-land-near-m25-7926512> shows the progression or not of a Radlett Airfield road-rail freight depot with presumably a new road access off the M25, would enable long haul by rail granted, but would also take green lands and landscape from a current state of fallow? Where does balancing landscape and environment in the wider sense meet? Rail has a pivotal role, but needs infrastructure and that takes land. ERTA has called for Napsbury to have an interchange station and for the tube from Barnet or elsewhere to be extended to link with Thameslink at Napsbury and maybe via a duck-under go to terminate at St Albans Abbey second bay, which needs resuscitating for rail use. The East-West Rail project must not be the only east-west rail-based solution, but we need Hertfordshire (25 miles north of the North London Lines) and north of A14 (75-mile distance from North London Lines) to be re-railed or new-build rail. Why? Because east-west traffic currently has no east-west rails for 100 miles north of London and the only way to check and balance unadulterated traffic proliferation and pollution is to inform rail alternatives. ERTA hopes to be able to afford a public meeting in St Albans to bring people together more and inform ultimately a team of members to take these matters forward. If development is inevitable, at very least it must be sustainable!

<p>Great Central Back-burnered: After years of campaigning, leafleting and advocacy, the effort has failed to court membership, a team, advocacy and resilience to enable it to court professional and electoral interest and cooperation. Reality is that development bet HS2 Calvert-Brackley in the south, Magna Park and other infill north of Rugby and the pup that you can use the old Midland Junction north of Rugby when it would require flat-level junctions on-coming to fast lines, beggars' belief! Much of the route is lost, there's been no interest. The great divide is whether HS2 should or should not be happening, whether at cost, it will deliver real capacity on existing other lines and Great Central has been squeezed. Although poorer, places like Rugby are places which have moved-on since the closure and focuses are on other things. Meanwhile, the lack of a direct link to Leicester, remains a challenge for re-railing.</p>	<p>Volunteers Needed! The main volunteers ERTA needs are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. EC Members to swell our managerial ranks, do committee work and ensure the professional operation of the association we are all committed to flourish. 2. Photographic and technical Officers to help with taking photos at our meetings and events for the newsletter/social media applications and helping with sorting equipment and being responsible for it to enable more illustrated talks to draw in the crowds. 3. Marketing Officer – to help with promoting our events and ERTA generally in a digital age. We want to court a broad range of age and ability to better represent a diverse society. It and you must translate to membership and liaise regularly with EC Officers. These jobs can be multiplied according to regions. 4. Generally all-round helpers, niche fillers and help with car transport, seeking sales stall opportunities, raising funds and ideally local to Bedfordshire to double-up with Richard.
<p>New Focus on Guildford-Horsham with 'new curves'! Following a meeting with an MP, ERTA has decided to focus on Guildford-Horsham rail link and a south-west curve from Guildford towards Arundel and support a west-south Arundel Curve for running into Brighton via the South Coast. We are not pursuing Horsham-Shoreham direct as a. no support apparent translating to local membership and volunteer terms, b. it is more developed than Guildford-Horsham making full-blown rebuild harder and c. MP supports the Arundel Curve, so working with that grain, seems expedient for more of what we wish for. Meanwhile alternating meetings between Guildford and Horsham, courting Cranleigh to the rail idea and much more is substantive enough pending more people and resources.</p>	<p>Northern Railway Appeal: If you live or know people who live say North of Derby bet east or west of the Pennines, we welcome them to join ERTA and help inform a regular Sheffield-based Forum to bring people together, feed support and ideas to getting our reopenings agendas peopled and progressed incrementally. Top reopenings are plethora but key are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Woodhead. In the past it was 'King Coal' which was a staple freight, today, Hull-Liverpool arcingly; containers could replace that as well as a revived limited stop passenger service inclusive of Sheffield and Manchester. 2. Matlock-Buxton/Chinley as a full-bodied conventional rail rebuild would enable East Midlands-North West synergies and patterns and vice versa footfall and spend on a sustainable basis. See: We thoroughly support the work of MEMRAP: https://www.memrap.org/ Cycle-ways and footpaths can be re-worked, railways not so easy.

Nostalgia Page: Bedford-Sandy Rail Corridor Musings:



Circa 1992: Looking west from the trackbed of the old Bedford St John's Station area. The former signal box long gone now, controlled Bedford-Bletchley, triangle and tracks into the old Station. Modernization saves overhead costs but comes at a cost of reducing the historical charm of a local railway. All old signal boxes were taken out along Bedford-Bletchley as well as semaphore signals and now colour lights albeit no passenger trains currently!

Circa 1984: Looking east from the window of a Class 104 train rounding the 1984 curve to the new Bedford St John's Halt built under Ampthill Road Bridge in Bedford. Looking east on the old Bedford St John's and London Road overbridge. Twin chimneys of former Goldington Power Station roughly central to the picture. This site has been dormant ever since, despite ERTA and predecessors calling for interim use for railway purposes. We want east-west rail this way ideally.



Left caption: Standing on the Elstow Road old Hitchin bridge looking north. St John's signal box side-on, Hitchin arches on the left, County Hall, now Borough Hall on the right. This is all now housing and that is what the old St John's Halt will be if an illusive application goes in and scuppers our rail links east of Bedford via St John's locking in a 'Northern Route E' or bust for East-West Rail. Idealism of end-to-end speed and efficiency, has to be balanced with interim local need and balance.

Caption Right: The old Bedford St John's sign fixture taken 1992. It is sad that the old Bedford-Cambridge rail link was closed. Even the famous Dr Beeching said Bedford-Cambridge should stay open, and other east-west lines were closed in such wakes like Luton-Hatfield and Northampton-Peterborough for example. 1967 Bedford-Cambridge closed and we've been poorer ever since amidst a critical infrastructure gap!



Welcome to the Modern Railway, but where is it going?



Photo above: A fast train on the East Coast Main Line heads south just north of Sunderland Road Industrial Estate, Sandy, East Bedfordshire. On the right of the main line is a solar farm, on the left, open farmland. Taken by Richard Pill.

There is much talk about where our railways are going. On the one hand, the attack against walk-on, walk-off access, discounts, ticketing choices and booking offices with staff to provide a welcoming and supportive environment and on the other, a digital age, slicker streamlining, pre-booking, more self-reliance (an ideologically rooted belief system) and the issue of balance. Then again, the structure of the railways, akin to other 'public service sectors' have been quasi privatised, but creepingly the Government reels back when that privatised idealism proves to be unsustainable to provide a consistent level of quality and affordable public service. The quest for profit, at the expense of the standards we expect within a cost-ratio to affordability and inclusive values for example, are not being balanced. Whilst some can provide empty trains in some cases, overwhelmingly demand is high and overcrowding on certain routes x nationwide a real issue for many people whilst prices keep going up and no remedy in sight? Structurally the Government is seeking to launch and equip a Great British Railways set up to better manage railways, but ever increasingly the tension between Government direct control and letting control to 'get on with it' freedoms, still leaves costs and who ultimately pays, be it general taxation or the customer be it freight or passengers. What are we trying to achieve is a timely question? On the one hand a Climate Emergency leaves no room for complacency and a need to hasten rail reopenings and give real modal choice to more communities for people and goods to go by rail and switch funds from expensive roads pandering to more rail alternative. On the other, Secretary of State for Transport Mark Harper said at a Select Committee hearing "I am the Secretary of State for the Department for Transport, not Railways"! Government delay, dithering and half-hearted patchiness is costing us and the railway dear and needs to decide once and for all putting people and environment first. Failure to do so or pluralism will cost us dear however predicated!

From the CEO: This is not the newsletter originally planned. We've all done it, but the annoying thing about losing a text or document, is very often no-one or nothing to blame except ourselves. Mistakes and accidents are a part of life and we need resilience to deal with them. So, we have a route for a new Bedford-Cambridge Railway and some take the view "it is a railway, at any cost 'must have'" for others, especially NIMBYs and those affected, - some 60 houses to be knocked down is no small thing for anyone – the cost is too high and an orchestrated campaign against is well underway, opposing not just the route, but the very need, justification, and case for a Bedford-Cambridge rail link itself. ERTA is faithful to its long-term view of 'right idea, wrong application'. We want tracks east of Bedford via St John's. No route is a panacea and all have pros and cons and outspoken opposition and yet the absence of an east-west rail link in these regions has haunted us for some 55 years. We get flack from members of Railfuture, and yet when I started out in 1987, many were cynical of a basic rail link between (then) Bedford and Sandy as a minimal for a Bedford – Cambridge rail link via either Ickleford curve to the Royston-Cambridge lines or via a rebuild of existing rails between Cambridge-St Ives-Huntingdon for linkage. Over the years which followed, the involvement of professionals via the East-West Consortium has taken the rail project up-hill and down hill many times but got it to places mere voluntary campaigners can but dream of. You have to start somewhere, where you are at and with the constraints and opportunities before you and finish somewhere. An east-west rail (if not more than just one) are badly needed as any examination of east-west roads indicates. Our route idea remains on the table if a Plan B is sought after.



Please Join ERTA Help us help you! <https://ertarail.co.uk/become-a-member/>

Tick if a New Member: _____

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

I/We wish to explore volunteering opportunities (optional) _____

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: c/o

T. 077659 77318 tony.houghton@keystonelaw.co.uk

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Join our free email loop for news and views: E. richard.erta@gmail.com

and see our website: <https://ertarail.co.uk/events>