

English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

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Inventory of Bedford St Johns – Tempsford East-West Rail Solution and critical assessment of the proposed northern route. We request a fair and objective consideration:

1. Reinstate the triangle at St Johns.

This would allow direct running east of Bedford for freight (avoiding the bottleneck of Bedford Midland). The curve from St John's – St Johns 1984 halt may be a 10-mph limit curve due to tightness, but this could be eased and is only a very small part of the overall line. Now Danfoss has been demolished, a new bridge over the pond and new alignment under the Hitchin arches could be looked at, if pre-plans are not extant in assuming brownfield lands for other non-railway purposes, which locks in a very unsatisfactory status quo. Again, if the old St John's site is lost to social housing for example, it locks in the northern route as the only 'do or bust' option. If it flounders for any and all reasons, then any other route involves as much if not more upheaval, compulsory purchase or lengthy unwieldy tunnelling at huge and arguably unnecessary cost. One of the joys of rail travel is to move consistently, able to look out of a window and enjoy the landscape. Lengthy tunnelling ruins that charm.

2. **Can do double track or single with passing loops going east of St Johns.** The original Bedford-Sandy trackbed was made for double track, but only single with loops was laid as the Midland Railway feared London North Eastern competition would assume a right to use the tracks and park their locos in front of Midland locos at Bedford and render the operations inefficient. Yes, cycleway would need to be slewed, but that can much more easily be done than contrast a railway!

3. Cardington Road/A603 Bedford: This is the first real hurdle; the rest is one of compulsory purchase and reforming the original trackbed. It could be that Bedford Bus Garage could be relocated – the nature of the land along Rope Walk has much changed since the days of Howards Engineering for example, now mostly shops. The garage depot site could become parking for rail and shoppers to use and free buses from having to tackle the access in and out via St John’s busy roundabout. A new location would be easier, save time, fuel and be just as adaptable, maybe enable links between bus maintenance skills and local colleges to spawn jobs and improve our buses? Cardington Road needs to be made single carriageway from Rope Walk/Longholme roundabout to east of the railway where it fans out to dual carriageway, one lane for Sandy and the other for Tesco. Speeds need calming in any case, does it make any sense for 30 mph going away from urban Bedford whilst 40mph signs onto a busy roundabout where pedestrians safety is put at risk coming into the urban cordon more? Level crossings are apparently not being allowed for new pieces or rail lines, but are cheaper, useful and necessary in some places. A more flexible approach is needed, remembering the environmental and land use benefits of sending more people and goods by rail – which here would reduce A603 traffic in any case and that of other radial roads to/from Bedford on the east-west axis.

4. Relay and possibly new bridges (x2) over the River Great Ouse.

5. Priory Park Entrance. If you took a new road from Riverfield Drive roundabout/Brunel Road and built a bridge over the railway to overhead line clearance specification, you could remodel the entrance to Priory Park and associated dwellings. Or you could campaign for a special dispensation arguing that due to the new cut river flow and multiple connectives off the Priory Park entrance, a level crossing is vital here. There was one many years ago when rails existed, so not without precedent. Once this issue is resolved, a major issue is passed.

6. Relay/rebuild and new bridge over the River Great Ouse adjacent to the sewage works. Then a rebuild/relay to the A421 Bedford Bypass which, invoking the clause (a test case) of Side Roads Order 199 in 1993 of the Bedford Bypass Inquiry whereby the Department (then) of Transport said they would sympathetically provide access for the railway if it is being pursued over or under the road. Due to a flood plain, a bridge was called for over the railway, given the bypass would bridge the River Great Ouse to the north and A603 to the south of the railway corridor, so could consistently be built up without compromising gradient profile. The gain is an east-west railway from Oxford-Cambridge arcingly and challenges the rate of use of the A421 with a rail alternative, reducing wear, tear and improving longevity of surface and structural renewals.

7. From the A421 Bypass, the railway would start to veer slightly north-westerly entering Willington Woods to cross the River Great Ouse twice, avoiding Willington: And upon crossing the River Great Ouse the second time, swinging round to parallel the Great Barford-Willington Road on embankment height to cross over the same

Great Barford-Blunham Road and continuing alongside on embankment the course of the River Great Ouse to north of Blunham. Weaving to avoid the lakes, crossing over the A1 trunk road, avoiding Station Road Tempsford, entering the Tempsford flood plains from the south-westerly direction.

8. Where ERTA diverges from the proposed Northern route here, is: That we want a proper grade-separated junction with physical rail links to the north-south East Coast Main Line (ECML) outer slow tracks to enable direct running to/from Bedford with places to Peterborough, Bedford-East Bedfordshire settlements like Sandy and Biggleswade and onwards to Hitchin and Stevenage (integrated with Thameslink using the same tracks) and vice versa those areas to access Bedford, the Bedford-Oxford and Aylesbury corridors and beyond in all cases potentially for both passenger and freight operations more by rail. On the eastern side, you could have a Peterborough, Huntingdon, St Neots – Cambourne, Cambridge South (Addenbrookes)-Cambridge and beyond link also, relieving/giving more options to running everything via Leicester-Peterborough and Ely for example, as Ely-Peterborough is at capacity and a great way round. Having a Tempsford physical rail connectivity on the flood plains north of Station Road Tempsford has plenty of land for this to be done and maybe sidings or a depot for other rail-based operations, bringing jobs directly and coincidental supply chain stimulus and accidentals. The flood plain at Tempsford is unsuitable for housing and the idea of housing and no rail connectivity and a new station, whereby freight cannot inter-link with the ECML or EWRL and vice versa, inconveniences people (waiting for connections and paying more in the middle of virtually nowhere is hardly going to lure out of cars, with comparative timings of 30+ minutes to get from St Neots or Sandy to Bedford for example contrast a bus of the same of less and a car under 20 minutes minus congestion). Far better physical rail-based connectivity, no station and no new houses here, retaining a quasi-rural balance with the new development of a railway and physically linked connectivity. A joined-up rail network helps the country keep its wheels turning, boosts efficiency, cuts costs of operations and entices modal shift from road to rail if we get this right, otherwise we waste time, energy, money and foul up a golden opportunity.

9. What happens east of Tempsford area: It is suggested to link with Cambourne, join the Royston-Cambridge rail link and serve Cambridge South (Addenbrookes) new station, Cambridge itself with through running onto Norwich and Ipswich a piece. This is laudable if it can be done. The blockage of the old route via Sandy, Pottton, Gamlingay and at Trumpington (access to Cambridge rail network) is deeply regrettable and fell foul between Governments national and local to take responsibility, protect formations and allow development to encroach these corridors even though the railway reopening has been called for over 3 decades. Likewise access via former Chesterton Junction is scuppered by Guided Busway which assumes the old rail corridor as well as Cambridge North which sprawls on the old formation junction. So, by a process of elimination,

only the linking south from Cambourne to the Royston-Cambridge line west of Shepreth Junction remains an option now, but given growing pressure both against the railway and for new development to scupper access by rail means in 10 years' time, that option will also be nullified. So, time is not a luxury we have before a curtain comes down and the rail link option is lost forever. The upshot of that is that NIMBYs may have loads of development and all on more and bigger road designs, the casualty being the very thing they purport to want to save, countryside and landscapes. Cambridge like Oxford is a place many want to get to/from for a variety of reasons passenger-wise. In terms of freight, Felixstowe is a main contributor and that market, freeing up routing via A14, Peterborough and London are where a properly thought through east-west rail and joined up Government support could be useful.

10. However, given we are where we are and the route options in, through and around Cambridge are problematic, costly and intrusive, we need to ask:

a. What are we trying to achieve?

b. How best to achieve it?

Could it be that a new railway from Felixstowe – like Rotterdam has/did – to the Midlands with links to existing north-south main lines following the corridor of the A14 and landing say Northampton for the West Coast Main Line (WCML) and serving Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal/Inland Port (DIRFT) en route, clearing A14, avoiding principal urban areas like Cambridge with bottleneck capacity and land use issues with intensive passenger service frequency and demand from numerous rails descending upon it from all directions, be more beneficial for all considerations? Again, no use wishful thinking another 30 years to 2050's, we need it conceived, decided upon and implemented by 2030 for benefit to be derived and as far as Cambridge goes, to have a more passenger focus. It could be a solution and starts with the Chancellor and Government deciding not to allocate £27 billion to new roads in a Climate Emergency, but switching that funding to rail more and modal shift back to rail/new to rail in particular. This is the acid test of how serious the Government is on Reversing Beeching and stewarding land use, reducing emissions and re-railing the country. Modal shift is crucial and conundrums like the Cambridge 'box' is exactly the spring board opportunity to highlight opportunity, solutions to problems and which way the Government goes with genuine intent and responsibility in delivery terms. The new A14 corridor railway upon reaching the Godmanchester area, could have a curve to join the southern direction ECML outer slow line for freight specifically for the Oxford corridor and/or beyond via the aforementioned junction at Tempsford. None of this is considered, designed or do-able with the northern rail route option between North Bedford and Tempsford area.

11. A brief critique of the proposed East-West Rail Northern Route:

a. Tracks need straightening out from the St Johns area to A4280 Bromham Road Bridge via Bedford Midland. New capacity, redesign, realignment and platform

tweaking with new concourse, parking, bus interchange, taxi rank and visual impact/access via Midland Road (regeneration via footfall and spend) to/from Bedford Town Centre and other principal locations around the area in a very compact piece of land to accommodate and include. What gives, what takes will be locked in for decades, so thinking now, getting it right, revising preconceived ideas is crucial. That is why ERTA has suggested a new access for pedestrians and cyclists off of Platform 4 west side of the station to a new second booking hall, drive-in and extra parking capacity on the former loco shed site which itself could be incorporated and adapted as part of the 'preserving best of past and utilising for new rail growth opportunities purposes.' That land must not be used for non-railway purposes. I appreciate the Borough has other pressures, but that is why we have to spread out, integrate new development inclusive of social aspect accommodation and save railway lands for rail purposes as well as committing to new and better public transport.

b. Once through the new layout of the Bedford Midland bottleneck – bottleneck why? A4280 replacement bridge only has 4 tracks archway capacity in a 2x2 arrangement. We called for an extra width slow line-wise for enabling more, but were ignored; the road aspect was the prime consideration and overhead wire clearances. You are therefore locked-in to two tracks going north. Upon reaching the A428-A6 Western Bypass link road you have the Girder Bridge over the River Great Ouse. There is no wriggle room to divert from the Midland Main Line (MML) before crossing via that bridge. Besides, lands which once existed are developed either side of the bypass and no access under the bypass exists except the existing tracks.

c. So north of the Girder Bridge, you would seek to veer off to the north-easterly trajectory. You immediately face the issue of adequate leverage for getting over the A6 Clapham Bypass at height to avoid conflict with HGV heights. You also enter a perennially flooding meadow and we are talking normal flood of several feet of water. Once over the A6 Bypass you then have to cross the A6 old Clapham Road at height still to avoid conflict with double-decker buses. Then the only clear patch of land north of the River Great Ouse is that of Tinsley's Show Ground and then you enter a hillside. Tunnel or cutting, it climbs continually.

d. Avoiding North Brickhill, Renhold, Ravensden, Wilden and Cleat Hill on an as yet undisclosed route for a twin-track main line railway remains uncertain. But the point is a 3-mile tunnel is a costly vanity and no route here is desirably by any consideration. Once through these areas, you face Chawston and Colesden respectively. Then the A421 Great Barford Bypass/Black Cat Roundabout/A1 then crossing over the River Great Ouse (hence tunnelling given close proximity seems a daft suggestion!) and entering the Tempsford flood plain from the north-westerly direction to head over or under ECML eastwards with a station, 300 houses and all will be able to be implemented within 10 years, again unrealistic as given demand and pressure for housing and Oxbridge Arc designated a key location for development, unless specific

measures are taken to protect a viable route now, it will be like the Cambridge area, lost and curtailed off.

12. Conclusion: ERTA believes our original route combined with select new-build between Bedford St Johns and Tempsford Plain/ECML offers the best solution:

- a. flat land
- b. avoids most development
- c. is away from residential areas/better screened off
- d. is probably cheaper
- e. is less hassle, controversial and greener
- f. Has more chance of being do-able than the current suggested route or interfaces at Tempsford and associated obstacles.

13. We ask that:

- a. Our route is assessed, appraised and supported
- b. that formal protection follows
- c. that design layouts and implementations are done to a date of 2030 not beyond.

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