

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. ~

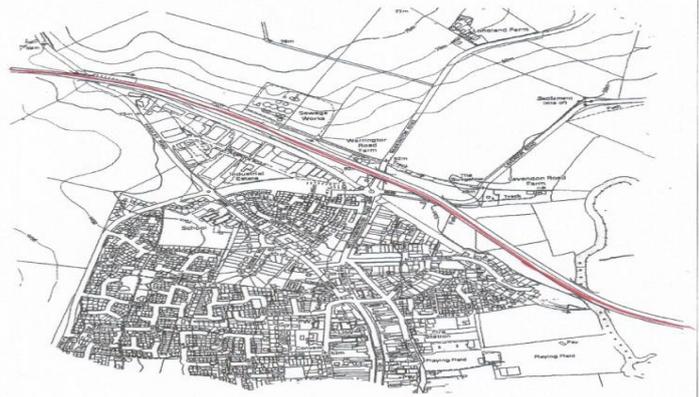
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<p>~ Making a contribution towards retention and improvement in better public transport. ~</p>		
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Northampton-Bedford: the closing of one chapter, the opening of another!

Olney Conundrum

At the start of our campaign some 20 years ago as BRTA, our fund raising to commission a pre-feasibility study and the drawing up of the Handley Alignment due to blockages existing namely at Midland Road and the Industrial Estate, west side of Warrington Road, meant that we had a consultant based alignment to proceed with in making the case for reopening. Now after a bombardment of applications left, right and centre, that alignment has itself sadly come to pass and is superseded by new ribbon development. There's a strong push for Olney to expand northwards, it being flanked on two sides by the Great River Ouse.

Does this mean the end of the campaign? Not necessarily! But what must be done is fund raising for a new study and a new 'alignment' to be established and that greater or lesser. It will however, require greater powers and resources than we can realise currently and possibly a new campaign by new people to progress that task. It will take a while and who but us has that kind of vision? However it will mean a long pause and interim the worsening situation brings down curtains but for a strong power-led initiative whereby compulsory purchase and cost will be the determining factor of approach.



The Bedford to Northampton Railway Reinstatement Pre-Feasibility Study Suggested Diversionary Route for Olney

Olney operates on a platform predicated on:

- Being a satellite town of Milton Keynes. No. 21 bus is often full, contrast the 2's and 3's of the No. 41 which detours with subsidy into Olney off the A428 – how long it will survive remains to be seen.
- The abundance of cheap oil and majority buy in/out on anything, so as to cushion any hardship be it Brexit, cuts or indeed oil costs rising – hidden inflation.
- This is the platform of Olney operations; our concern is the basis of operations whereby the rail link would play a wider local and regional role.
- If anyone wants to take on this task, by all means!
- We welcome new offers to seek to build a new team.



Above Left: Class 168 Unit No. 168106 at Oxford City Station prior to departing for London Marylebone 12th December 2016. Oxford now has 2 routes to London, Milton Keynes and Witney next? Photo by Simon Barber Dec 2016.

Above Right: The ERTA Celebrating Christmas bash and the new rail link on December 12th 2016 at Gino's Spaghetti House, adjacent Gloucester Bus Station, Oxford City Centre where the X5 coach to Bedford goes from conveniently!

Association News: First day of London Marylebone-Oxford Train Service – by Simon Barber

On the first day of the new timetable for Chiltern Railways (and also for several other Train Operators), three of our members (David Ferguson, Tony Bush and myself) travelled on some of the first through train services running from London Marylebone to Oxford City. David and I travelled on one service, whilst Tony travelled on another. We all distributed recruitment flyers on the trains to some of the other first passengers, and after we arrived at Oxford City both David and I went on to another train to leaflet more passengers prior to that train departing for London Marylebone.

We travelled on a Class 168 unit, which now operate most of the London Marylebone - Oxford City services. However, when we all returned to London Marylebone we travelled on a push-pull set presumably hauled by a Class 68 locomotive. There are now two bay platforms at Oxford City which are now dedicated to the London Marylebone service and also for the future East -West services for whenever these come on stream, and new awnings are now in the process of construction for these platforms. We then made our way to an Italian restaurant close to Oxford's main bus station where we had a superb meal which also marked ERTA's Xmas celebration.

News in brief

- **Conference:** Unfortunately our mooted conference has had to be cancelled. Basically we need more people involved at the heart of the association to enable us to resource and realise potential.
- **Amphill:** A delegation was had with Central Bedfordshire Councils reps who suggested that they prefer to focus resources towards supporting a Wixams Station instead. However, apparently Gallagher Estates don't want to pay and Amphill is equally a defined area needing more parking and ridership. Watch this space.
- **Website address:** ertarail.com Please peruse and send feedback to erta.rails6@yahoo.co.uk We love to hear from our members, especially offers of help.

Light Rail

Some have suggested both narrow gauge and light rail in relation to parts of the former Bedford-Northampton railway. They do this, partly because of some belief it is cheaper and partly as enthusiasts they just want to ride and quote examples of the 19th and early 20th century rather than where's the queue specifically now?

However we wanted a Thameslink style through route. There's little to suggest any more appetite for any kind of railway. The closure happened, everyone's got cars and drive time is precious even if in congestion apparently. However if someone could persuade the Northampton area they'd have a potential captive audience of 200, 000 people!

Bedford-Sandy-Cambridge Side Show



When it comes to reopening railways, the Border Line's success and extent of engineering and re-design is exceptional and has not filtered through to Bedfordshire yet! However if you build a fixed premises on an old trackbed, you have more of a job to recover that old trackbed, than if you leave the trackbed free of obstruction. There are grades! **Caption left** shows the old Bedford St John's to Cambridge, east side of London Road Bridge, Bedford taken circa 2007. These cars can be relocated; the necessity of the railway to enter Bedford and serve two stations should be less open to debate as per out of town relocation suggestions for the railway in our view. Traditional means just that if the benefits to the urban cordon are to be realised.

Caption right: This 'gateway' is the old trackbed (circa 2006) near Meadow Lane, Bedford looking eastwards towards the A421 bypass which obstructs the railway corridor and the on-off proposed Willington Rowing Lake. It will take the powers of Government to push this kind of railway reclaim through these obstacles and again whilst we have advocated reopening and have never shied or pretended other than as is landscape wise, it is beyond our wit to realise the railway but obviously we will follow and support with interest as we do. One suggestion is for a halt/station here with a park and ride and serving the Bedford Town Football Ground. Gating would go up!



Caption left: Circa 2005, two trains occupy the former Bedford Bays at Cambridge Station. Note the now 'lost' milling factory behind. Cambridge the goal, but how we get there remains to be determined. We hope that 'traditional' means just that, the attempt to reopen faithful to the old route but with realignments where blockages exist. The line must be fit to take passenger and freight as the decongestion of the North London Line requires such for wider benefits and cutting journey duration depends on it and the railway to wash it's face beyond mere Oxbridge and local usage focus'. Unless we get that, paths on the West Coast Main Line will be at a premium and that restricts the amount of trains which can serve Milton Keynes Central at any time of whatever construe, passenger or freight operations.



<p>Bedford/Bedford St John's</p> <p>Will a triangle be reinstated at St John's? The old station is constrained to just 4 coach length trains as London Road Bridge blocks expansion eastwards. The inner route demands trains go into Bedford Midland and out again. Will we be able to sustain 1984 St John's Halt and reopen the old St John's? Nothing here is straight-forward and we're keen to see a design specification from the Consortium spelling out how they intend to tackle these issues. The 1984 St John's Halt would have to be slightly modified to accommodate the curve into St John's and a group seems entrenched against any changes or accommodation?</p>	<p>Cardington Road</p> <p>Here the old bridge was swept away and a dual carriageway inserted for Tesco. However you could insert single carriageway fanning out to two east of the railway theatre. However, level crossings are unpopular and making a road bridge given the close proximity of Longholme Way - Rope Walk junction and roundabout, makes the road bridge idea prohibitive. A level crossing would be cheaper than bridges and less intrusive. The other factor is that a Sandy-Bedford rail link could be creaming off traffic along the A603 and cuts queues anyway. Currently there has been no choice but road based solutions. They have and are not working, strong leadership is required.</p>	<p>Willington</p> <p>Some have added to their gardens across the old trackbed, Danes Camp bestrides the course of old railway, it is a narrow gap hedged in by the lapping waters of the River Great Ouse. Before you approach Willington, you have the spectrum of a rowing lake and development being threatened to be resurrected as a scuppering technique. Scuppering by default as the training lake rules out an island pillar for the railway to bridge the lake and thus rules out the railway. Outer routes have their blockages especially between Cople and Willington for example and linking with the Midland Main Line even at a Wixams Station, then denies Bedford Town Centre. It is St John's in some shape or form or bust in our view.</p>
<p>Blunham</p> <p>Housing estate blocks old trackbed and old station site. Realignment would require using some land which is currently a garden centre cum agriculture. Realignment then has to cross diagonally over the old River Ivel Bridge and fit in the Sustrans Cycleway. In-keeping landscape practise means that high gradient viaducts may not be in-keeping and so getting the railway through this pinch point remains an issue. But it is our view with a will, a way can be done.</p>	<p>Sandy</p> <p>If you go around Blunham to the north of modern built Sandy, you then have a huge curve to swing back over or under the East Coast Main Line, into Sandy and beyond. Old route via Potton and Gamlingay is blocked and so a railway bypass or new route would be required. This means virgin soils or new blockages have to be tackled and destination Cambridge could help determine best route. If you rebuild Trumpington Junction, you make 5 tracks into Cambridge and earlier segregation.</p>	<p>Shepreth v Trumpington</p> <p>If, as proposed the new railway links up at Shepreth, you have to share twin tracks to Shepreth Junction; then share just 3 tracks with the Bishops Stortford lines into Cambridge, through Cambridge to Norwich and Ipswich respectively. To enter Cambridge by the former Trumpington Junction requires either slewing the road space or cut and covering the Guided Busway; and things like bridging the M11, clearing a track through the Trumpington Park and Ride where a new halt could link road, bus interchange and rail.</p>

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**Please send completed form to ERTA Membership Secretary: Mr Simon Barber,
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