

English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

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ERTA Calls for Re-Railing of the former St John's Station Site for Railway Purposes



The old St John's Station site was closed in 1984 when trains from Bletchley were diverted into Bedford Midland Station Platform 1A and do so today. The 1984 St John's Halt is well used but hourly trains and the odd freight train. The old St John's Station site is currently overgrown but is being threatened to be turned into a housing development This would block the site and rule out the land being used for railway purposes ever again. It is the stub of the former Bedford-Cambridge Railway route and the x2 4-coach platforms are still distinguishable amidst the undergrowth. London Road Bridge had 2 railway arches under it and one was filled in and screened off in the early 1970's. Beyond that, part of the old trackbed is used as a parking facility for Bedford Stagecoach Depot and beyond that it is derelict land to the boundary of Cardington Road.

Caption above: Taken from a moving first generation DMU in 1984 as it rounded the sole remaining track curve to the new 1984 St John's Halt. The picture shows the St John's site just after tracks were removed with London Road Bridge in the background.



As the photo on the left illustrated, the length of siding potential is extensive and the photo is not exhaustive of it. Easily get a 12-coach train. Now, with electrification, the service sidings south of Ford End Road may move elsewhere like Wellingborough or Corby, which in turn could allow a straightening of the trackbed between Kempston Road Bridge and Bedford Midland Station for trains to move quicker and speed up not only end-to-end timings, but also enable more trains to get through the box between Cow Bridge-Bedford Midland and Midland Main Line (MML) North and vice versa. Bedford Midland is intensively used and serves a wide and diverse population. There is a congestion problem on and off the tracks in the Bedford area and as far as roads go, the bypasses were supposed to cure congestion, at great cost and intrusion, they have failed, rather traffic volumes have grown to fill more capacity created.



Caption Middle Left shows a parcels train passing a contaminated soil train in the mid 1990's on the section of lines between Kempston Road Bridge and Ford End Road Bridge, crossing the River Great Ouse. Current 12-coach Thameslink reverse on the eastern side track to their stabling and servicing sidings, but could utilise St John's for extra capacity especially if straightening of tracks and relocation of stock does occur.

Caption Right: Shows the Stagecoach car park in 2020. You could put a washer plant down there easily or a

waiting freight train or any number of rail related uses. It is critical Bedford Borough and Network Rail see the strategic need to protect this land and steward keeping options open for rail, as a principal choice and alternative to more roads, more traffic and congestion/pollution as an assumed and normalised part of daily life It need not be and choices have to be made. ERTA is calling for:

- A. Stop entertaining redevelopment of this land for non-rail related purposes
- B. Look at and consider this land for rail related purposes interim and medium/long term
- C. Work towards registering an interest and getting tracks back, land re-railed and enable Bedford's rail significance to be optimal than minimal.





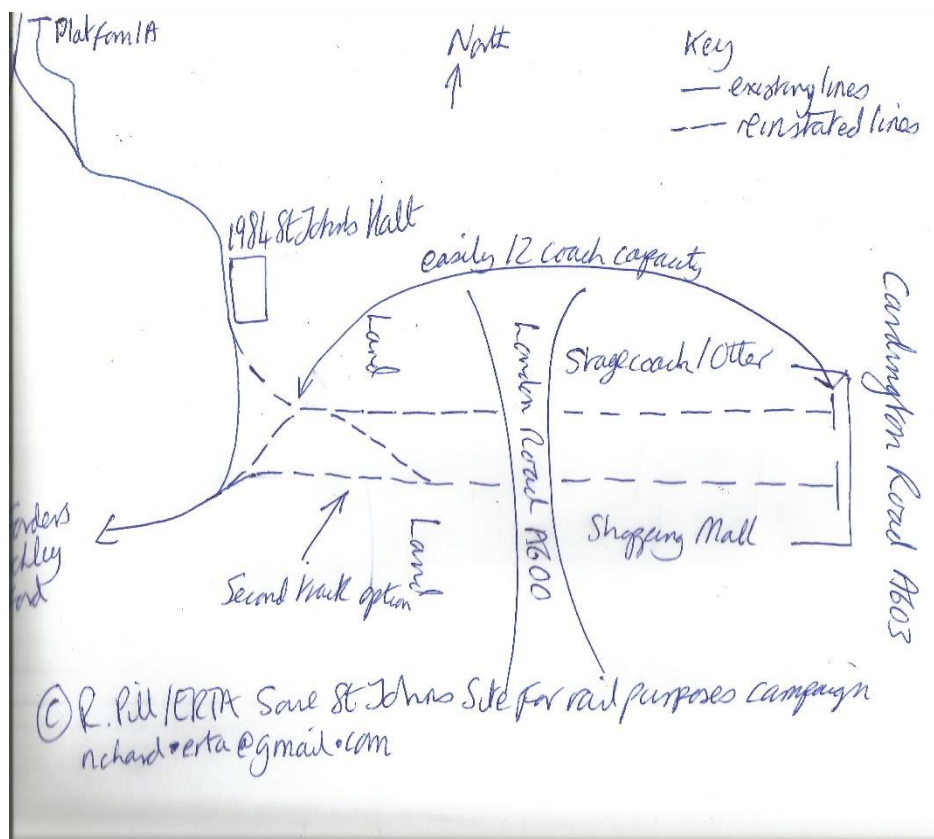
Caption Left: The old St John's overgrown station site today taken from London Road Bridge. Overgrown, the fauna could be reformed to enable a new rail-linked facility of some descript to serve singular or collective rail uses. Bedford, like many places has seen a rationalisation of sidings, rail access sites and rail-based storage and waitover capacity and with new trains on the Midland Main Line and the on-coming of trains (passenger and freight) from the Oxford reach of the western corridor of the East-West Rail Link, is uniquely placed geographically central with good road and rail links to do more by rail and so it is ERTA's view that more capacity and space for rail use is required and St John's could play a role.

If a rail-linked facility was forthcoming, it would have the option to negotiate extension to Cardington Road surrounded by perimeter fences. We should not throw this land and asset away for non-rail purposes which can go anywhere else. We believe there is a need for the rail industry and planners to come together and see the strategic and local need to retain the rail access and use it interim for rail-based purposes. If the old trackbed east of London Road Bridge was recovered or from day one re-railed, here's some ideas of what it could be used for:

1. It would allow 12-coach length capability be it sidings
2. It would enable waitover stabling capacity
3. It could have a washer plant.
4. It could be a depot for parcels and similar smaller load logistical by rail considerations
5. It could serve more freight by rail be it stabling, discharges, loading or waitover or combinations.
6. It could inform a triangle with automated train-activated points as is used already for a reinstatement of a triangle for running around/turning locomotives around from either the Leicester or Bletchley/Oxford directions.
7. It would keep the site rail-used as a potential through railway for an east-west rail link to the East Coast Main Line and onwards to Cambridge in some fashion and places like north of Stevenage, East Bedfordshire, south of Peterborough to Bedford County Town and vice versa.

If you agree with what ERTA is espousing, please contact the following:

1. Bedford Borough Council, Borough Hall, Cauldwell Street, Bedford, MK42 9AP/
customerservices@bedford.gov.uk
2. Object to the housing threat, saying it could be sent elsewhere:
<http://www.planvu.co.uk/bbc/written/cpt16.php#st9>
3. Write to Rt. Hon Grant Shapps, Secretary of State for Transport:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport#org-contacts>
Department for Transport, Great Minster House, 33 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 4DR
4. Your local MP or the MP for Bedford and Kempston: Mr Mohammad Yasin MP,
<https://mohammadyasin.org/contact-yasin> E. office@mohammadyasin.org Mohammad Yasin MP, 2A Duke Street, Bedford, MK40 3HR
5. Join ERTA by filling in the form and sending with your membership payment. Our website is:
<https://ertarail.co.uk/> Join our free email loop: richard.erta@gmail.com



Caption Left: Diagram of what could be done if the old trackbed is negotiatedly reclaimed and re-laid to the full back to the border at Cardington Road. It would allow 12-coach length capability, sidings, waitover, washer plant, depot/freight or a combination of creative uses benefitting railway operations and flexibility with growth and doing more with and by rail. It is uniquely positioned for Leicester-Bedford and Bedford-Oxford arc corridor reaches and ranges.

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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 £12 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:

ERTA, 24c St Michael's Road, Bedford, MK40 2LT (01234 330090)

Join our free email loop: E. richard.erta@gmail.com