

English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)		
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Great Central Corridor Re-railing between Oxford/Banbury/Woodford Halse or Oxford/Bicester/Calvert and Brackley-Woodford Halse and onwards to Willoughby, Rugby, Barby, Lutterworth and the Leicester/Nuneaton Lines Gatewaying to/from East Midlands Direct.

Who

The English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) is an unincorporated voluntary membership-based association which takes a particular interest on the agenda of forwarding better public transport especially rail around the English Regions. It has a growing membership across the regions and welcomes more.

What

Our concern and interest here are the re-railing of the former Great Central corridor which we believe could play a significant role in the areas and inter-regional connectives it could serve for both passenger and freight. It is not born of nostalgia but of the fact that if we are serious about climate emergency matters, modal shift pro-active is an essential ingredient to get traffic volumes, congestion and pollution down and re-railing incrementally is a key part of that.

Where

The section of Great Central corridor we are focusing on is in scope between Calvert and Narborough and possibly Banbury and Northampton as an interceptor link with mutual benefit. Places like Brackley, Woodford Halse, Willoughby, Barby and further north Lutterworth need re-railing. They are busy areas, loads of upgraded roadways, but a long way from rail connectivity.

Why

Currently trains between the triangle and all between Southampton/Bristol and Leicester/East Midlands have to go via London or Birmingham. This means few paths are available, restricts growth and takes capacity other trains could utilise. GC re-railing would enable: **Freight**, South Coast-East Midlands, South West and Wales-East Midlands and all in between and vice versa. East Midlands being a gateway to wider distribution networks. Currently there's a feeling that East Midlands is being shadowed and playing second fiddle to West Midlands spotlight and both should be equally getting new/reopened lines and investment to optimise potential and that sustainably with a view to environmental impacts. That means rails and this is a prime example. The ambition of vague 'defaultive capacity' created on the backs of HS2 for example, still leaves no direct rails to/from the East Midlands but via London and/or Birmingham and that is a capacity problem compounded unless new/rebuilt rail links are provided like this GC re-railing idea. **Passenger-wise** direct access 'not via Birmingham or London' means Cross-Country could be beefed up to offer more diverse services like Penzance/Paignton-York/Scarborough via Oxford/Banbury or Bicester/Brackley – Leicester and East Midlands principal stops and vice versa. New audiences and new markets. A real chance for rail to woo off road reliance to rail and a Nottingham-Bournemouth service is also potentially in the frame as well as new links and services between East Midlands/Leicester/Burton and Derby for example to Marylebone (London), Old Oak Common (via Princes Risborough or a rebuilt Calvert-Grendon link), Heathrow (a link between Chiltern Main Line and the Guildford-Heathrow Southern Proposal has been made to the DfT in numerous communications) and finally via a new chord onto the east-west rail Oxford lines via Bicester to Reading and via the Didcot avoiding lines to Bath and Bristol for example.

In reverse these new flows to Leicester and beyond offer sustained flows of footfall and spend, visitorship and exploration including access to the Peak District if the Matlock-Buxton line is reinstated and Sheffield-Manchester via Woodhead. All called for rebuild in recent years to take traffic pressure off the road system and cut emissions as a result whilst enabling more mobility to all.

How

The missing rail links are between the Oxford-Bletchley line – Brackley – Woodford Halse/Banbury-Woodford Halse-Willoughby-cross WCML/M1 on new viaduct to cross back to either serve Lutterworth or a wider area station and freight interceptor station east of the M1 with links between rail and the merging M1/A14/M6 Junctions and onwards to west of M1 to link anew with the Nuneaton-Leicester existing lines. At Knighton freight for further afield and indeed a diverse passenger alternative to Leicester could be to divert to the Knighton-Burton line for quick access to Derby with connections. The Knighton 'Ivanhoe Line' and Leicester access lines

could share the passenger and freight business on offer and enjoy more apiece. There would be plenty of business and benefit on offer and buoy up any business case and that could work back as a plus for the case to re-rail by return. It needs backers, funding study support and on-the-ground action.

Calvert or Banbury - Woodford Halse

Our original proposal wanted to take a spur off the being rebuilt Oxford-Bletchley lines onto the redundant GC trackbed to south of Brackley and via a new descent to raised trackbed in the valley to go to the east of the town intercepting the busy A43 and a bus link to Silverstone to make the most of the catchment served initially by a railhead station. The old formation was lost years ago with demolition of the old viaduct and houses built to the north of the old station. Thence a Phase 2 would be to extend to the north of the GC trackbed unimpeded with more or less relay to Woodford Halse where some realignment or relocation deal would have to be struck.

Now HS2 wants to utilise the old GC formation adding extra complication and cost and the 'throw everything at Calvert area' by multiple schemes of one sort or another means getting a chord onto a new domestic line alongside HS2 is potentially problematic. Moreover, the trackbed or alongside new domestic build to that of HS2 would require more land and some demolition/compulsory purchase upheaval. That is always controversial even as big brothers seem to have more ability to assume that displacement role than domestic others. So, getting to north of Brackley and indeed serving Brackley is the most expensive bit, complicated and controversial. North of Brackley, with HS2 veering away to Solihull at a north-westerly angle, we assume the old trackbed.

Another suggestion has been to utilise existing tracks and rebuild a new rail link north of Banbury to Woodford Halse with modest distances and negotiations, albeit would have to negotiate M40 and HS2 and maybe some smaller developments enroute. This gets you there quicker, this cuts the cost of the Brackley link, but also means Brackley is still disenfranchised by being served by rail.

Once in the Woodford Halse area we proceed to south of Willoughby (new station) and a split with a link off serving Barby and linking to where the WCML fast and Northampton Loop lines diverge on a graded flyover which going south would veer to the west. The other GC route – old alignment would go into Rugby and have a second station (Rugby Central) and cross the WCML via new viaduct.

Our view is we don't mind overly. Both have merit and should both be studied. If HS2 brigades were to offer to passively design rail access for domestic link to serve Brackley, that would be a kind and welcome gesture given they have no intention of providing such a station.

Both options should be studied and weighed on their merits. In terms of getting things done, the cheapest, least protracted option and quickest to deliver should be done.

Direct link to Rugby Central and beyond

We have already mentioned our suggestion of getting into Rugby (WCML) for linkage (passenger and freight). The old Rugby-Leicester formation and line would have been useful even as far as where they intercepted with the GC/M1 area so a loop and chord onto the GC 'new build' could be considered. Deviations around built areas would be required. But again, the idea of a new link between Rugby and Leicester with their connectives commends itself for consideration. Likewise, a direct new viaduct GC across and go alongside the M1 to Lutterworth/A14/M6 Junctions and onwards crossing back over or under M1 to lands west entering via a new chord to descend to flat junction link with the Nuneaton – Leicester lines. You could have a west and east junctioning, which from the Nuneaton line direction, would enable early GC access and reduce transits along WCML between Nuneaton and Rugby for example or vice versa accessing WCML or West Midlands via Nuneaton. It is all direct routing, all new capacity and catering for growth not just on existing lines or default, but instigationally. You cannot have default capacity if the lines don't go where the business is and that is plundering road congestion, not competing between rail companies!

Summary of Passenger AND Freight Benefits:

- Direct AND Default capacity creation
- Re-railing a corridor unserved nearby by rail access
- Taking on the roads, not other railways and operators
- Open access, open to all
- Provider of infrastructure must benefit from use
- Outlying area re-railed giving modal choice
- Regions better linked not via Birmingham or London dependent
- Direct, faster uninhibited access enabling more by RAIL
- Enabling and underpinning sustainable growth

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