

Bedford-ECML Dossier 20-05-2023

Overview. There's politics and then practicalities. There are few if any panaceas. If we want a railway, some will have to give. If we reject the railway or fail to find a way for it to go, we consign a structural weakness to growth and exacerbation with compounded congestion, exhaust damage to buildings and people's health, delay, costs, and a very real problem unfolding. The railway offers the best chance to capture people and goods off roads and back on rails.

Pre-amble: I joined Bedford to Bletchley Rail Users Association (BBRUA) at 14 in 1981. I served on the committee 2 years 1985-1987. I co-founded Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Campaign (OBRAC) for Oxford-Bicester-Milton Keynes/Bedford from 1986-1988. In 1987 I led an inaugural meeting at Sandy and the Bedford and Sandy Rail Reopening Association (BASRRA) was founded. I led the initiative for a Bedfordshire Branch of Transport 2000 (1990-1994) and the Bedfordshire Railway and Transport Association (BRTA) 1997-2007, resuscitated 2013 and since has been known as the English Regional Transport Association (ERTA). Rail links east of Bedford and the Oxbridge project as a whole; has been a core element of campaign focus, experience and up and down hills akin to a hamster's wheel.

Vision: a railway which goes east of Bedford via St Johns site. Passenger trains would go to a new twin bay facility at Bedford Midland where the old Focus DIY Warehouse once was, now part of the southern Bedford Midland Car Park sprawl. A twin track set of points for east-north freight (Midland Main Line-East of Bedford or West for that matter). Tracks between Bedford Midland and St John's area need straightening to increase speed upwards of current single track/10mph operations. Reinstatement of a southern east-west link for avoiding Bedford Midland would enable east-west freight and other movements to carry on without recourse to the Bedford Midland 'box', East of Bedford St John's and if the railway crosses the pond and east and west share tracks using the former Hitchin arches at Ampthill Road Bridge with a relocated Halt upgraded to a Hospital accessed side location (releases land east of the railway/north of 1984 current St John's Halt – which could still have a walk-way/cycle-way access and more parking for example as well as a link around the old curve to the St John's Station site/St Leonards Road area, avoiding busy St John's Roundabout for example.

Summary:

1. **Cycleway** could go alongside a railway if the 'green corridor' is widened, cycle access more flexible, reworked and more over-rail foot/cycle/disabled access.
2. **Railway** could be bi-directional single track and/or fanning to double track, depending on what we do on Willington and eastwards.
3. **Speed**, unlike HS2 is not a main consideration. Local railway, for local people and community need and wider trunk road alleviation – more freight by rail – means engineering can have say 40 mph speed, but like Willington, curves to get around or through pinch-points. If 100 mph as some moot was applied to Bedford-Bletchley, it is likely trains could come off the tracks. So, we are dealing with a secondary railway here and more flexibility on speed is required. It is having the railway back which should be the priority and how best we facilitate that.
4. **Upheaval**: We have to bear in mind Northern Route E.
 - a. All has to go through Bedford Midland 'box', our does not require that conflict
 - b. Even if a few £500, 000 properties are needing relocation, it is far, far fewer than Northern Route E – Poets, Cleat Hill, Ravensden, Chawston/Colesden areas and more.
 - c. If people can get on a train at either St Neots or Sandy and directly travel to Bedford, the County Town and vice versa, they are more likely to use it, than 300 houses in a flood plain north or south of Station Road, Tempsford.
 - d. Development must be curtailed especially at the Tempsford end until we have an agreed and established rail route. Then tailor and build or re-use the spare land according to what you are trying to achieve/needs doing.

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	Area	Description	Caveats
1.	Link between Bedford Midland and St John's	Tight curve from east to north. The 1984 Halt was always a cost exercise. Here we have an opportunity for a brand-new railway, so thinking creatively, outside boxes and objectively can consider 'new' with pros and cons.	You could a. bridge the pond, b. relocate St John's Halt closer to Hospital side, use old Hitchin arches (x3) for east-west movements to a double track. Making track route simpler and less curvy is required to raise speeds in and out of Bedford Midland above 10mph.
2.	Bedford St John's Site	Green Space	Could be a green corridor with a twin track or single railway going east of Bedford. Southern arch of London Road Bridge could be opened up for more. Social Housing will block this rail option and new people will not want a railway. We need to get infrastructure in first and then think of land use tailoring second bet housing, parking, green spaces or combinations.
3.	East of London Road Bridge-Cardington Road	Mix of Stagecoach Parking and Wildlife area.	Railways, fauna, and flora can coexist, albeit the right of way for a railway will mean substantive clearance and re-planting.

4.	Cardington Road: Dual Carriageway/A603 Bedford-East Beds Road	Railway approaches on a flat-bed alignment at right angles almost to the road.	Bridge over railway – see Cauldwell Street Rail Overbridge for traffic lights and proximity junctions either side. You could consider an ORR ‘special dispensation’ application for a level crossing. Recent permission to A21 Rother Valley Railway East Sussex to Bodium given such - worth checking.
5.	Trackbed to first Great Ouse Bridge	A wildlife area, would need same clearances for a railway. Assuming single track fanning out to double track by Sewage Works.	Trackbed originally designed for double track but never completely used due to rivalry between LNER and Midland Railway Company access.
6.	3 Bridges between Newnham and Sewage Works and Priory Entrance Access	Double track would mean relocation/reworking cycle way via Barker’s Lane. Single Track and new river bridges would enable possible perimeter fencing segregation.	1985, originally the cycle way was to protect the railway keeping options open, now it is a major challenger to a right of a railway access. Credible alternatives needed.
7.	Sewage Works to A421 Bypass	Mainly the cycle way and clearer areas. Fanning out to double track possible, but Meadow Lane over-bridge would need rebuilding.	If cycle way and railway could coexist – the railway being bi-directional single track – could additional cycle/foot bridges be installed and extend cycle way to the St John’s Leonard Road area as a cycle-railway ‘green corridor’?

8.	Priory Entrance	The railway course is at almost right-angles to the road access. I know it is a highly sensitive and controversial thing for implementing a level crossing and tailback delays likely. But unless a new entrance was designed, seems little other option, notwithstanding the bigger picture and greater good the railway compensates aggregately.	Priory Entrance would certainly need a level crossing, old Goldington Power Station site did have AOLC, but would need skirts etc today. Dispensation needed, but critically should whole Oxbridge Railway be cancelled in the absence of and the inevitable 5 minutes delay as and when a train comes along?
9.	A421 Bypass	Dual Carriageway. Bypass should be raised with a bridge over the railway akin to the 1950's/early 60's Girtford arrangement.	Side Road Order 199 in 1993 (Public Inquiry) Department of Transport (as then called) said they would look sympathetically at access in event of rail being pursued. They assumed no other route at that time and non-have until 2019 Consultation.
10.	East of A421 Bypass	Either relocate main extended gardens and compensate to get the railway through Willington ort realign to the north and deviate around it.	Both options are costly. Dane Camp would be a main objector, even if a relocation to say Willington Woods, was suggested. Deviation required 2 Great Ouse River Bridges and speed restrictions on a bend.
11.	East of Willington to Great Barford-Willington and Blunham Road.	Flat open land. Get railway done, re-work cycle way around with perimeter fences and walk-way/cycle-way over bridges at locations.	Goal is to have railway rising to embankment to cross both these roads at gradient. Flat access off the River Great Ouse would probably be impractical due to navigational clearance requirements.

12.	Blunham-Great Barford Road-North of Blunham	Theory at least is to follow the course of River Great Ouse on embankment. River to the north of your left looking east, built Blunham to your right.	This is a possible solution if we write off the south of Blunham/Station Court option, which is curtailed by development north of Sunderland Road, Sandy now.
13.	North of Blunham to East of A1	You have to clear A1 anyway at height. You have to clear close proximity River Ivel. North of Station Road/Tempsford is too far north/pinch points and development.	So, south of Station Road, Tempsford lands is still 'open' but clashes with Blunham Grange et al and north Bannocks Castle. Trouble is, north of Station Road, near the Anchor (former carvery pub adjacent to A1) the Great Ouse, comes to within its garden perimeter. So, you are squeezed. Once over the A1, north of Mossbury Manor is open land and proximity to where Northern Route E ended up in a fashion.
14.	Tempsford area ECML Links	ERTA believes optimal rail reach and market would be better served with outer slow line arms to/from the EWRL for more passenger and freight potential.	South of Peterborough, East Beds and North of Stevenage is the scope as well as through tracks for Cambridge and wider East Anglia etc. No need for a change and walk new station.

Disclaimer: I am only a layman but have been involved in a voluntary capacity with Oxbridge Railway some 3.5 decades as an adult and have seen many highs and lows. Much is in the balance, but if we determine the railway matter, is important to Bedford and our path forward, then we must have a 'can-do' approach, a will and a way/find one and collaborate with others to bring out preferred corridor route/s to a formal level and compare and contract with the unwanted 'Northern Route E' I stand willing to work with anyone where I may and feel able. Thank you.

Richard Pill
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