

English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

~ A voluntary unincorporated membership based association seeking to restore strategic missing rail links and improve the environment as a result. ~

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<p align="center">ERTA... the voluntary association which likes to help others, as well as <u>just</u> ourselves!</p>		
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East-West Rail Stalling? ERTA picks up the baton!



Caption Above: Looking west in 1987 and a Class 31 hauls the Akeman Street Fertiliser train eastwards near former Swanbourne Sidings with an overcast background.

Caption Above: Fertiliser train heads east. Note the long gone Bletchley Brickworks chimney's in the emergent Milton Keynes suburban landscape, now housing be-straddles the line out to Newton Longville and beyond.

There's a desperate need for the full East-West Rail Link now. Sadly, it is being stalled by Network Rail not being able to afford and resource it until the next cycle of its investment programme. This means that whereas Oxford-Bletchley-Bedford would have been delivered by 2018, we're looking at 2025 and whereas a Bedford-Cambridge rail link would have been delivered by 2025, we're looking at 2030's. When one considers that the Steer Davis Gleave Report making the case for full reopening came out in 1997, as we turn the year into the 20th year since publication, the longevity of the years when this railway to be operational could contribute so much to the local areas it would serve, takes a toll and saps all but the most enthusiastic towards some disillusionment, not with the intrinsic railway itself, but the bureaucracy and vacancy of strong leadership to push it through in a timely manner, however informed. We have the East-West Consortium, which is the lead body and we support them and follow behind eager for news and information to cheer it on and make common cause where wanted. We have made a link from our website to theirs as a good will gesture, we have written letters of support to local papers and politicians alike and even up to Downing Street itself. But when we consider 2017 is also the 50th anniversary of the closure of the through route, it will be another generation who will see it and get the benefit of it. Still we keep on in good faith, hoping for the best.

News and Notes

<p style="text-align: center;">Website</p> <p>https://ertarail.com/ is the new web address for the ERTA website. On it you will find a wealth of information and news updates or links to our Blogspot for more in-depth articles. We don't seek to follow the news, we aim to make news, forge projects ahead and get some sensible informal understanding on how public and Government can cooperate loosely to help usher the railways we wish to see in a timely manner. If a national reason makes it a priority, we won't argue with that!</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Bedford</p> <p>ERTA has deplored the closure threat of the travel centre at Bedford Bus Station. The facility is well used with queues before it opens often. So hard to get accurate information, so many ticketing arrangements and knowing you can buy reliable tickets at accurate cost are a facility Bedford badly needs to retain. Public anger has been vented that splitting the tourist office to another location will require a third round of costly refurbishment in 10 years.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Milton Keynes</p> <p>The pivotal role of a Northampton-Bedford rail reopening is that it would inform a Northampton-Bedford-Bletchley loop off the West Coast Main Line. This in turn offers more paths for more trains to serve the MK Central Station. Therefore to put heads in the sand and suggest "what is Northampton-Bedford to us?" is to throw away those extra paths by default and lock-in an overcrowded location which cannot serve the demands being made upon it in a context of growth.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Northampton</p> <p>Good news! A meeting was organised by Cllr Liz Coombes of Northamptonshire County Council to explore the Northampton-Bedford rail link issue and what may reasonably be done even at a late stage with road link threats and other minutiae abounding. It may well be that as we reach out to other councils along the line; we're seeing the beginning of a consortium for this railway reopening and an all corridor agreement that it must be protected. Thank you Cllr Coombes! We look forward to the next meeting.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">London</p> <p>Richard Pill (right) represented the association at the Institute of Directors in September to meet with a promoter of a Lower Thames Crossing. This project would see a direct new tunnel under the Thames Estuary taking road traffic and rail freight combined in a two tiered platform set in a tunnel. The upshot of this development could be more freight heading north into East Anglia and a Stansted-Braintree rail link to inform an orbital loop.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Constitution</p> <p>The constitution has been revised and updated by the Executive Committee and copies can be requested from Richard Pill by email erta.rails6@yahoo.co.uk The constitution is very important as it sets out how we are to conduct the business of the association, the format of meetings and rules governing conduct, inclusivity and reasonable frameworks for going about our daily ERTA business. Members are key for resourcing and encouraging.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">BBRUA Salute</p> <p>It has been reported to us that Richard Crane will be stepping down as Chairman of the Bedford-Bletchley Rail Users Association (BBRUA) and that the association will be folding. This association has fought the good fight to save the line from closure to modernisation and now a Sunday service. We would like to say a thank you to Richard and his association for the years they have spent and wish them well in their retirement. Whilst other groups exist, ERTA will continue to take an interest as it is a local and regional strategic railway.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Sunday Services for Bedford-Bletchley</p> <p>According to Modern Railways October Edition Page 10, the new London Midland Franchise will include Sunday services on the Marston Vale Railway (Bedford-Bletchley). This means people will truly be able to call it a leisure line, getting to church on time, taking their cycles to the Redways at Milton Keynes for safe, off-road cycling and visiting Bedford to enjoy all that it has to offer including its splendid river, history and international culinary choices. New Franchise kicks in 2021!</p>

Bedford-Bletchley Side Show Review



In 1984 the old St John's Station was closed, the triangle was ripped up and a new halt was opened below Amphill Road Bridge, Bedford and passenger services extended into Bedford Midland. Caption left shows Class 104 DMU standing at Bedford Midland 1987 ready to depart to Bletchley. The bay (Platform 1a) was designed for receipt of these trains but they were soon sent north of Bedford amalgamated into services to Corby in 1987. That reopening proved less than, but several years later was revived as a modern railway and proved successful and is to be double tracked and planned electrification.

Network Southeast under its charismatic leader Mr Chris Green translated it's colours of blue, red and white toothpaste onto these 1950's first generation Diesel Multiple Units (DMU's). This one sits at Bletchley Platform 6 ready to depart for Bedford. Subsequently there has been a move towards more trains departing from Platform 5 and track-works have been done at some considerable cost, to enable direct reversal and running on to a created bay platform at Central Milton Keynes Station, the penultimate rendezvous with other trains and connections. The former drivers mess rooms can be seen behind the train all swept away by 'progress'!



The ground frame at Millbrook Station was the way the line was in the 1980's still, with staff manning many level crossings and signal boxes or ground frames until modernisation of the line came and swept them all away. Obviously if you need fewer people to operate a railway it helps to reduce cost and with automation, the freedom to operate more trains 24 x 7 becomes possible even if not the case on this particular railway. Millbrook once had a brickworks and extensive sidings. Note the house behind, was for many years derelict and really should be returned to the housing sector, as there is a queue for housing we are constantly told!



One of the bug-bears of the railway in the 1960's at a time when closure axes were swinging, was whether parallel roads could offer an alternative bus service to replace the train. Luckily for the Bedford-Bletchley railway, the roads go across the line rather than alongside it! Thus buses could not compete on timings with the railway and for various reasons the railway survived at least 3 attempts of closure. However loss of the Bletchley-Oxford and Bedford-Cambridge arms, hit the volume of passengers and freight using the line hard. Photo taken 1987, when most roads were snow bound, the local train works its way through!



From the Chair

2016 has been a year of progress for ERTA. We are growing gradually. Highlights include a new website. We have contributed text to it but apart from generating new members, donations and news for people, that it will act as a hub and spoke to encourage more growth, area reps to come forward and a nationwide movement for rail reopenings and local project expansion in particular. The move to being able to pay via the website electronically means it is much easier to make donations towards the work of the association as well as for people to join and renew their membership. I apologise it took so long, but that is the hand life deals sometimes.

Our team has been gradually building up and growing the muscles of experience in the work we do. Our Executive Committee is the centre for all decision making, consulting members in various ways to keep them informed, as this newsletter does for example. We take that basic commitment seriously and welcome to hear from our members as well as see them at our events and meetings.

I would like to thank Nick Bethune for a splendid talk on 6th October at the Calthorpe Arms in London and for all the team who helped out marketing it and on the night. I would also like to thank David Ferguson, Simon Barber, Michael Hustwait, Leonard Lean and Lorraine Heyworth and others who made contributions in various ways to the work of the association and its ability to carry on.

We may not be the biggest group of our kind, Railfuture is bigger. We have a large railway media, some more benign to groups like ours than others. However we are active in highlighting issues, championing East-West Rail despite of the cynical hand dealt on Bedford-Cambridge. Development pressures exist now, unless the route is protected, with realignment spaces, in 18 years it will be but lost, we cannot assume fallow forever, action is required. Protecting corridors is not a cost-free passive act; risk, liability, blight and many other issues means it could be a legal and expensive business. So, we'd rather the railway was built sooner than later. Once we have a work in hand, settlement and objective planning around the corridor can be done including integrated bus services and ticketing arrangements.

~ On behalf of ERTA, Season's Greetings and a Happy New Year for everyone. ~



1987, the year the Bedford And Sandy Rail Reopening Association (BASRRA) was launched at Sandy. A friend stands on the remnant of former Girtford Halt with Girtford Bridge which carried the A1 over the Bedford-Sandy-Cambridge Railway. This underpass was turned into a road and a new railway would have to go to the north of built Sandy as it is today. At a time when some are thinking of starting a new Oxford-Cambridge Railway Users/Supporters Group, it is worth remembering they have an 18 year gap to fill. What changes to the landscape and our way of life may have happened in that time? The reality is to be found in oil, as now it is cheap and plentiful, but may not always be so and then we'll need this railway more than ever!