

British Regional Transport Association

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Our Blogspot is a wealth of information too: <https://brtarailvolunteer.blogspot.com/>

BRTA Newsletter No. 65

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Donations welcome

Bedford-Bletchley Concerns and Universal Opportunities if it can be grasped and made real? In brief:



Caption Left: © By our new Photographic Officer Nathaniel Dodd. Note: the date was 23rd August 2023. Bletchley-Bedford passenger trains are now Class 150s. That photo shows a Class 230. East-West Rail propose closure of 4 halts potentially ending the local shuttle service for its own services. In-fill electrification would boost passenger and freight on the line!

Bedford-Bletchley Concerns and Universal Opportunities if it can be grasped and made real? In brief:

1. Class 150 DMU's are 45 years old and failing, proving to make the rail-based service unreliable. If trust and rock-solidness cannot be fostered, people can quickly lose faith-trust and search for other modes of transport, which then become a lifestyle with aggregate losses to the rail network in this case.
2. BRTA wants infill electrification for passenger and freight utilisation of the route and that would mean lengthening platforms to 4-coach minimally as a standard length of platform. Interim better and new rolling stock needs to be sought and some have suggested battery trains, but that still leaves the fact of platform lengths, health and safety and what the stock could be given a problem with accessing suitable trains for the line which are versatile to its function.
3. Universal offers 8-million visitors per year, of which combined with other developments along the rail corridor and impacts of East-West Rail in some degree, you either plump for longer trains or increase frequency. What we cannot have is overcrowding of trains, 50-year-old trains proving unreliable or other threats to the basic passenger service and optimisation of revenue.
4. Some places also, like Ridgmont are locked-in with bridges and crossings, so do not lend to lengthening beyond 4-coach platforms. 4-coach Electric Multiple Units (EMU's) are not beyond reason, and besides Kempston Hardwick should have a longer countenance for the volume of people coming to the Theme Park. However, Stewartby needs retention for the village, sports facilities, and Kimberley College. It needs a plan, a vision and sorting out! Given 2031 is the opening deadline for the Universal Theme Park, it needs an identifiable coordinator to ensure our local rail link is optimal, not minimal. BRTA will play its part!

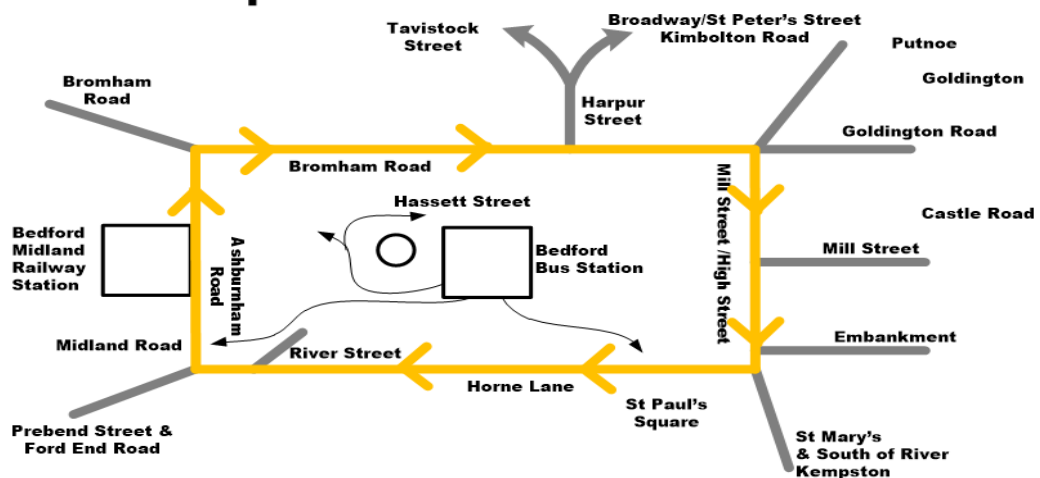
Bus 905 Bedford-Cambridge: A well-used bus service. A remnant of former Oxbridge X5 Coach Service deconstructed in the Pandemic by former Transport Secretary Rt. Hon Grant Shapps MP, no toilet, no through service. Now, hourly BRTA wants:

1. Extend the hourly frequency to a. loop round Longsands Road to connect with St Neots Railway Station and b. extend from Drummer Street Bus Station Cambridge to the main Cambridge Central Railway Station.
2. Make the bus stop in St Peters Street Bedford (adjacent to the Quarry Theatre, Pizza Express and Eagle Book Shop) a stop for 905 on request for people going eastwards. Both these would boost patronage and make it more accessible to more audiences. We also need through bus-rail ticketing and both digital and analogue information and discounts/offers available.

People be-moan less usership of buses and yet every election time it seems we are promised more of this and that, but then post-election, cuts of frequencies of local buses and more costs? £3 may seem reasonable, but a family of 4 – what would it take for them to swap the car or cars for the bus or bus usage as a way of life? Matching realism with vision needs some pragmatic thinking out of the box and for that to be rewarded. We need to democratise bus and town centre management and match bus to distributions around town centres with main shopping areas and principal places and indeed, regional rail hubs and railway stations for more joined-up public transport. We need to foster a service ethos again. The public need to be the main concern, plus more modal shift. People driving buses need to have better pronunciation and elocution lessons provided by employers, to articulate the information people want, not get what is given albeit mumbled and begrudging!

4-Jun-2021

Bedford Station and Bedford Bus Station Loop – Enter and Leave



Not to scale
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Please note the current BRTA Website is: <https://brtarail.com/>

Dumfries Forum 9th August 2025 – are our railway hopes compromised?



BRTA has identified the Dumfries and Galloway Area as needing more rail presence. It is a long stretch of area length and breadth without any rail presence and an area of inevitable growth! The regeneration re-railing would bring should not be underestimated, rather studied, case worked up and trump the drawbacks, blockages and remnant issue course of old railway which has been allowed by the Council to be blocked, just like Bedford-Sandy-Cambridge. Critically with the latter, the old route through Potton, Gamlingay and access to Trumpington Junction for example. Likewise, also, houses on old routes on terminal branches means a new station on the 'now' edge of town and encouragement of people to walk, cycle, bus and park and ride from the new station. This was understood at Wisbech in Cambridgeshire, which gives more space for optimal reach and range anew, could be done if ever a Hunstanton rail link is reopened. Point being, a terminal branch blocked by houses does not mean necessarily a new rail access cannot be done or should not be done. Photo of the local train at Dumfries Railway Station!

So, blockages of themselves are a setback, but can be worked with to inform new railways amended which still gives new rail access (Kirkcudbright) and where the main Port Patrick Line is built on, either relocation notices, deviation lands or new stretches of line should be studied, if feasible adopted. Getting the railway back should be the top priority, but over many years the Council has shown no interest and any action of strategic intent by the Scottish Parliament or Transport Scotland, even if the case is found to be 'robust' – not a matter of whether a railway is financially viable in the purest sense, but whether the off-the-rail benefits outweigh the costs, upheaval and new designs which may be required.

Some feedback which usefully came from the meeting:

- Kirkcudbright - the old station site and the trackbed between it and the northern edge of the town are now completely built-over, mainly with residential properties. A new station would have to be built at the northern edge of the town. There never was a Royal Navy Deep Sea Portal, as Kirkcudbright was only a fishing port during the railway's lifetime.

- Castle Douglas - only part of the Kirkcudbright branch trackbed is blocked by houses, and would be impossible to reuse without the demolition of at least 11 properties. The Dumfries - Stranraer main line route is obstructed by an industrial estate (on the old station site); a Tesco's supermarket, one short row of houses: the A75 Castle Douglas bypass, and another industrial estate just north of the bypass. To clear the main-line route through Castle Douglas, the following steps would need to be taken:

1. Clear the main-line tracks alignment through the old station site (by removing part of the industrial estate, and the Tesco's supermarket). The new station could then be on the site of the original one.

2. **Stop Press:** Political parties are supporting the return of the railway to offer regeneration and modal choice with more environmentally friendly credentials than the A75 trunk road which is heavily used, often mooted for expansion and upgrades, but delivers congestion!

1. Unblock the infilled railway bridge beneath the A745.
 2. Rebuild the landscaped trackbed across the public park.
 3. Clear, and widen the cutting beyond the park.
- Realign the railway to avoid the short row of houses, pass beneath the A75 bypass further east of the existing A713 overpass, and to avoid the industrial estate just north of the bypass. The line would then swing back onto its original trackbed just north of the Stewartry Rugby Club, which currently straddles the trackbed.
 - Timber transport by rail, to remove as much of it as possible from the local road network, should be the top freight priority.
 - Sustainable nature - the railway would offer a much faster way to cross Dumfries and Galloway than will ever be possible by road. A direct link with the Borders Railway at Mossband Junction - by reinstating the dismantled North-East chord there, and by using the existing Carlisle - Kilmarnock - Glasgow line between Gretna Junction and Dumfries - would create a direct Edinburgh - Borders - Galloway - Stranraer/Cairnryan rail route. This has never existed before, and would effectively be the Edinburgh - Belfast/Dublin main line (via the Cairnryan - Northern Ireland ferries). Lastly, the highly scenic nature of the Port Road (as the Dumfries - Stranraer route is commonly known), its fame for this before closure, plus the fact that it would have returned from the dead, would likely attract rail tours to it, especially from Carlisle which is very frequently visited by such trains. This would boost the region's image, and make it more widely known, even internationally. The former engine shed site at Stranraer is now just abandoned, not built-over, and if the original turntable pit still exists underneath infill, then it could be cleared out, and returned to use with a new turntable. This would allow visiting steam locomotives to be turned at Stranraer, greatly increasing its attractiveness to rail tour operators.

- Cairnryan - a rail link to serve the 2 ferry ports there could easily be built from Stranraer by reusing the mostly intact and largely unobstructed trackbed of the former World War Two military railway.
- Scottish Parliament - I have been told that both the local SNP and Green politicians are in favour. Also, in the past few weeks, SWestrans (South West of Scotland Transport Partnership) have made a funding application for a feasibility study into reopening the Dumfries - Stranraer line. The idea of reopening the railway is growing at Holyrood.
- AOB - A direct, northward link between the Glasgow - Kilmarnock - Carlisle line and the West Coast Main Line could be built between Annan and Kirtlebridge, by reusing the mostly intact trackbed of the Solway Junction Railway (SJR). A new section in Annan; three new overbridges to replace demolished originals; the removal of the redundant pipeline from Chapelcross power station (which helped preserve the SJR route through Annan); a new bridge under the A75 Annan bypass; the digging-out of a blocked cutting, and a slight realignment of the route to join the WCML just south of the existing A74(M) overpass (as the original Kirtlebridge junction site is now directly beneath the overpass) at Kirtlebridge would be all that is needed to create that link.

BRTA is grateful for Christopher Rosindale for this feedback.

BRTA is realistic enough to recognise that like many other rail corridors the length and breadth of the countries they served, have been allowed to be compromised and so recovery is what gives, what take and where is 'it'! If it can't, won't or does not, then roads have it and all the locked-in consequences of that dreadful situation affecting people, places, land use and the environment. Only by a growing membership can BRTA seek to have the teams and brave individuals who despite the odds and fashion of airbrushing out realities on the ground affecting ordinary everyday lives, only our well-being can inform more and better. So please encourage membership of BRTA and what can be salvaged for modern rail use, is gain no matter what. See: <https://brtarail.com/become-a-member/>

From the CEO: 200 years of railways and where is it going?!

Call me a cynic, but I reckon there will always be fake news, photos of locos, new paint, shots of rail scenes and ribbon cutting, but as to whether it reveals the true health or adequacy of the rail network as a whole or a need for reopenings and select pieces of new-build is lost. Calls for more people and goods by rail should translate to actions commensurate to grow the rail network; but high-sided business case demands rule out most lay people (knowledge, can-do or money) and then government says there's no money anyway and finds £billions for new roads, upgraded roads and big infrastructure projects like Lower Thames Road Crossing, where it can't, won't and does not fund rebuilding Colne-Skipton (what a proper 200th anniversary should look like), not just glossing past glories and the abysmal way the railways during the post-war era were decimated and trashed for low-cost oil, roads and locked-in dependencies. Likewise, a rail link East of Bedford to Cambridge. That is the dilemma we face and BRTA is not getting the support in membership terms it needs to address these wrong signals. We are hard-pushed on every side, but for all that, the goal is worth it if we are to lower the bads of inadequacy - less congestion, emissions, pollution, contaminated water courses, public ill-health, NHS waiting lists and drains on resources which otherwise could be stemmed for want of more by rail based on a platform of reopenings, select new-builds, capacity enhancements and switching funding from road to rail. It is simple really, but the resolve of public and government needs to be there to make it a priority. It is not currently and we ask you to join BRTA and help make it so: <https://brtarail.com/become-a-member/> Seriously, unless BRTA gets more members and willing and able volunteers to bolster the Executive Committee and unless the national agenda changes to put people, places, land use, the environment and local rail connectivity first, we may fold or be disabled to address these critical issues, even as a voice calling in the proverbial wilderness!

Bedford and Universal Main Line Station for Wixams – but are we ready for meeting the opportunity and the side- effects?

Government support, 8-million visitors per year coming to the Bedford area. How ready are we? Concerns have been raised on impacts like traffic volumes on already gridlocked roads, pollution and demand for more roads exacerbating the cycle of transport if we do not get timely delivery of RAIL-based solutions.

Now this will filter to people's particulars of other agendas, small beer and sandwiches focuses, siloed society and thread bare resource cabinets bet councils or government.

To give the go- ahead to something as big as this, without evaluating the impacts and unintended consequences, is more than a leap of faith, it is courting a series of practical issues which urgently need everyone's attention. In short, 2031 opening, mid-30's the test of cohesive and coordinated preparedness or not.

If a forum is tabled of support for BRTA's rail agenda, which is shared by some other councils and people, then inviting investors to work cases up, get map and plans inclusive (hitherto is now short of that mobility reality unfolding); protect sites and rail corridors, look and study the case merits and benefits on and off the rails and build coalitions to progress to full acceptance. Bedford will gain; Universal equally. Mitigating the costs of congestion in all ways.

<https://inrix.com/press-releases/traffic-congestion-to-cost-the-uk-economy-more-than-300-billion-over-the-next-16-years/> We cannot build our way out of it, we can foster the rail alternative as much as possible, bringing people to and from and across our area sustainably and revitalising town centres never built for the road volumes we see today.

Regeneration is increased if we support re-railing. Our diagram attached shows what we have now and what we could have then. Government needs to instruct East-West Rail Co, to change its route and enable that by instructing Office for Road and Rail (ORR) to have a more inclusive approach to dispensation granted to level crossings in designs where no other solution is feasible like Priory Park Entrance for example and ideally, Cardington Road. That is our route's Achilles heel. On the other hand, the Northern Route is not a panacea, far from it and questions around freight and electrification, cost and timescales, remain questionable to put it mildly. On the other side, Northampton-Bedford-Wixams as an extension of Thameslink needs new route identification, protection and working up the candidacy case for government support on the back of Wixams and if investors stand ready to show a willingness to invest and pro-affirma support, why not? In any case 2035-2040 seems probable.

Interim, Stations North of Bedford (Oakley and Sharnbrook) and a new service with Leicester/East Midlands and revamping Bedford-Bletchley with Oxford

hourly services, or at very least Bedford-Bletchley timetables enabling scope to come back from Oxford and change to a Bedford train now and 2031 seems logical. Longer halt/station platforms, electrification infill (4-coach units) - capacity and demand will grow. 25 years ago, a study showed Retail Park Station and Kempston would add 100 extra passengers daily to Bedford-Bletchley local shuttle. Objection as in taking ages? But the receipts for a 3-minute extra delay covers that inconvenience, and brings 20,000 catchment to the service potentially (Kempston Town and Elstow for example with radial walkways and cycle links etc). What will be inadequate is 45-year-old trains, clapped out, failing often, bus substitutions caught in congestion and people not using the service due to unreliability issues. What can we do now, what by 2031 and what and when post-2031? If East-West Rail say 2050 for 'all singing and dancing' we are right to be sceptical, and tears more likely. Today we decide the future and work with the grain greater or lesser.

Hope of interest. Our events are open to all, so all welcome; <https://brtarail.com/events/>

...And more from Radial Rails for Bedford or not?!

(Councils going bankrupt and becoming ever more irrelevant?)

re: <https://www.bedfordindependent.co.uk/major-development-submitted-for-1000-homes-at-bedford-river-valley-park/>

This and <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/141291/html/>

Leave much to be desired:

Development at Tempsford without infrastructure like new A&E Hospital, sewage works and an east-west rail link, will be unsustainable. Biggleswade, Potton, Sandy and now Tempsford will bloat and homogenise to a big urban new town area exceeding 100,000 people in a very short space of time. That is land take and unless we set aside land for a rail link for example as well as the usual bog-standard Section 106 (school, a shop and community centre for example) where will the railway go? This is not being thought through cohesively, it is just a development dumping ground like Wixams, to fulfill quotient housing stats - yes, a real need, but communities need other things beyond mere 'estate' development.

Likewise, west of Willington blocks our rail route and access, lacks facilities, puts a strain on the A603 into Bedford and parking/existing railway station for commuting and with the precarious and controversial Northern East-West Rail Route in jeopardy/opposed by the Conservatives and everyone else (consensus at last! But for all the wrong reasons!); the default is either an orbital rail route that disenfranchises people and does not serve the town centre of Bedford, resuscitating through footfall and spend, the heartlands of the town and what it has to offer - many hidden gems!

BRTA has spent itself trying to reach out to politicians!

The rail link lacks champions, any kind of visible leadership, direction and timescales of implementation are hard to come by. Loads of unsuited people on the board, loads of secrecy and a lack of transparency, accountability and democracy, cripples proper integrated nurturing and trust.

Our rail route is available now but it is an 11th hour situation. There is a whiff of a lack of faith, vision and sense of direction. Public majoritively want a rail link; but local government has failed the people through dithering, other agendas, and pontifications on routes than rail links.

I just wonder if any audit was ever done on how many houses and at what cost comparatively would be lost were the old route to be pursued and new linkages near Shepreth Junction (new linkage rather than Trumpington Junction) at the Cambridge end as East-West proposed to get people to Addenbrookes for example? The old route blockages are more expensive houses than northern route, but I am still unclear about beyond Bedford urban cordon like Ravensden - will any demolitions be happening there or all in tunnel?

BRTA encourages the public who want a rail link to:

1. Join BRTA and offer to help, organise and get involved for the rail link we wish for: <https://brtarail.com/become-a-member/> Donate time and money, this is a last throw of the proverbial dice and this is our town and its future gain or disablement!
2. Email your local MP about these local-regional-national matters: <https://members.parliament.uk/members/commons?sort=1>

Government purports to be behind it all, where is the leadership and timescale of means and ways for implementation? They have yet to deliver the long-promised passenger service between Oxford and Milton Keynes/Bedford nor the missing Aylesbury rail link, bringing South Buckinghamshire and links with Heathrow and Old Oak Common to the frame?

Unless there's action, discourse, and leadership on Bedford-Cambridge rail link, it will be lost within a decade to us with great injury to the local Bedford scene. Politicians and Government have only themselves to blame, the people have spoken and we have held out to all who will work with us: <https://brtarail.com/ewrail/>

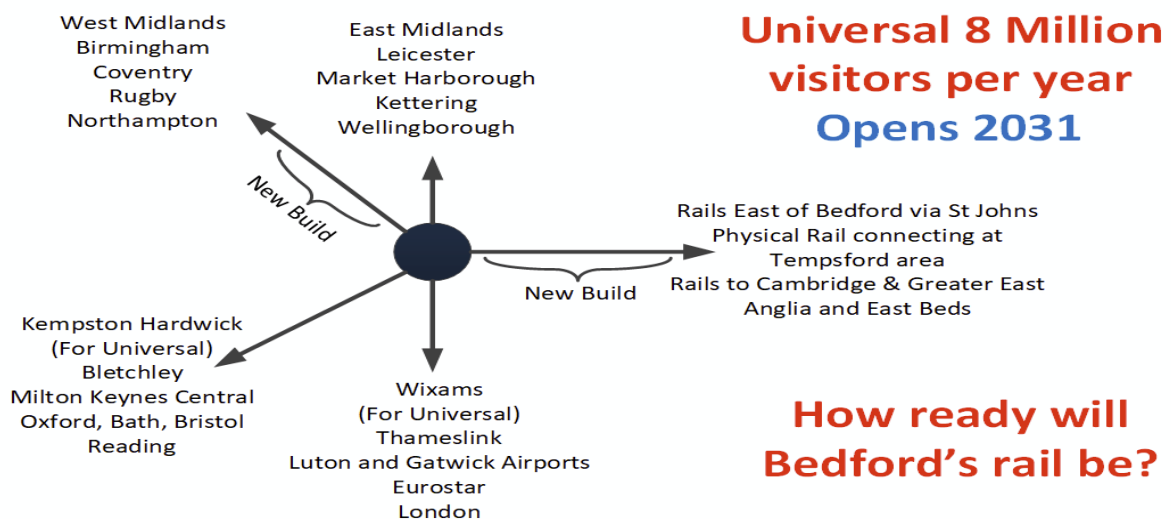
If one says one is 'green' but fails to support this rail link as foundational to underpinning all greenery beyond airbrushing and petty planting whilst macro developments sweep away habitat, food production lands and congestion proliferates with pollution, making water courses, public and wildlife sick; it begs whether such claims are worth of being called 'green', rather tepid at best and in denial at worse! This is decision and crunch

time: <https://www.cieh.org/ehn/environmental-protection/2024/july/road-runoff-is-a-toxic-cocktail-polluting-uk-waterways/>

If we but go through motions and fail to deliver cleaner choices in a timely manner including mandating every council and agency to sign up to a Traffic Reduction Strategy (TRS) per area/region, with rail more for modal shift as a part of that; credulity is rightly to be questioned and whether we are better off without such outlets if they are failing the people, nation and planet we all rely on for basics and dailies?

BRTA is playing its part, but would welcome more engagement from all shades and the public getting behind rail alternatives more please. See: <https://brtarailvolunteer.blogspot.com/> for updated information and elsewhere too!

Bedford Radial Rail



ceo@brtarail.com Visit us at www.brtarail.com Not to Scale © R.Pill BRTA 4 Aug 2025

Beating the retreat: re: <https://www.bedfordindependent.co.uk/major-development-submitted-for-1000-homes-at-bedford-river-valley-park/> and <https://www.bedfordrvp.co.uk/> We may object, but no-one is listening or cares. Our leaders by default and cowardice have made up their minds. The Northern Route or bust. BRTA is ill-resourced to fight any more and our focuses as ever are on Northampton being bolted on for a look-in to both Universal and rails east to/from Cambridge for passenger and freight. We and our predecessors have battled for a rail link east of Bedford for 40 years and have been up and down hill on it. Now is time to work with the grain and enjoy the ride! Of interest is a road will be realigned for a railway, A45 next for Wellingborough?! We can never say 'never' in this line of business!