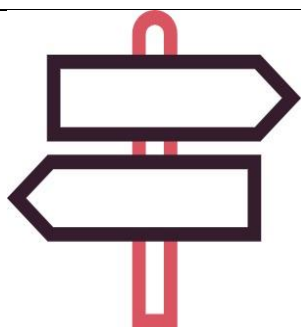




British Regional Transport Association

British Regional Transport Association Main Postal Address:

2 Leigh Road, Hildenborough, Tonbridge, Kent, TN11 9AB

Main contact: Mr David J. Start: Vice Chairman, Treasurer, Membership, Grant Oversight and Delegation, On-Line Sales Coordinator and South East Area Rep.
T. 07535 641055 E. treasurer@brtarail.com

Chief Executive Officer (CEO): Over all day-to-day Coordination with Executive Committee (EC), Media and Publications Coordinator, Delegating, BRTA Events Support, Bedford Area Rep.; On-line engagement/Social Media links, Team Growth and Role Allocations.

Mr Richard Pill (BA Hons), FAETC, E. ceo@brtarail.com

Events, Forums, Public Meetings Fixtures Secretary, Flyer Team Builder and Admin

Assistant: Mr Simon Barber: E: admin@brtarail.com

Phone (landline): 020-8940-4399 Phone (mobile): 07522-374740

Northampton to Market Harborough Rail Link (N2MH), B2N Campaigns and Northampton Area Rep: Professor Andrew N. Williams,

T. 07923 489254 E. n2mh@brtarail.com

Project Manager & Westminster Coordinator: Ms Falak Naz: T. 07490 398710

E. Falakkayani889@gmail.com

Other Area Reps can be found on our website contact's page:

<https://brtarail.com/team-contact/> Our Blogspot is a wealth of information too:

<https://brtarailvolunteer.blogspot.com/>

BRTA Newsletter No. 69

**September-October
2026**

**£2.00 where sold/Donations
welcome**

Dunstable Reflections.... From if only to what if?

~ A leap of blind-faith, or a step into a more positive future for all? ~

~ A special article by Richard Pill, exploring possibilities of new-build rail for a new context dawning that fixed public transport assets can pay dividends if they court local and regional potential markets, not mere parochial visions. ~

A Vision for a Luton and Dunstable Railway collaboration, there's gain for all, amidst the seeming pain of a lack of land and multiple demands on it.

The Vision: Summary of end product vision

What if... there was a direct rail link between Luton Airport Parkway Station and via Luton-Dunstable-south of Leighton Buzzard/Linslade tracks enabled direct Milton Keynes Central to the Airport and vice versa? There has been much against and that remains the case, blockages, Guided Busways and small 'p' political mental blocks as well. What would it take to bring the various parts together and agree on a common policy of some give for some take conjoinedly?

Dunstable (population **40,699** **source:** <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunstable>) One of the largest towns in England without any rail link. Yet there once was, long gone and has a Guided Busway on part of it now. It works like this, to be in London, you have to get up, either bus or drive to Luton or Leagrave and park/change and then rail elsewhere. It takes time, it is a very congested corridor. Buses are frequent, but take time, picking up and putting down along various routes including the Busway.

Guided Busway considered: When after a 30-year campaign to get a Luton-Dunstable rail link reopened for passenger usage, the Inquiry Inspector ruled a Guided Busway would be built instead, there was palpable public dismay; that the will of the majority was sacrificed on cost and local vested interest pressures and a stand-off of countenance of Luton to Dunstable, which need not be. Indeed, Luton has everything to gain from such a rail link in footfall and spend terms, regeneration and prosperity rising. In short, Luton has nothing to fear, everything to gain. How do we get them to see it that way over parochial and 'here we go again' contempt for a revised idea of more and better rails for the South Beds East-West axis corridor?

To have a policy of "use what remains as staple public transport" is lazy and inadequate by our councils, leaders and government. Milton Keynes to Luton via Bedford and Bletchley takes 3 hours, costs approximately £25 and is unreliable. By MK1 or other bus-coach transport direct, takes between 1-2 hours and is £3 chiefly. The roads are constantly congested.

Only rail lures people out of cars and offers freight by rail if tracks are laid where demand wishes to go and a direct rail link between Milton Keynes and Luton on the north-westerly to south-easterly axis, would serve new demand and supply by rail and bring multiple benefits to all on and off the roads and rails, including better air quality, land saved, environmental benefits and lower ill-health and NHS waiting lists.

Guided Busway

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luton_to_Dunstable_Busway

The main benefit of the busway is to enable buses to leap-frog chronic road congestion end-to-end and serve Dunstable and Houghton Regis with quicker public transport. Multi-plethora operators ply the route both ways and carrying loads can vary from half-full to full except for off-peak times when it is lesser. However, according to AI.

Overview, the modern typical bus holds 70-80 people (which is sardine-crammed!). According to the same source, a typical 8-coach train can carry approximately 500-1,150 people per time, so one each way every half hourly would be say 750 per train x4 (x2 each way per hour) = 3000 people carried along the corridor by one train each way x 2 per hour each way. In other words, rail deals with volume. With fewer stops, is arguably quicker end-to-end and here is the twist: AI Overview says the following “Trains are generally more effective at luring people out of cars in the UK for longer distances, while buses are essential for city-centre commuting, particularly within London. Trains are seen as more competitive due to speed, comfort, and the ability to work, whereas cars are preferred for flexibility and directness.” So, buses work best for **local journeys** contrast rail, which serves a wider and longer journey better e.g. Dunstable to Luton Airport or London and vice versa for example. Moreover, rail does volume as we have already said, but end-to-end is quicker. Certain swathes of people use buses, other swathes, mainly those using cars, tend to be more likely to use rail if and when convenient and provided. So, no rail means no modal shift. Bus users have gained from the busway in the absence of anything else, but the following could be observed:

- Rail does both more efficiently and cleanly, especially if electrified

➤ If the railway were rebuilt, displaced buses could strengthen road-based operations and diversity of services and reach out more to new inter-urban feeder markets to core operations.

The next 20 years: To phased incrementally re-construction of a modern design railway between Luton Airport Parkway and Luton, Dunstable to the West Coast Main Line (WCML) south of Leighton Buzzard and north of Cheddington will cost around £500 million to £2 Billion, greater or lesser, including duration and inflation in say a decade from agreement to delivery.

The risk is also that targeted and unchallenged development will block and then tough choices of reclamation or diversion or abandonment with consequences medium to long-term present themselves. If it was agreed to proceed, BRTA sees the phases as follows:

- **Phase 1** Luton Airport – Luton-Dunstable as a terminal branch off the Midland Main Line (MML). That gives medium to longer distance direct, quick rail-based access to Airport, St Albans and London for example and vice versa to the Luton and Dunstable economies and reduction in road traffic interim, with environmentally and quality-of-life/health benefits rubber on hard surfaces and exhaust proliferates negatively.
- **Phase 2** Dunstable-Stanbridge area-physical track linkage with the WCML (south of Leighton Buzzard and north of Cheddington). That gives Milton Keynes-Dunstable-Luton-Luton Airport synergies to and from with reductions of traffic on A5, A5505, M1 and A505 respectively. Lower congestion, less delays, des-res delivery reputation rises as a plus for relocation to the area, with employment and quality experiences in such wakes.
- **Phase 3** Luton Airport to Stevenage wrap around new-build for Cambridge/Norwich-Airport-Luton-Dunstable-Milton Keynes arc and synergies.

What of Oxbridge Arc based on Bedford? Well, at 20+ miles arcing the Luton-Dunstable areas and given pace-of-growth currently, more rail and capacity will be needed and no better time than the two to complement

each other and start now, than forever dawdling at glacial pace or as in the Dunstable case, locked-in going nowhere fast scenarios.

The Luton issue and challenge: The questions arise of:

1. What is in it for Luton?
2. What does Luton want/outcomes?
3. Where will we relocate when we fill-in every bit of spare land for 'progress' images?
4. Even if Luton consents, is there a sneaky suspicion of loss?

No.1: Luton stands to gain improved public transport, transit times, more capacity and wider regional links by sustainable transport.

No.2: That is to be determined and maybe years on now the Busway has bedded in, a local referendum of Luton and Dunstable to gauge opinion and engage/consult on pros and cons and the wider regional rail linkage potential and environmental and regenerative gains versus losses of status quo.

No. 3: If the rail link is to be done, we have the challenge of how and what gives, what takes and whether Luton can live with it for the gains inherent of the upheaval? What is needed is:

- a. A duck-under from the south from slow lines to new twin-track lines along busway to Dunstable.
- b. Relocation of the Interchange is absolutely required. However, given demands for new, expanded and better trainshed/booking hall provision, given the current station is locked-in land-wise by the Interchange and a roadway; the clash of two agendas is leading to some stalemate in conceptualism, design and delivery stages.
- c. One option is buses come in via northern end of the pedestrian area near St Georges Square, wrap around by road to the southern end bus stops and go out plethora of roads available. Nearest bus tops would be at the Vue Cinema if the rail link option was pursued successfully. Another option is a regular bus along the road to High Town (unpedestrianised for buses and cycles only access) and diaspora from there, dropping off on the eastern footway?

d. The twin-track railway would come off the slows, duck under, have 8-coach length halts with extended footbridge and lifts from main station with a new ticket hall and services on the land between student accommodation and walk-way to Guildford Street and the Arndale Centre. Then you have the interchange with Luton shops and main station from Dunstable (bulk footfall and interchange audiences lured to quicker rail-based transport with a toilet on board) .

e. The rail via new bridge over the Bedford Road, going westwards on the re-railed Busway to Dunstable with a double-track halt-style twin platform with lifts and a modest booking hall and dual exit facing the town be-straddling the college (former skateboard park – never used for various reasons like out of the way and zero facilities or supervision) and north of the college with new bridge over the road-way which will need lowering for access to Amazon and Sainsbury's areas for example and vice versa to the railway (wider employment opportunities and inwards commuting to the town centre).

No. 4: BRTA's view is everyone stands to gain, more and better mitigating any aesthetic losses.

Phase 2 is Dunstable to north of Cheddington/south of Leighton Buzzard/Linslade for direct Milton Keynes rail-based access and east-west rail for Oxford and possibly Aylesbury if that missing link is added to the wider scheme.

Phase 3 is a new-build looping round to Stevenage from the south near Knebworth for Stevenage (interchange to Hertford), Hitchin (for stations to Peterborough) and Cambridge (for wider East Anglia) and all those audiences first to Luton Airport, Luton, then Dunstable and onwards for Milton Keynes Central for the whole area, links and main-line services further-afield. The volume would more than pay for any local losses and with clearer roads in a context of growth and regeneration, the market demand for public transport on rail and road, is likely to grow and be buoyant for all to serve.

The reality is, that current provision adequate; is it sustainable and is its informal for real modal shift? Renewal of concrete would be a costly

mistake if it is found wanting, whereas a rail link, would be regularly maintained and pay for itself. This is not visiting the past, it is a portrait of a brighter future in which if delivered, growing confidence in the South Bedfordshire areas as main players in national life is underscored by sustainable public transport infrastructure and platforms.

How do we get there?

1. Luton needs to be consensual and convince itself of the gains outweighing the pains.
2. Dunstable has to want re-railing and be willing to make space for it to accommodate and integrate parking.
3. Milton Keynes, Leighton Buzzard, Linslade, Stevenage and the London Luton Airport, need to see the business case and buy into it as would-be contributors, market feeders and crucially investors.
4. A full-blown feasibility, engineering, business case and environmental impacts study is required using the phased incrementalism approach which would inform revenue to underscore each phase on a rolling basis.
5. Planning and Government support needs to be convinced it is worth it, gain their support and that the current Oxbridge East-West Rail via Bedford will be boosted, not undermined by such an additional railway and that handling growth, development, land-use and the market share of 8-million extra visitors per year to Universal (at Wixams) with a share of 26, 000 extra jobs, the wider rail project could again ensure the optimum outcome, than the disenfranchised outcome of being isolated except for costly car ownership and ability to drive. Better public transport enables disabled people to have better access and chances for leisure, work, study and a more fulfilling life for example.

Beyond Luton Airport Parkway Station:

Luton Airport Parkway is a major interchange station in its own right. It needs investment to create a new 4-8 coach bay platform underneath the DART transit facility. That would enable some Thameslinks to terminate there (Dunstable frees up capacity for more trains for Luton as well off the main line) and also to take advantage of the Dudding Hill North-West Rail

Reopening to passenger services for Heathrow, Reading and Guildford. These could serve Dunstable (Phase 1) and/or terminate at the Bay if Luton cannot accommodate on through lines. The site is fairly land-locked, but some creative endeavour could inform more wriggle room. Likewise, buses going to the station for interchange and terminating, should also be considered as part of the reconfiguration of Central Luton itself in the wake of a re-insertion of a Dunstable Rail Link.

Population of principal places between Luton-Leighton-Linslade-Milton Keynes areas notwithstanding caveators. That's 578, 762 not serves on an east-west axis and on a north-westerly to south-easterly direction in either direction. BRTA believes there is sufficient potential, scope and demand for at very least a collaborative study to see what is in it for each area and why leeway should be open to compromise and relocation to put the essential rail infrastructure in, for optimum benefits for all and des-res footfall and spend to regenerate and make existing and new businesses prosper more. Sustainable footfall and spend means we choose rail and rail deserts and glaring gaps need re-railing. Please add your voice and weight to this call. If the comprehensive study proves robust and a will and way can be found, especially in relation to linkage with main lines at both ends, Luton, relocation packages and redirection of tall-sided vehicles from urban areas, then everyone can gain from a re-railing of the South Beds Corridor for people and potentially goods of all sizes too.

The British Regional Transport Association (BRTA) asks the following:

1. Email your MP and get them on board to speak up/make supportive enquiries.
2. Join/Affiliate to BRTA, every penny goes to our efforts for a more and expanded rail network across Great Britain.
3. Offer to volunteer is assisting us with plethora of jobs to be done including admin, forums, research, photos and delegated representation at all levels. Loads of potential, can only be realised with a growing membership and support base.

The Growing Demographic not including burgeoning villages – locally and regionally!

Place	Population
Dunstable	34, 487 (2021)
Luton	225, 262 (2021)
Leighton Buzzard	42, 727 (2011)
Linslade, Beds.	11, 185 (2011)
Stanbridge, Beds, UK	752 (2021)
Milton Keynes	264, 349 (2021)
South Beds Population	118, 200 (2007)
Totals	578, 762

Caveator: We exclude the South Beds Reference in totals, but each location should be given additional weight of a 3-mile catchment per location for a fuller picture of population the railway would immediately serve as well as through traffic and airport specific to/from traffic. This new and modal shift to rail, is better for land-use, people, places, environment, choice and pollution reduction purposes.

Sources **used:**
[https://citypopulation.de/en/uk/eastofengland/central bedfordshire/E63004175 dunstable/](https://citypopulation.de/en/uk/eastofengland/central_bedfordshire/E63004175_dunstable/),
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luton> ,
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leighton Buzzard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leighton_Buzzard) ,
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leighton Buzzard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leighton_Buzzard) ,
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milton Keynes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milton_Keynes) ,
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South Bedfordshire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Bedfordshire)

What you can do – take action, it could make the difference!

1. Luton-Dunstable

2. Dunstable-Leighton-Linslade-Milton Keynes
3. Luton Airport-Stevenage wrap around, mainly in tunnel.

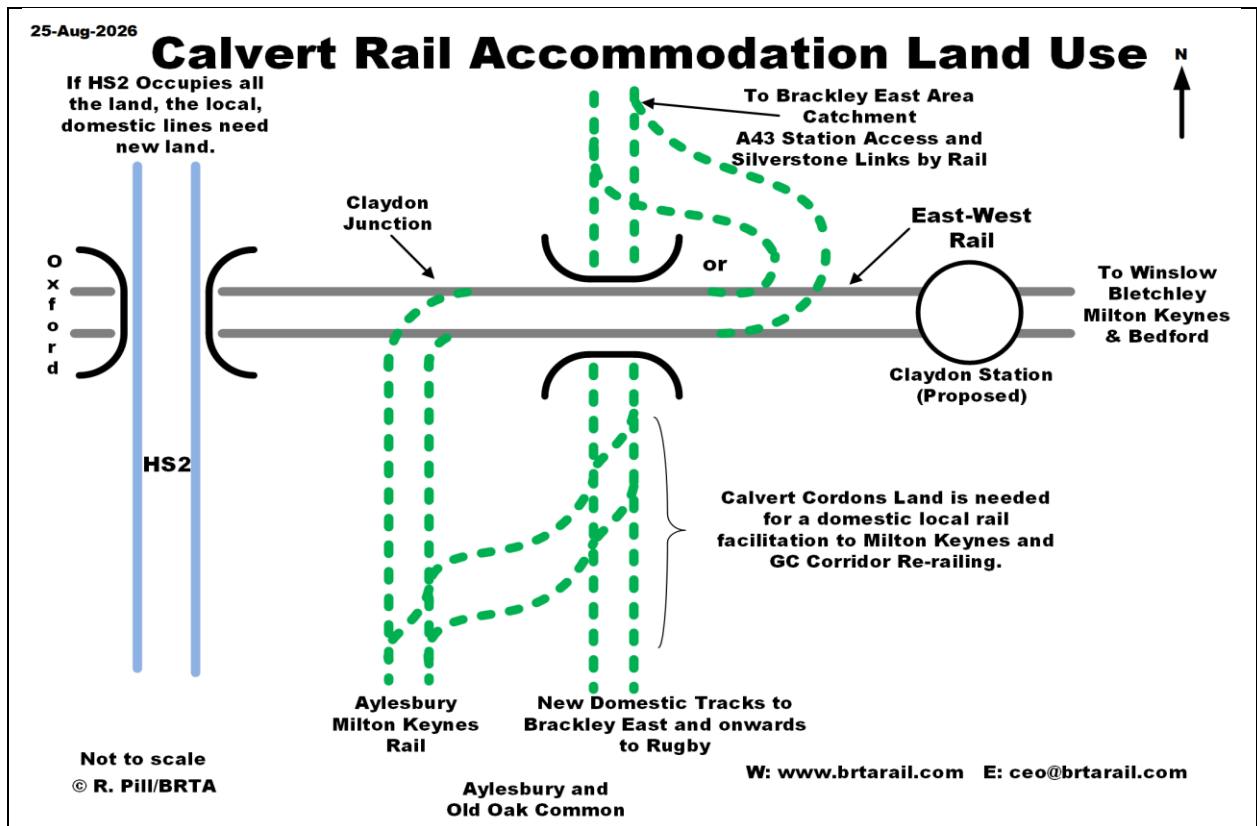
What you can do:

1. Join BRTA, people our meetings, offer to voluntarily help out and lead on aspects: <https://brtarail.com/become-a-member/>
2. Email your local MP and ask them to flag up the matters and get government interest and support.

<https://members.parliament.uk/members/commons?sort=1>

3. BRTA facilitates, offers a brand, we empower individuals to work collaboratively and help share the load. We do not work with one central person carrying everyone else's agendas!
4. Email your local newspaper and media outlets in support of our ideas, suggestions and goals.

Note: Apart from the Interchange and Guided Busway, some of the route has been built on and a conflict is Dunstable High Street North and Brewers Hill Road for example. These challenges need to be looked at by studies in a 20-year context of planning, policy, relocation, design but also alternatives. Dunstable is heavily congested and Brewers Hill Road has more than its fair share of traffic as all manner of vehicles seek to avoid the tortuous town centre gridlock. Dunstable does need a north-south orbital bypass, but also an east-west rail link and these things need to be made to accommodate and revise what, how and where should be done. But the benefit of a siding to Dunstable is more trains serving Luton and Luton Airport Parkway, without land-give rather than land grab; you lock-in an intense situation of high demand for rail, but no accommodation to service it.



The British Regional Transport Association (BRTA) wants a physical rail link from Aylesbury to the new-built Oxford-Milton Keynes rail link to enable Northampton and Milton Keynes people to travel direct by rail to South Buckinghamshire and Old Oak Common (OCC) Interchange Station in West London and those audiences vice versa. HS2 has cost avarice and is to all intents and purposes a mis-application of a railway to what is needed like more conventional rail capacity, able to handle passenger AND freight, able to have a Parkway Station serving the Brackley expanding area and accommodate go-anywhere trains. That the government has also not resolved the absence of passenger trains between Oxford and Milton Keynes as we close for press, shows and raises questions whether the Transport Ministerial Team is fit for purpose/properly focused? December 2026 marks the 40th anniversary when a meeting was called in Milton Keynes to bring splinter campaign groups together and went on to form the Oxon and Bucks Rail Action Committee (OBRAC) for short. BRTA CEO was at the public meeting giving support and gave a slide show to boost positivity and morale to enthuse the initiative. New groups are emerging calling for trains and in Aylesbury and Brackley's case more tracks!

Sustainable Britain Needs Re-Railing



British Regional
Transport Association

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Yusuf Isat

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All are welcome. Free to attend.

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