

ERTA Response to East-West Consultation 2021

1.0 Preamble:

1.1 **The English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)** is a pro-public transport membership-based association with a particular interest in reopening, rebuilding and select new pieces of restoring missing rail links across the English Regions. Our Chairman has been associated with organisations which have advocated an East-West Railway from Oxford-Bedford-Cambridge since 1987 His history is as follows:

1.2 **1981 joined the Bedford-Bletchley Rail Users Association (BBRUA)** – then seeking to save the last remnant of the Oxbridge line from closure threats (Serpell).

1.3 **1985 Joined Railway Development Society (now Railfuture)** and served on the Reopenings Committee with a brief to help forge forward the Oxford-Bletchley line for reopening.

1.4 **1986/7 Forged Links and supported the formation of the Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee (OBRAC)** which served as an umbrella organisation to bring various reopening advocating groups together between Oxford-Bicester/Aylesbury and Milton Keynes

1.5 **1987 Formed the Bedford and Sandy Rail Reopening Association (BASRRA)** which called for route protection, studying and reopening a rail link to link with the main line at Sandy for through services elsewhere and to the east-west corridor.

1.6 **1990 Formed the Bedfordshire Branch of Transport 2000 (now Campaign for Better Transport/CBT)** and carried on raising the profile of reopening the east-west rail with variations as much as possible. Coalesced local councils to support the idea and project which ultimately morphed into the East-West Rail Consortium (EWRC).

1.7 **1997 Formed the Bedfordshire Railway and Transport Association (BRTA)** which carried on route protection, advocacy and widening dynamic appeal of the strategic nature of the railway and courted councils to come together to support more. This carried on for about 8 years and after a 5-year break, was resuscitated to morph into the English Regional Transport Association (ERTA).

1.8 East West Rail Consortium (EWRC): The forming of the EWRC in 1994/5 was a game changer, levelling in funding for studies to put on a formal basis what we as lay-people had been advocating but without the resources to give it formal footing in an increasingly competitive arena of competing agendas, conflict and demands for science-based evidence.

1.9 Examples of time-line and development conflict:

However, the EWRC came after 7 years of calling for route protection which was not supported by Bedford Borough and Bedfordshire County Council, resulting in a. a cycleway along the old route which became and end in itself and an objector to a railway and b. the damage extensively done by allowing both the A1 Girtford Underpass, a lack of underpass to the A421 Bedford Southern Bypass and other encroachments of a development kind. Likewise, in latter years, the policy of the Office of Road and Rail (ORR) of opposing new level crossings for reopened railways, increases cost, affordability and rules out where layout of roads or urban landscapes do not lend themselves to the land-take of bridging with possible clearances in such wakes. However, that must be compared and contrasted with bridges, which get hit by lorries and buses aplenty, cost more and are not a panacea against clearances, witness 6-tracking north of Bedford Midland for example, totally unnecessary if part of the old route east of Bedford is adopted.

2.0 The Consultation Process and how we feel somewhat disenfranchised:

2.1 2019 Consultation came out of the blue to us and was held for Bedford at Scott Hall, easy for parking, remote for people who do not drive unless they live within walking distance of Fenlake in south-east Bedford. The long tradition is for civic consultations to be done in a central and optimally accessible place like Harpur Suite, Corn Exchange or Central Library for example. There walking, cycling, bus and rail access lends itself, driving and parking is a cost-time exercise, but a balance is not struck by locating to out-of-town centre areas. That consultation, took away a 30+ year consensus on what, if any reopening meant east of Bedford; formalised by the EWRC's own 1997 study which verified what we had previously advocated, namely that east of Bedford meant the old route, with realignments south of Station Court Blunham, and swinging round to a new build alignment north of Sunderland Road Sandy and new links facing south to the East Coast Main Line (ECML), the idea of bolting on to the Cambridge-St Ives-Huntingdon corridor being scuppered by the decision and implementation of a Guided Busway on a railed (freight only/mothballed) railway corridor, blocking the northern access at Chesterton Junction which now has Cambridge North Station bestriding it.

2.2 The 5 options after £10 million to whittle down to just 5 from some 33 options ruled out/did not include the old route/turned away from the Steer Davis Gleave option or variants on it. This was a complete unexpected and shock to us and we were bitterly disappointed and disenfranchised/alienated from the whole process. The turning on its head all that had been understood and campaigned for at cost to start anew with 2 options supporting 'via Bedford Midland' and 3 avoiding Bedford altogether. The nudge psychology of Bedford

Midland or bust of course twisted people's arm for inclusion, but then led to the question of how you then end up at Cambridge and head off eastwards in some shape or form. Our view and reflection, given these changes of design dynamic and policy, however informed or not, was to accept the link with Bedford Midland, but calling for 2 new bay platforms bolted alongside the current Platform 1A for passenger trains to reverse and freight Midland Main Line (MML)-East-West to use existing tracks, albeit realigned and upgraded between St John's area and Bedford Midland 'box' area. East-West freight, would avoid the Bedford Midland 'box' area, by a reinstatement of the triangle anew at St John's area and thus conflict and away from any encroachments of residential areas.

3.0 Our emergent view of a new build between Bedford and north of Sandy/Tempsford area:

Rebuild/new build east of the old St John's area reinstated anew triangle and either bridge or level crossing for Cardington Road/A603 dual carriageway. Head off east on old corridor with new level crossing needed at Priory Marina entrance, raise the A421 Bypass as per DfT were to give 'sympathetic consideration' at the Side Roads Order 199 1993 Inquiry and such an under-pass bridge would also, with perimeter fencing, enable a cycle/footway alongside the railway. Heading east, either plough through on old trackbed at Willington and relocate Danes Camp to Willington Woods or realign the railway to the north, cross over the Great River Ouse west of Willington and swing round and cross exact same River east of Willington and thence on embankment and new build go to the north of built Blunham alongside the Great Ouse River Valley and corridor to approach crossing A1/Ivel River from a south-westerly direction and – contrast the agenda of the 2019 and post discourses – choose physical linkage of tracks with the outer slows of the East Coast Main Line (ECML) for optimum scope, business courting and through rail journey capture. We are against segregated lines, we are against a new station, we are against 300 houses on a flood plain and a lack of facilities when existing settlements would be better enlarged with enhanced facilities.

Alas, this 2021 Consultation rejects this completely and presents us with a Northern Route E which arrives at the Tempsford area from a north-westerly direction.

4.0 Key objections to the Northern Route:

4.1 Six tracking through Bedford Midland and Poets area of Bedford. We need to see how the design and land use of a rebuilt Bedford Midland would look and fit in a context of growth on and off the rails.

4.2 Rebuilding of A4280 Bromham Road Bridge – going to need a land-take and be a massive under-taking with huge disruption and had Bedford Borough, Network Rail and other agencies listened to us, would have had an extra arch for bolting on to existing twin slows north of the bridge, we were completely ignored and now face more cost and disturbance as a result.

4.3 Fifty plus houses taken – not just residencies, people’s homes, our route option required fewer if any demolitions. Extended back gardens are not residencies and there is a difference between inconvenience and family dwellings.

4.4 The eyesore of a 50’ viaduct/flyover/bridge to get from ground level to incline of a hill over trunk roads and associated issues on a mainly flood plain which perennially floods.

4.5 The unnecessary intrusion, cost and upheaval of the Northern Route E arcing route and what of demolitions at Ravensden or associated to get through an increasingly built area both sides or projected route/s?

4.6 The conundrum of negotiating A1/A421, Black Cat Roundabout, Roxton, Roxton Garden Centre to get to the Tempsford Flood Plains east of the River Great Ouse/River Ivel conjoined area? Our route is flatter, more direct, in all probability less cost and less intrusive, courting fewer objections. Why not consider it, why not study it, why not compare and contrast? Instead, we have a stiff-necked ‘Northern Route or bust’ attitude, presumption and in our view, abuse of power.

5.0 The consultation Section by Section:

5.1 Oxford-Calvert:

Islip Station must have a regular train service and be invested in as an equal partner, optimising footfall and spend with things like capitalising on visitorship, country walks, cycle rides, more food and drink access and modest development in-keeping with the quasi-rural nature of the location.

5.2 A west-south new curve for Bicester-Aylesbury (nodal points of reference) should be studied and considered to enable rail to do more (passenger and possible freight).

5.3 Calvert must have a new station:

The area (3–5-mile radius) is growing, possible new town development, so a. keeps rail reopening and servicing by rail land-take-use options open and b. look at other servicing projects like extending Chiltern to Brackley alongside HS2 and indeed re-railing the Great Central corridor with new build to West Coast Main

Line (WCML) Rugby connectivity for passenger and freight by rail options, capacity, re-railing outlying areas and catering for growth on a sustainable basis. We are not so concerned who does it, who serves it or who operated what services over it – the rails – but it is needed and should both be looked at and design options kept open instigatively and passively by others including HS2 and other development agendas and plans. Likewise, a new Calvert-Grendon rebuild of former GC rail corridor gives access by existing rails to Princes Risborough, High Wycombe, Old Oak Common and if we get our way, the new Southern Heathrow rail link to Woking and Guildford which provides off peak other use like freight away from residential areas of Aylesbury and London centric tracks (few other choices currently to orbit the capital north-south and east-west). Can also approach Reading from the east and link on to South West and/or Southampton flows.

5.4 Calvert-Winslow:

There should be land protected/identified around the old Claydon Station area with a view to a new station. The Claydons and surrounds have and are growing, Claydon House a major attraction of national interest and the gap between Bicester and Winslow is too great (given Buckingham a 10-mile distance is included in commuter use catchment potential case making) – needs to share-out the loading and parking/traffic flow and capacity more. Claydon could fill that gap and bring better public transport interchange in a quasi-rural transformed setting going forward.

5.5 Newton Longville/West Bletchley:

Growth of Milton Keynes and east of Winslow, north, south, east and west, makes consideration of a Parkway Station serving these areas out of urban cordons tangible and should be a. land use allocation identified, b. should be studied further/case making and c. kept under review/implemented at design stages now. Services can be diverse, fast end to end, semi fast with limited stops, slow, every stop plus freight. 24 x 7 railway, gives plenty of scope to optimise. However, this goal should be a constant along the whole project, alas flounders and stalls in some cases.

5.6 Bletchley:

This is good but should give more consideration to a. expanding capacity/baying and through tracks at Milton Keynes Central Station, b Wolverton and c. how Newport Pagnell and Northampton can more be included in the frame for Aylesbury links, Old Oak Common via Calvert links, Oxford via Bicester links and vice versa, bringing regenerative footfall and spend on a sustainable basis. The current one train per hour from Southern tracks to MK Central is an example of how capacity constraints, diagramming and available paths, stifle access. Some study needs to look at this and come up with rail-based solutions. Diversity on a

theme makes sense and our suggestions seek to take it into account. a. where do people wish to go, b. what main hubs like places and airports could rail direct serve better/market capture.

5.7 Marston Vale Railway:

The quasi-rural nature, albeit a changing landscape constantly, should be valued, cherished and retained where possible. Likewise, the local hourly shuttle serving multiple halts should be retained and enhanced with a. Sunday and Bank Holiday Services, b. Increased hours inclusive of later night running say 11pm as a get you home/mop up service base note. c. The service could do more. Line guides should be produced and sold. Food and drink trolley service nurtured and retention of the toilet on a train and conductor likewise and retain the cash economy alongside other options. d. I do not think people would object to a bi-hourly service on Sundays and Bank Holidays if it is rock-solid reliable, sadly this has not been the case in recent years, however informed or not. e. We object to closure and relocation of stations, diversity of services should be the goal, not end to end whole line timings per se. f. Extension of the local service to Milton Keynes Central (£20 million spent), the electrification of the line and utilising old stock which could do more, a line-side freight development plan inclusive of regenerating freight to/from Forders loading gantry use and sidings – recycling centre and sending to processing centres by rail – located as is off the A1-M1 A421 link and near A6, could service a wide area with aggregately less lorries pounding the roads as a result. We need to think creatively, scope widely and court an alliance geared to making use of the infrastructure just sitting there, rotting in a world of need and resource demand. g. Kemspton Town/Retail Park – see attached report. But upwards of 18,000 population/Kempston Town could bolster usership to any local or regional service on the Marston Vale Railway and should be round-tabled, supported, studied and progressed to boost all trains calling there. It is a short-sightedness that has not had station and development together for 40 years and needs rectifying with integrative bus services for local distribution and two-way feed.

5.8 St John's – Bedford Midland:

a. Reinstate a Bedford St John's area rail triangle for optimum operations (passenger and freight)

b. Claim and utilise the former Danfoss area for a realignment of railway, straightening and line speed increases.

c. Relocate the 1984 St John's Halt to serve both sides of the railway and make 4-coach standard on all halts and stations for exact the same or more in principal locations like Bedford Midland Baying facilities.

d. install twin bays at Bedford Midland with a booking office/reception annex wedged between looking down Midland Road and the new station/track layout

for pedestrian and cycle and bus access whilst car drivers can continue to use Ashburnham Road access and a new facility over Ford End Road Bridge – see diagram for an idea to be worked on.

e. Bedford St John's – Tempsford – see 3.0 above.

5.9 Tempsford-Cambridge:

We would have preferred a going through a rebuilt proposed Sandy Interchange Station and via new interpretation through/tunnel the golf course near Potton and straight gradient line to south of Gamlingay and rebuild on old route to M11 where a new build and facilitation across the M11, River Cam, new re-claim of old route through Trumpington Meadows Development, Trumpington P&R and junk the Guided Busway to roads and utilise old trackbed to serve both Addenbrookes/Cambridge South and a east-south curve for direct Stansted running from the west and via Long Road underpass bridges, to enter a broadened Cambridge 'box' of extra platforms, through or bay facilitation and broader neck enabling more than 3 tracks in/out from the south. In any case, if you went for the Shelford option, curving from the old route to a southerly direction would be less intrusive and hazardous than current derivative options. The reality is that all tiers of Government failed to protect the old route despite calls from public based organisations and developed even with an intent to reopen in mind well into the 2010's. This flagrant breach of trust and stewardship should be translated to a levy of compensation shared both to the builders of the new rail link and those affected by it more.

5.10 On freight:

A new line off the Soham and Ely Junction lines across via Northstowe to join ECML slows at Tempsford (from a north easterly direction) to go out south-westerly makes sense to segregate freight and also 'not via Cambridge' extra capacity to reduce the conflict of intense passenger requirements to an international centre like Cambridge from multiple directions. This segregational approach means more by rail, not less. Yet this needs looking at now or the exact same scenarios as before, whereby land is taken for development, no corridor planned, and failing to plan means planning to fail! We cannot afford to if we are serious on climate change, climate emergency and modal shift/cutting road emissions and associated volume pro-rata of road space informing congestion, pollution and wasting both time and energy as a normative bi-product of human activity. The rail alternative is needed and we must think bigger, better and act now to secure this new route.

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