

# English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

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## Call for evidence for EEH Connectivity Studies (Oxford-Milton Keynes; and Peterborough-Northampton-Oxford)

### 1. Oxford-Milton Keynes Connectivity Study + Peterborough-Northampton-Oxford.

**Preliminary:** I combined and overlap, as they in reality do and are not clinically separated. The presentation of an Oxford-Milton Keynes Connectivity and Peterborough-Northampton-Oxford should not be seen in isolation and will inevitably have some overlap? For example, when east-west rail gets going, one change at Bletchley will enable Northampton and Milton Keynes people to go to Oxford and/or Aylesbury (ought to) and vice versa. The connecting road between Northampton and Oxford direct is the A43 which feeds to the A43 and A421 respectively for south and south westerly links like with the M4 at Swindon for further afield. Other end, Northampton the A43 feeds into northerly M1 and A45/A14 for example. The key place on Oxford – Milton Keynes – a half way point on a map can be Calvert. Seems incongruous in itself hitherto but as a growth area with multiple transport (rail) links and yet no station?! We have to take this oversight seriously. HS2 will not entertain any station between Solihull and Old Oak Common (OOC) Interchange, so how will growing communities between Rugby and OOC access a rail link to such an interchange with potential rail links to Reading, Heathrow and Guildford let alone west London and the wider South East and vice versa in spinal core transport terms with the arm to Milton Keynes and Bedford secured? Reading-Dicot-Oxford is at capacity and waiting on the cushions at signals for clearance/pathing slows down and bottlenecks the amount of capacity for rail to cater for all the business on offer (passenger and freight). This means a variation and proliferation on a theme is required to be looked at. Yes, modal shift must be a key goal from road-based transport (passenger and freight) to rail and so we both need the rails and stations/access points nearer to where people live and filling gaps in existing networks to challenge the default assumption of roads, roads and more roads and locked-in road reliance and dependency cultures as the presumed normalised norm.

## **What we wish to see in rail infrastructure terms:**

1. Study and make the case for a rail link north of Calvert (and protect/steward/ensure adequate land is allowed for) for:

a. A station at Calvert for domestic rail services (numerous) to share and utilise for rail.

2. **Study and make the case for, grow parties of support and investment** in and moves up and down the chain to delivery in a timely manner of a new domestic rail link north of Calvert alongside/same corridor as HS2 to serve (east of) Brackley/A43/bus link with Silverstone), Woodford Halse, Willoughby and then via a new build serve Barby and link to the West Coast Main Line (WCML) where the Northampton Loop/slow lines diverge with the Kilsby fast tracks. This spinal core, utilising perhaps, part of the old Great Central trackbed, certainly the corridor needs better rail access and would:

a. compliment growth agendas with default to rail more

b. compliment and tie in with any aspirations for a Banbury-Daventry-Northampton rail link which could connect somewhere in the Woodford area.

c. Would compliment the advancing campaign for a Rugby-Magna Park-Lutterworth-Narborough (linkage with Nuneaton-Leicester Line) and would therefore give multiple connectivity for passenger and freight by rail – capacity, choice, flexibility and more for more. The overlap with an Oxford-Milton Keynes and Peterborough-Northampton-Oxford arc is obvious. But unless you re-rail and centre north-south with east-west re-railing agendas, all development is roads based and that is unsustainable even in an electric vehicle era, because tyre friction particulates still pollute the air we breathe, volume per ratio of capacity and cost/land-use allocation demand is also self-defeating and flies in the face of a Climate Emergency which means we need to change Government agendas and policy and redirect existing forms from for example a £27 billion new roads budget to pep up the Railway Reopenings Fund to parity or favouring rail expansion projects over roads agendas. This is not happening; the proverbial juggernaut is hurling towards destruction and needs both to reduce speed and be turned around before the crash and that with immediate effect. Timescales of delivery need bringing down from 2050 assumptions to 2030 realities.

c. Calvert south, look at rebuilding a Calvert-Grendon rail link to enable freight and some express passenger services to serve OOC domestically from Milton Keynes, Rugby and Calvert and all in between to OOC and also approaching Reading for onwards to Southampton or South West from the east.

But capacity wise, the proposed Southern Rail Link from Woking-Heathrow needs to be designed to extend to OOC and via a new link or tunnel to connect with the Chiltern Main Line for direct linkages and arcing between Banbury (nodal point of reference) and Calvert and Milton Keynes to OOC, Heathrow and onwards to Guildford. This links with the Portsmouth line and also our campaign for reinstatement of the Guildford-Cranleigh-Horsham rail link, which linking with existing lines would enable approaches

via Three Bridges to Gatwick from the south. Likewise, the rebuild of Horsham-Shoreham and a new direct link off the Guildford-Horsham line, would enable direct access from OOC and points north to Brighton and Shoreham itself in a port. The point being that passenger and freight would have a new north-south with east-west rail links bypassing London and via Heathrow could utilise off peak capacity to enable more by rail.

### **3. Northampton-Peterborough et al:**

There is no direct rail link between Oxford and Northampton except the proposed east-west rail via Bletchley and change. However, mooted Banbury-Daventry -Northampton would have to negotiate M40 and HS2 but positively were that to be accommodated, could link with a re-railed GC corridor for interchange and optimum operational output flexibility and feed each other.

There is also a need for any link to consider possibly including a curve from the Leamington/Stratford lines via Southam to Daventry to Northampton via the A425 corridor to link southern West Midlands with these key, un-railed areas.

a. Northampton: Station needs rebuilding and re-modelling – the current layout is bad from a number of considerations, let alone growth on-off rail contexts. More tracks, more platform capacity and more radial routes for walking, cycling and bus and less car reliance to/from the station.

b. Re-rail the Brackmills Branch: would connect important Brackmills Industrial Estate with Castle Station. The branch itself could afford to accommodate waitover freight/passenger turns off platform, clearing through tracks for other services. Indeed, a consideration of rebuilding back to Bedford for east-west rail and Thameslink connectivity as well as MML-WCML freight. A new route needs to be found from Castle Ashby Estate to flyover and connection with the slows of the MML. Forget Olney, they don't want the railway and have deliberately allowed development to scupper old and any close proximity rail link passing their way. Far better to look north and have a Parkway Station near to where A509 and A428 connect surely for optimum interchangeability and reach/range? Numerous studies have been done over the years and reached the Government for consideration in 2004 but was declined on cost, not case terms. Principally, the councils and other agencies had other agendas, approaching 20 years on, given growth and modal shift, we need to keep this option alive (route protection) and examine with solutions in mind, not be overcome by hurdles per se x any other rail reopening or new build.

c. Rebuild the Northampton-Market Harborough Rail Link: Study done already, was positive and should be engaged with. Needs backing and a sponsor to take it forward. M1/A508 are principal arteries to declutter as well as urban impact of volumous traffic, congestion and parking/land-use which is needed for other things like housing and employment. Leicester-Northampton, Milton Keynes and east-west to Oxford as well as existing other WCML linkages and services. Passenger and freight. The corridor needs

expanding to accommodate walk/cycle paths as well as a twin track railway and some provision for the current preservation option. A key lesson to learn and work on is footpaths, cycle routes, leisure trails, linear parks, road roundabouts, road intrusion, preservation schemes and canals are just some of the blockages purported to protect a corridor which then in turn become objectors to a railway! We need to think creatively how these can make way for the bulk greener reach-range of re-railing or select domestic new build schemes for the greater good. Ponds can be moved; the railway needs specific engineering. Likewise, tracks can be lowered to make 9'6 clearances in tunnels and a north-west direct curve would allow direct running to Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT) Inland Port. Likewise, freight via Peterborough could access Northampton Depots and others from the Leicester-Market Harborough-Northampton link. Whereas the Rugby-Lutterworth-Narborough rail link serves different, specific and new growth passenger and freight opportunities and the GC from Calvert new build scheme we have suggested. Plenty of scope for both. Rugby-Narborough takes on western flank of M1, Northampton-Market Harborough, takes on the eastern flank. Potential for Brixworth to have a station (A508) commuting and also a Parkway Station where rail line and A14 intersect.

d. Northampton-Bedford and Northampton-Peterborough used to share the same portal access via London Road Level Crossing and Bridge Street to Castle Station 'box'. Therefore, any links to Brackmills, Bedford, Wellingborough and/or Peterborough (new build/interpretation) needs to lobby Office for Road and Rail (ORR) for 'special dispensation' to look at suitability and fit of its demands for bridges everywhere and see that a tight-fit urban location may be more in-keeping to have a new proper level crossing. Bridges are not panaceas and to rule out a whole reopening because access across a road and avoidance of knocking down Grade 2 Listed Buildings (heritage), needs a more flexible approach. Most bridge bashes and level crossing abuse come from road users who act recklessly. Education and more informing common sense should be nurtured culturally and Network Rail are well placed with other educational-local schemes to increase sensible awareness of dangers like trespassing on railway land and so forth. A new rail link to Peterborough is needed, to enable Ely-Northampton freight flows and cut time and premium pathing conflict issues of sending all via London (a great way round) and Peterborough-Leicester) which has East Midlands and West Midlands centric needs and growth. Northampton as a key area logistic hub and connections to other lines (HS2 is supposed to create default capacity on the West Coast Main Line). Such a rail link could have new arms or LRT associated links with places like Rushden, Raunds, Wellingborough suburban areas. Whilst we do not oppose any rail link per se, we have concerns about the feasibility of linking to the Midland Main Line at Wellingborough. If it can be done without conflict, we welcome to see the design. However, a new station to Parkway the new Rushden Lakes Shopping Centre and A6 links and re-railing the Thrapston and Oundle areas respectively makes good social

sense. Thrapston is far out except by car and needs re-railing likewise, maybe for different socio-economic reasons Oundle also. Footfall and spend and better linkages the new interrelated railway could bring cannot be under stated. Again, how it could be worked with the Preservation outlet occupying the old course into Peterborough, needs revision and evaluation, but the link-on to the Peterborough-Ely lines for Stansted, Cambridge, Soham, Ipswich, Felixstowe and Norwich to name but a few and them direct, quick and faster by rail Good for freight, good for passengers, good for courting new markets which have arisen since closure and decluttering the A14 corridor as well as links with A45, A43, makes this a must-have consideration for a more holistic and joined up railway infrastructure.

**We are keen to understand from interested parties:**

**What are the key themes for the study area?**

- a. design a railway delivery plan, make the case and roundtable/consortium develop with delivery in mind. We don't have the resources, connections or powers.
- b. re-railing and select new build, local, conventional rail to connect these arcs and corridors north-south, east-west.
- c. Recognise the 1960's closures went too far, left huge gaps in the rail network
- d. Recognise plethora private interests vying for 'their' piece of rail connectivity, led to a lack joined-up-ness like at Thrapston where two lines crossed but no physical connection to enable more. People say Kettering-Cambridge was under-used, but the reasons for that may be circumstantial and complex, but A14 follows same axis and is overflowing and £billions spent on widening/land take. We need good planning, coordination and strategic vision with local, affordable, accessible and more by rail/modal shift built into designs, plans and timely delivery.

**What do you consider to be the key movements in the area?**

- a. freight and passenger movements and a need to provide rail choices
- b. growth, development and logistics on more sustainable rail-based platforms from plans, consent and designs to be rail connected. We should never have a proliferated Wixams example without rail connectivity from day one... lessons have not been learned and however informed, is lacklustre/race to the bottom planning and desperation politics of the worst kind. No railway station (passengers), no rail connection (large warehouses and freight rail served). The result? Car-legs and loads of daily lorries pounding roads proliferatedly and intruding urban access roads. Planning, systems, joined-up-ness and objectivity must look at this failed model and do better/amend retrospectively (new build) and ensure going forwards all new developments over a size have rail informed from day one/learn lessons/advocate best practise/hold up examples where this IS the case and/or can be.

c. Recycling by rail more. Local-Regional hubs, for gathering material be it household, cars, fridges, glass, cardboard and send by rail for recycling/processing and finished goods also by rail more. Make it so/design/plan and ensure is and must be the future.

d. Broaden and educate and support the fact that when we think about freight by rail, we have often been trained to think in terms of large marshalling yards, outlay, infrastructure, containers, block loads and a fight between intensive passenger demand and usage over same tracks as the ideal mooted phenomenon of 'more freight by rail'. We need to better nurture and appreciate/apply that more freight can start small and growth strategy. So, click, collect/send parcels, post and pallets by rail, passenger stock with Guards Vann designs for more by rail like luggage, bikes, prams, buggies, people mobility scooters and more can utilise that capacity. Retain walk-on, walk off accessibility for passenger and small load consignments. Likewise, growing from small loads, pallets, wagon-loads, small to large containers, mixed goods, former model of Speedlink ideas, local-regional. If by rail is unviable for less than 100 miles, make it law that all freight over 100 miles must and should go by rail lion's share with local deliveries door to door. A thousand miles begins with a single step and so start small, block replicate models which work, find means-ways and recycle, utilise and restore old stock and redeploy/save outlay costs. Indeed, new ideas, new railways, new thinking, rejuvenate existing railways. Niches, hubs and growth for more modal shift, less fossil fuel and demonstrate that it can work. Brackmills is a prime example. Get it right and where else can it be done? Likewise, the Forders Sidings, shunting sidings and Gantry on the Bedford-Bletchley Railway, needs a vision, a plan and action to get it fully operational, growing more by rail, doing something for rail, not just sitting there year on year doing nothing, rotting whilst roads are taking more traffic, congestion and pollution. Sidings at Swanbourne to enable priority to traverse the Bletchley Viaduct should be considered.

### **What are the key connectivity opportunities and challenges in the study area?**

- a. Lack of east-west links, just one, is not enough, however good.
- b. Lack of protection and stewardship of rail portals and freight servicing areas to urban interfaces
- c. Lack of old rail route stewardship, study and evaluation with delivery of a new railway/reopening in mind and the challenge of the mantra 'it never paid' when 50+ years on, everything has grown, everything has changed and we need to engage old and new markets, refresh our vision and get everything transport-wise back on the rails as much as possible. This is why developing railway lands for non-rail usage is ludicrous as we think of the old St Johns site in central Bedford as one example, similar others at Wolverton – there was once a recycling by rail/water plan, alas nothing seems rail visioned, only capacity constraints, costs and more of the same old road-based/guzzling agendas which ill-serve from a number of angles.

### **What interventions do you think the study should consider?**

- a. Government alignment and consistency of policy and investment for modal shift back to rail as much as possible/wherever possible
- b. Route and access land protection/nurturing enablement for re-railing
- c. Modal shift back to rail to be the foremost priority and agenda with a how to/can-do attitude and approach/overcoming problems, rather than defeated at outset by daunting prospects.
- d. Need to do and act in a timely manner – seize those lands at Calvert, ensure station and new lines can be fitted in amidst HS2 and other development ‘non-rail’ interests and use of lands. Must have expansion by rail more at forefront.
- e. Start with rail network and gap filling first and work back from there with timely delivery and nurture-enablement in mind and then engage, interface and grow coalitions for. Seems we pretend pluralism when we need specifics, we leave open-wide for the unexpected, but miss-out fine detail and plan for common sense. Leadership and direction start with all of ‘us and Government must be on-side as a facilitator and enabler, not an excuse not to deliver or enable per se as long as it squares social, economic and environmental considerations, not just greening unsustainable more to the roads quick fixes at what cost elsewhere?

I hope these views, feedback and welcome further opportunities to discourse and work towards achieving these goals. More information is on our website: <https://ertarail.co.uk/publicity/> I attach a rough diagram which shows our north-south and east-west Great Central-Brighton spinal aspiration for joined-up rail links and planning to realise. If we don't do it, we lock in capacity constraints and stifle modal shift more. Calvert-Grendon avoiding 24x7 freight going through Aylesbury and enables more capacity respectively.

Yours sincerely,

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