



English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

	<p>Patron: Sir Edmund Verney + Others welcome of professional, business or other acumen and of good standing.</p>	
<p>~ Contributing towards retention and improvement in better public transport. ~</p>		
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ERTA March-Spalding Railway Reopening Report

*~ A new railway for a new dawn answering
the call of traffic reduction and inward
investment opportunities. ~*

By Richard Pill B.A. (Hons) April 2019

£2.50

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Foreword

I first became aware of the March-Spalding rail link in the 1990's when I met people who had travelled on the last train as youngsters with their parents and also listened to stories of rail campaigners who had fought against the closure, citing short comings in Local Government and its responses.

The passage of time means that old routes if not formally protected even under the auspices of other congenial uses, are subject to erosive elements of nature, other uses, absorption into other lands or developed over, encroachment abounds and this rail link corridor is no exception.

The English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) does not advocate reopening every inch of former railway in religious terms, rather we take a pragmatic approach of recognising when old routes are lost and yet identifying the strategic gaps in the national rail network. This includes looking and advocating studies to examine the merits and other considerations for recovery or new build and to nonetheless link 'a' to 'b' again in the wider interest of better mobility, access and public transport.

There will always be cynics and sceptics and schools of mantra thoughts whereby once closed a railway cannot be reopened, or once bridges lost or encroachment happens it cannot be undone. Likewise, new build can correct past mistakes and drawbacks of a plethora of settlements which dictated the route of a railway but equally no new route necessarily guarantees problem-free access and straight forward build. A balance has to be struck and the study to come up with solutions and options is pivotal to establishing what can be done and then, on balance to agree to do what needs doing to implement a new railway.

This report seeks to outline in basic terms, some references which may be taken into account, to bring together those open to scope and search for solutions to overcome setbacks and problems and ultimately work together to nurture the plausibility, retention and option to re-rail the corridor.

Certainly the experience of other similar reopenings/rebuilds can be lesson drawing to inform a better performance elsewhere. However, the comfort of a new dawn of realisation that the closures of local rail links across the UK by stealth and superimposition inflicted serious structural vandalism on local communities blighting their prospects, performances and options. Moreover, in an ever growing and complicated world of both Global forces and Localism and the management of such interfaces calls for a hearty revision and rectification where possible.

Transport affects us all and whether from social, economic or environmental perspectives the benefits of restoring a local rail link have to be weighed by the experiences hitherto and the loss of not taking action to secure the prospect for this and future generations.

Richard Pill B.A. (Hons)

20th April 2019

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Executive Summary

- The March-Spalding rail link closed in 1982
- The rail link was mentioned as a suggestion for reopening 1999/2000 by Railtrack (NMS)
- The route has not been protected down the years and many aspects have been dismantled, lost, compromised, built on or ploughed or obliterated
- There is a need for a new route linking March with Spalding
- The railway link, links two Fenland towns but also East Anglia with the North East and vice versa off the East Coast Main Line (ECML)
- The railway needs a new route and new construction with engineering, environmental impact and business case being studied, options ascertained and consulted on as a prelude to building the new rail link serving the wider transport and other needs
- The rail link would decongest existing roads and rails, create capacity and enable more passenger and freight volumes by rail, benefitting the economy and environment
- South Lincolnshire and North Cambridgeshire have capacity for positive growth if it can be predicated on a restoration of the local rail infrastructure to avoid congestion and associated road ills
- The rail link could play a role in bringing more footfall, spend and investment to the areas it serves.
- South Lincs has a swathe of unemployment and suppressed social and economic disadvantaged society which needs the boost and stimulus the railway could bring
- ERTA suggests a new build solution with realigned railway around places like Cowbit which could have a new edge of town station and a positive gain for its people and future growth and associated impacts.
- New junctioning nearer to Deeping St Nicholas and likewise new junctioning in the March area with extension of Whitemoor Yard, slight amendment of the Prison or a new link off the March-Wisbech railway also proposed for reopening
- Bridges would have to replace former level crossings, but new design could also bring other benefits not apparent in the 19th century
- ERTA calls for public support and activism to encourage and court local councils to take an interest, support and embrace the prospect, form consortia and pooling resources, time and talent invest in studies to make the case and wider benefits and court Government and Network Rail GRIP acceptance and scheduling for implementation
- ERTA can aim to promote, table meetings and support within limited and finite voluntary human and other resources, but needs people to join locally and offer to be volunteers to help foster a credible discourse to achieving the steps necessary for progressing the scheme to the ultimate conclusion, protecting the corridor and bringing others on board.
- The new corridor could also be linked and paralleled by a cycle and footpath corridor for leisure and conservation 'green corridor' solution with the rail associated with it.

1.0 March – Spalding Loss

On 27 November 1982 the 19.75-mile railway linking March with Spalding closed. (1.)

In the late 1990's/early 2000's Railtrack suggested reopening in its Network Management Statements. Campaigners fought the closure, but the Local Authorities were not up to the job of seeing the wider regional role the railway could play and let it go. They have not bothered to protect the trackbed and now it is compromised and obliterated.

The key potential the line offers:

1. **A regional link:** East Coast Main Line/Doncaster – East Anglia and Cambridge/Stansted Airport direct cross country linkage avoiding bottle necks, delays and changing trains at Peterborough, freeing up capacity on and off the rails.
2. **A local link:** Population has risen since closure and the over heating London and South-east is looking to expand but the rail infrastructure is with glaring gaps like this one case and the roads, despite massive spend on them, get congested and clog up access to town centres, where parking demand/land allocation balances are always at a premium. Buses are not as comprehensive as once were, so public transport access is a poor relation to pandering to the car and lorry.
3. Peterborough despite a flyover and duck-under being provided, still takes time and at great cost is a long way around to get from a to b. Peterborough tracks to/from East Anglia are twin tracks and cater for multiple passenger and freight movements. Growth means that capacity is bottlenecked with what the approaching lines can manage in any given hour and that means rail is inadequate to cater for all the potential business it could reasonably court. The result is more traffic on local roads, adding costs to wear and tear renewal demand and accidents which can cost lives. Air pollution is not able to be checked as there is no rail alternative thanks to the local rail closures and rationing of service provision.
4. South Lincolnshire is suppressed with above average under-employment, low wages, suppressed incomes and divides between haves and have nots. Contrast relatively affluent Cambridge and South-east areas. The rail link offers commutes to Cambridge, direct access to Stansted Airport and East Anglia generally with new prospects, more spendable income and lifestyle enhancements lifting the incoming footfall and spend, share of visitorship markets and sustaining small to medium sized businesses, shops and services, which otherwise would not be sustainable on current trends and levels. (2)
5. The rail link if newly built could be realigned where blockages exist like going around the edge of Cowbit and new junctions further west of Spalding near Deeping St Nicholas/new access over the A1175. New build and interpretation in between these key points and tacking on to the stub of the proposed March-Wisbech reopening gets around Whitemoor Prison blockage.

2.0 Struggling South Lincs:

For a long time, South Lincolnshire has missed out on the warming benefits of the overheated and expanding London and South-east prosperity boom. The lack of critical infrastructure from hot spots for employment, tourism and visitorship. Footfall and spend is below par. Better local rail links hold a key to unlocking potential with associated jobs, prosperity and lifting of the standard of the game and discussion from cyclical status quo to more opportunities for all.

The costs of starting a business combined with whether sufficient patronage exists to make it sustainably viable goes against a society with pockets of poverty even relatively, where money is tight or a daily struggle to make basic ends meet, ideas of starting a business which could cost more than £3000 p.a. start up costs and loans have to be paid back which means sustained viability is crucial to ensure success. The rail link can:

1. Offer sustained footfall and spend
2. New audiences and interest
3. Choice of transport, access and mobility inwards and outwards
4. Traffic congestion management and reduction, freeing up parking for others
5. Land use allocation decisions made easier whereby demand is more controllable and land use for things like employment and housing is not impinged by parking demand.
6. Raise the game on local prosperity and ability to purchase more spiralling demand and supply chains upwards not downwards.
7. Make growth sustainable as you would have the north-south, east-west axis strategic rail infrastructure to cope and cater for expansion and growth and ensure it is manageable.

Currently Spalding is a satellite of Peterborough for commuting, employment and services. Meanwhile Cambridgeshire and East Anglia is only accessible by road. This makes car ownership and reliance (cost) locked-in and the trend makes the divide between haves and have nots ever wider as sustaining public transport on low incomes and limited mobility is harder to justify financially.

It is quite feasible that if a new railway is built and it did serve the perimeter of Cowbit, a Parkway Station could be provided. This, bearing in mind the location's population will swell and expand, so planning to implement a railway on new alignment needs to be done now. Likewise protecting new junctioning access at Deeping St Nicholas and at the March end and all in between to ensure options remain open and viable and are not further squandered and compromised locking in dysfunctionality and depressed socio-economic scenarios unbecoming for a nice area of the country. Congestion is a cost we could all do without. (3)

3.0 Kernel of what is required now

ERTA is very pragmatic. The old formation and railway are lost. We can't wind the clocks back; we cannot pretend that demand for housing is not high and trends hitherto will continue to spiral. But on inadequate infrastructure means that congestion and associated ills also rise locked in to confined spaces and corridors with no relief planned and therefore realisable. Thus, what we have to do is draw a line in the sand and say "start again". Clean sheet, new railway linking March with Spalding not as ends in themselves although that local commute dimension should not be under-estimated but rather mixed with the regional aspecting, the passenger and freight, the wider gains locally, regionally and to far flung places like Peterborough, Cambridge and Lincoln respectively.

Key aspects:

1. New Junctioning at Deeping St Nicholas, could be integrated with new passing sidings and/or a mini freight depot, getting more lorries off local roads, creating sustainable jobs on the railway and the associated lands around could be a mix of agriculture and conservation bordering the edges to give that 'greening' touch with landscaping to barrier noise or light blight for example.
2. New construction to edge of Cowbit, new Parkway Station edge of Cowbit
3. New construction to the March area
4. New junctioning with either the trunk of the former March-Wisbech line to avoid Whitemoor Prison or re-develop prison perimeter to make way for a new rail access. There's plenty of land in that vicinity, creative designs and some flexibility could be an opportunity for all.

The above seems simple at face value but at this stage ERTA calls on the public and Local Authorities to grasp the idea and opportunity going forward and plan to foster the policies and conditions for realisation in a 10-year time frame. It depends upon commissioning a study to establish case, credentials and fit on landscape and technical aspects like bridges instead of level crossings, costs and pooling talent to work towards delivery courting Whitehall downwards support, interest and Network Rail GRIP listing and incremental movement towards delivery. Formation of consortia is prudent to pool resources, bring agencies, talent and buy-in together to the project. Action is required, not just reports filed away to pretend we're doing something when hands-on is required at every location to forward to a coming together and agreement that the investment of time and talent in this 'one project' stands on its own two feet in robust case making credentials, wider community on and off rail benefits, regeneration, sustainability agendas and a range of cleaner-greener options for all pockets to give support and loyalty to.

4.0 A new railway

ERTA makes no bones that we need to approach this subject not based on past glories or nostalgia or steamy enthusiasm but a gritty commitment and determinism that the rail link end to end is a necessary thing and yes, new built infrastructure to modern standards, but delivery within a time frame and incremental staged progression to fruition.

It is unacceptable to say to owners of houses built on old trackbeds “move” as is the case in some top-down development schemes, rather working with the grain of how things are today, fostering a new railway with the end to end linkage benefits, the benefits of modern design and technical innovation today being apparent to make it a viable asset of which the community could be justifiably proud.

Railway journalists can be out of date in their clamour to seem objective, cold and scientific in thinking because whatever the reasons which informed decline and closure like old costly manual level crossings, spiralling costs, closure of local stations, timetable gaps and wider national agendas and fashion swings from rail to road, the reality is that over the decades the gaps of the closures have been keenly felt, the opportunities missed and lost palpable and the need to rectify in some cases where possible and prudent.

So in this case, now is the time to grasp we want a new railway linking March and Spalding and both local stations and communities and services and wider regional semi-fast services between principal places to beat congestion and road reliance and ideally give the environment a chance, save land and reduce emissions over all to the benefit of all. (4)

A new railway gives other options too like putting a linked cycle way and footpath alongside opening up the corridor to leisure and walking/cycling options integrated with local and regional rail services. This also adds footfall and spend, this also draws new visitorship to the areas the corridor serves, this too aids the environment, this also gives healthy options, enables enjoyment of countryside and instils a deeper appreciation of assets and the need to conserve land, to keep a balance between farming, conservation and development, as we need it all and all off the roads!

Local businesses stand to gain with a reopened railway. It is a win, win for all. It should be looked at positively and with fresh eyes by South Holland District Council and Lincolnshire County Council. There has been mooted a new curve between the Joint Line (Spalding-Doncaster) and the Sleaford-Skegness line to enable Peterborough-Skegness direct off of East Coast Main Line. Such again would be a great step forward for returning spinal Lincolnshire rail connectivity and new flows, sustaining all year-round employment and new commuting opportunities. If the electrification was extended even as far as Spalding, the extension and inclusion of the town with Thameslink could be another boost.

5.0 What the railway could offer

The cost of the new layout north of Peterborough to enable freight to and from East Anglia to Doncaster off the East Coast Main Line (ECML) which has capacity and growth issues, and saving the paths of crossing a main line from the East Anglia Lines on the western side of Peterborough station to the Spalding Joint Lines on the eastern exit from the ECML means that segregation on a great way round remains the order of the day. It will help but is not a panacea. Climate change and the balance between socio-economic robustness and modal shift back to rail for more to go by rail off roads, cutting congestion, costs and emissions, means that more trains – and by no means the only trains – entering that theatre junction, have to take paths, varying speeds, lengths, braking distances and signalling. Passenger and freight trains use the same tracks and all have to be timetabled, scheduled to pass through pinch points Ely-Peterborough, Peterborough Station itself and onwards to ECML, Leicester or Spalding and vice versa respectively.

March-Spalding anew could remove those freight trains bound for Doncaster or beyond plus growth of switch to rail from road trends and courting new flows from plethora business and market demand and supply of what the railway has to offer locally, regionally or nationally, remembering we are physically linked via the Channel Tunnel to international traffic potential import and export by rail were a coherent strategy for making more of it deployed.

That use of a new March-Spalding line then frees up paths for more other freight like Felixstowe-Nuneaton via Leicester and passenger growth, frequency and services on what is a principal cross country railway via Peterborough. This releases capacity on roads, reduces wear and tear/maintenance costs, accidents and makes for a cascade of benefits, reach, range and potential currently not available, reducing pressure and hot spots and both decluttering and keeping GB Plc moving positively.

The passenger reach and range being Ipswich-Bury-new station 'Soham'-Ely-March-Spalding-Lincoln/Doncaster and vice versa, similarly Lincoln-Cambridge and maybe onwards to run direct into Stansted Airport and vice versa – a market not available in the old days but churning out significant traffic and another place of employment and supply chains to serve and court from the food producing regions of England.

Norwich and the new proposed Oxford-Cambridge 'East-West Rail' all feeds into Cambridge and Ely and the link to Spalding and vice versa would bring new flows of opportunity, jobs and much more. Really apart from practicalities and cost, there is nothing negative about rebuilding a new railway, but much gain on and off the rails, both near and far.

6.0 Example of East-West Rail

East-West Rail (5 and 6) started by local members of the public in 1986 and 1987 respectively coming together and determining they wanted as much of the Oxford-Cambridge Rail Link reopened as possible. After 7 years Local Authorities clubbed together and in 1995 the East West Consortium was formed and in 2018 the East West Rail Company Ltd was established for the missing Bedford-Cambridge bit. It has taken a long time, £millions spent on studies, long hours of round table discussions, analysis and coalition building with many setbacks, now looks more positive and Oxford-Bedford at least is due by 2023 with a mooted date for the Bedford-Cambridge section in some shape or form by the early 2030's. Clearly the plans and actions of today are for the foundational benefits of tomorrows generations, interim since closure in 1967 it is bus, car and lorry and road based reliance with all the ills and side effects from parking land use pressure demand and costs, congestion, delay costs, emissions and public health concerns, quality of life balances and sheer consumer choice stifled. Additionally, the problem of town centres plummeting and capitulating to green field bypasses creating brown field out of town shopping with free parking and more capacity. This may be all well and good but it clogs up junctions and leaves those without cars disenfranchised on numerous fronts and now with town centre shops like M&S closing, access to quality and staple foods becoming harder and time consuming. It is a downward spiral epitomized by Bedford which has born the brunt contrast Milton Keynes which arguably generates much east-west traffic but as a new designed location copes better and absorbs more but even its grid system is clogging up now too.

We need to learn lessons of the East-West experience.

1. Yes, the principles of forming consortia are right to pool time, talent and resources
2. Yes, commissioning studies and working up the case, merits, practicalities, overcoming problems all need attention and methodological process and rigorous detail.
3. Yes, Local and Regional cases and considerations have to be brought together to show the panoply and dynamic appeal of what one piece of railway can offer and court the widest support at all tiers of Local, Regional and National Government
4. It needs commitment, gritty determination and never losing sight of what we are trying to achieve – a critical piece of infrastructure cruelly denied too long amidst growing need and demand at various levels and consideration from basic humanity and inclusion agendas to robust socio-economic ladders to bring out fullest potential of every individual and community which others are invited to invest in.
5. Yes, we need to have a clear path of successive steps and ideally get delivery in a timely manner, 10 years max not 35 years!

7.0 Need to act and work together

ERTA considers that whilst we can advocate schemes within our limited human and other resources, it relies on local people of all walks of life to come together and work together, to be of one accord and mind as to the goals and steps and sequestrations necessary to incrementally move towards delivery – which ultimately is what counts. With delivery you have an asset everyone can benefit from. The road towards it can be long and protracted, so needs a steady hand. Key goals need to be:

1. If you agree the principle, join ERTA or as an independent professional or other agency offer solidarity and support within your auspices and good office as and when able and willing. If people join it helps ERTA and in return, we help flag up the cause and scheme.

2. Next to have a register of willing supporters to meet bi-monthly or as agreed to start the processes to work towards goals.

3. To appoint an ERTA Member as an Area Rep who would seek to recruit new members to ERTA and [this] cause and feed into the meeting tabled and wider promotion of the idea of building a new railway. This could be greater or lesser according to willingness, means and ways open to lawfully pursue it. For example, someone could double up and attend events with a promotion stall, leaflet along the corridor, convene public meetings, raise funds and do library/other research and compile reports independently or via ERTA auspices which helps grow support, recognition and appreciation of the asset we are advocating.

4. Get Local Authorities, MP's and elected representatives at all tiers of government on board from parish upwards all along the line, maybe starting with Spalding and South Holland D.C.

5. Once you have that support, to form a consortium via Local Authorities and pooling resources commission a study to look at routes, options and both make a case, consider construction problems and over coming challenges and how local railway access and inclusion can be built into the new railway from day one. The leisure corridor with cycle and footpath access can also be mixed in here too with benefits.

6. Take it to Whitehall, Department for Transport, Treasury and as far as it needs to go whilst courting independent funding, courting the rail and other industries to see the wider on/off rail benefits and opportunities.

7. The role of ERTA is supporting, ushering, filling gaps and working in tandem with the goal of a new rail link always the focus and consideration. The past is past, the old route lost, new horizons, new railway, new designs, learning lessons of past misdemeanours and gaining from that experience, fostering best practise and exporting the talent to benefit other areas and schemes, championing what we achieve as we go. Public have a pivotal role to play as do the winning over of Local Authorities as key stepping stones for advancement.

Conclusions

It is hoped this report gives a basic foundational basis for kind consideration of on the one hand we accept that the old is gone, but on the other there is an urgent need to grasp that the asset is needed and necessary and should be new built with sensitivity, inclusion and modern design gains to inform a robust public transport life-line, bringing people and communities together.

It is not our wish to dwell on the past or what can't be recovered, but to start with a fresh blank sheet and agreement a railway linking March and Spalding is a good idea and one that should be sought after.

Finding means and ways and looking at best route and implementation options is exactly what a study must consider and then public consultation to get their steer and reflect on best fit and layout for this community asset to be restored to South Lincolnshire and North Cambridgeshire 'Fenland' areas.

This report hopefully outlines some key areas, gains and opportunities and overall to raise the game for all citizens and stakeholders in a shared world and society.

The commuting, capacity and planning gains means expansion and growth need not be a threat, but could be sensitively nurtured in tandem with the new railway to inform a sustainable corridor and areas at both locations, gaining and growing together.

The over-heating London and South-east and Southern Cambridgeshire needs better links to the rest of the country to expand, share out and allow others to gain from better links, prosperity and accommodating more people and getting the land allocation use balances in better harmony.

ERTA stands ready to play a role in the project and within its limited human and other resources, and to help advocate a new railway providing we have a support of local people for such a venture to be undertaken. Local people must determine the rightness or otherwise of this course of action and accept that a new railway is an asset and gain not a blight or drain!

Only by getting Local Authorities to buy into the new railway idea and being willing to entertain the recommendations, findings and direction of this report can we hope to make some progress. They know their area, the statistics and means and ways of getting things done, so getting their support to the principles is absolutely pivotal, as without that first rung of the ladder, the rest is and remains academic. The world does not stand still and unless action starts now, the windows of opportunity will be lost forever.

Appendix 1 The old route versus the new

Report from using Google Earth to survey the potential for route and branch recovery from March-Grimsby from 12-03-2018

1. March-Spalding

- a. Whitemoor Yard – Whitemoor Prison blocks immediate route to the north of it – could a new link come off and share the trackbed of the former Wisbech line also proposed for reopening and circumvent as near original source as possible to re-join former rail route?
- b. Crossing A141 at Rings End new bridge/viaduct and new bypass to west to cross River Nene and A47.
- c. Use adjacent field to Patrick Reclaim.
- d. Deviation needed at Josdan Boarding
- e. Access to west of B1167 and Contour Autocroft
- f. New bridge over Oxcroft Bank and Downsedale Bank
- g. New realignment near and over B1166
- h. New bridge over Queen's Bank
- i. Rebuild across fields and bridge
- j. South Holland main drain – new bridge needed
- k. New deviation to west of Cowbit with new access to re-join over/under A16 old trackbed.
- l. Access over/under A16 leaving old trackbed prior north of Cowbit to west crossing River Welland to join Peterborough-Spalding rail lines west of Spalding Common having crossed Littleworth Drove

This has cost but could be recovered according to the lie of the land at this time and as a unit is worth a. route protection/identification shoring up, b. studying as to engineering, environmental and case building credentials the why, how and what and c. pursuit as a candidate for reopening.

This is another example of local government not picking up on the civic and strategic community interest in protecting rail corridors. In a context of development proliferation (e.g. Cowbit and blocking access to Spalding) and some new agency / responsibility role is required to stem such erosions.

Benefits of reopening/rebuilding a new March-Spalding rail link:

- a. Fenland Commute to Ely, Cambridge and Stansted Airport
- b. Sustainable development and increased wage earner and spend in local communities especially at weekends – food, leisure and entertainment for example.
- c. Freight by rail, capacity for new flows, cutting the time and detour/congestion at Peterborough and reducing road pounding, wear, tear and maintenance costs.
- d. Better infrastructure to commend the area to sustainable growth rather than growth minus adequate transport links except unsustainable road reliance for majority transport uses.
- e. It would supplement and feed other lines and public transport services including local buses and enable localised commutes bet work, school, college and all year-round football and spend to the towns it could serve. This could also cut parking demand pressures and land use allocation conflicts.

Disclaimer: This was compiled before South Holland District Council gave permission to develop housing at Cowbit on the old trackbed and associated lands.

Appendix 2 Figs 1, 2 and 3

Fig 1

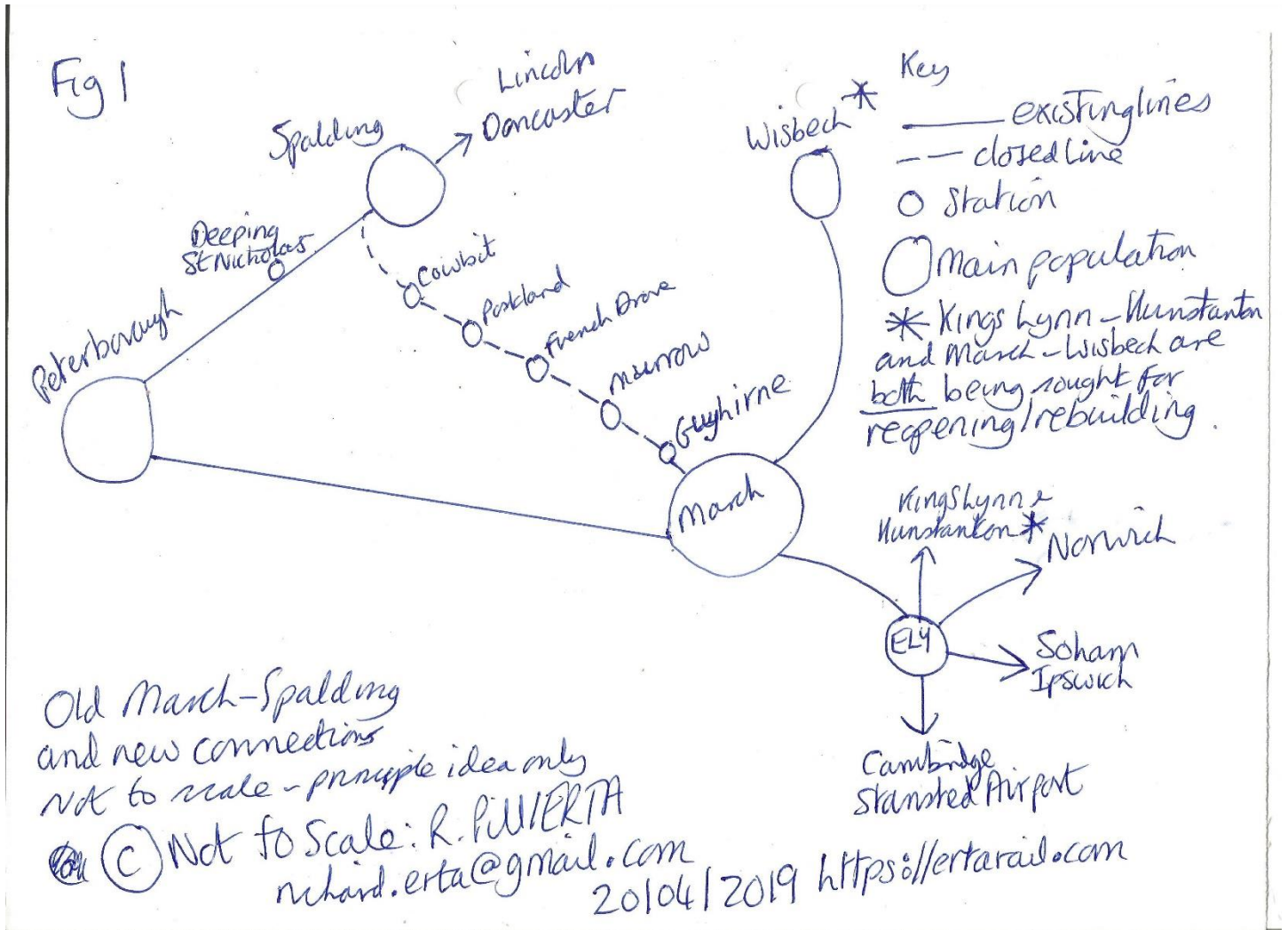


Fig 1 above shows local dimension and how things were but now reinterpretation is needed.

Fig 2

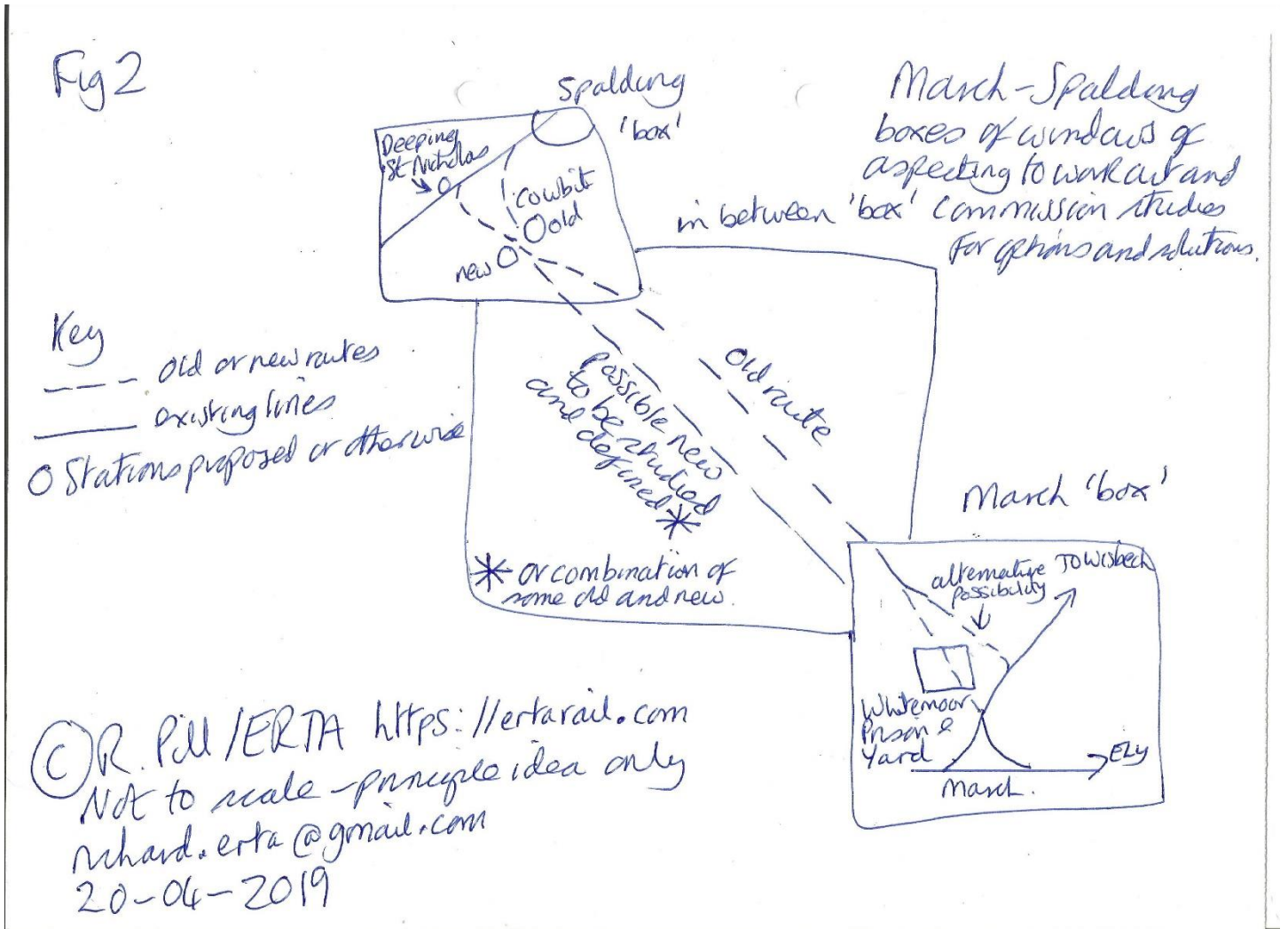


Fig 2 above, shows boxes or windows for focused study and coming up with solutions not writing off the opportunity to have back a railway asset for the whole community.

Fig 3

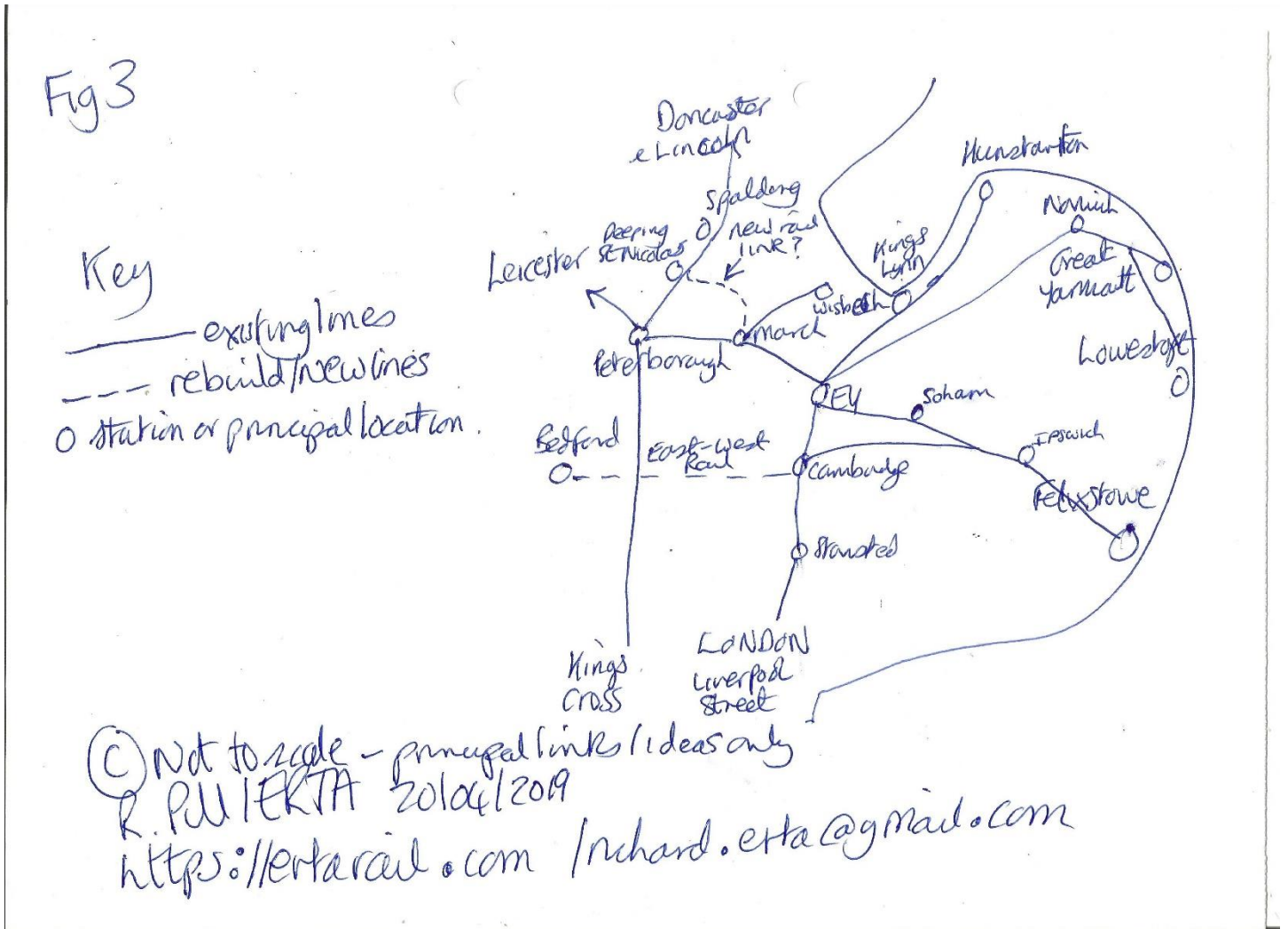


Fig 3 above shows the links between East Anglia and how a March-Spalding 'new build' could fit into the wider scheme of things.

References and Further Reading

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https://telematics.tomtom.com/en_gb/webfleet/company/updates/press/2016/11/29/
4. Recommended Book about Air Pollution – threat, challenge and need to remedy
 Gary Fuller, **The Invisible Killer: The Rising Global Threat of Air Pollution – And How We Can Fight Back**, Melville House UK, London. – gives a wealth of information and insight to the real issues of air pollution
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6. East West Rail Company Ltd - example
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Glossary

Department for Transport (DfT)

East Coast Main Line (ECML)

East West Rail Company Ltd – as is.

East West Rail Consortium (EWRC)

English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

Felixstowe to Peterborough (F2P)

Governance for Railway Investment Projects (GRIP)

Network Management Statements (NMS) Railtrack


Network Rail (NR)

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