

# 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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## All Things Marston Vale!

**Introduction:** This newsletter is partly focusing on the Bedford-Bletchley railway alias the Marston Vale line. This is the last remaining branch and secondary route between London and Leicester and is remarkable survivor having seen off at least 3-4 attempts at closure. After years of Cinderella status and decline, it is gradually bouncing back as a popular local transport facility carrying a wide variety of passengers with local line hop-a-long journeys like Lidlington to Woburn Sands to commuting from stations to London (leaving the car at home) and attracting new interest from young people getting to schools and colleges.



**Caption Above:** A Class 153 winds its way along the curve out of St John's 1984 Halt Bedford circa 2016 en route to Bletchley. The 16 mile line has some 12 stations/halts and some of these can only take limited length trains. As a successful marketing of the line pays off in increased usage, looking at lengthening platforms for longer trains inevitably comes to the fore.



**Caption left:** The daily reality! On the former Bedford-Hitchin railway trackbed and sidings sits the Bedford Hospital extended car park. This sea of cars x many car parks shows that we are clearly a nation wedded to the car for short and longer journeys. Whilst lines like Marston Vale may not be able to offer a switch, they can increase their market share.

## **Mr Stephen Sleight answers some of our questions: ERTA Newsletter Questions – May 2017**

1. When did you start with MVCRP? What during that time has changed in your role?

2008.

The main changes have been the opening of Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre providing a new visitor attraction for the Line and the formation of station friends or station adoption groups at several stations. There has also been an overall improvement in station facilities including Help Points, tannoy system and Customer Information Screens providing real-time running information.

2. You now cover the whole of the Marston Vale Railway - what does that entail?

It's a very varied role including promotion and development of the Line, improving station facilities, assisting passengers, management of Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre and setting up station adoption groups.

3. Of all the many halts along our line, which ones are doing best and which are still needing promotion?

Stewartby and Ridgmont are two of the busiest stations. Passenger numbers have increased significantly to these stations following the opening of Kimberley College and Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre respectively.

4. Does our line ever suffer from over-crowding and if so, what remedy short term can you identify?

The Line occasionally has over-crowding at peak times. This could be overcome by all trains being formed of two carriages, which MVCRP has requested in the new franchise.

5. What chances of newer rolling stock and any personal preferences of what interior you'd wish to see?

New rolling stock is likely after the start of the new franchise in October. MVCRP has requested all trains are formed of two carriages.

6. Are Sunday and Bank Holiday operations on the cards and what chance a tea-trolley service selling leisure line guides?

A Bank Holiday service will be introduced in December 2018 and a Sunday service by December 2021 (MVCRP is pressing for an earlier start date).

A catering service is a possibility in the new franchise, although the relatively short journey time may be an issue.

7. Is there any case to electrify this piece of railway linking 2 main lines?

Electrification has been removed from the scope for East West Rail so is unlikely.

8. What if any support do you detect for a halt serving the Kempston Retail Park and have you had any discussions with the owners to sound them out?

MVCRP put forward a station at Kempston Interchange Retail Park in our response to the franchise consultation. This will be taken forward in the new franchise.

9. Is there a case for more parking along the line, especially with all day commuters in mind?

MVCRP has requested parking at intermediate stations to complement existing facilities at Ridgmont and Bow Brickhill. There is potential for car parks at Millbrook and Kempston Hardwick.

10. What of the future - is there any good news we should expect and in what time-frame?

There will be increased funding for Community Rail initiatives in the new franchise starting in October. Other announcements are likely with the franchise award due in late June.

11. What freight uses the line currently and what new could be realised?

The main freight usage is currently stone trains 2 – 3 times per week. There is potential for more.

12. Will East-West Rail herald any new investment in the line?

Yes, platforms will be lengthened at Ridgmont, Woburn Sands & Bedford St. Johns.



Top left: Richard Pill (ERTA) and Stephen Sleight MVMCRP pose for the camera (early 2016) in the shop facility at the Ridgmont Heritage Centre which also has a tea room and memorabilia room as well as meeting rooms. Richard has made a start clearing the overgrowth around the car park and doing litter picking. The grounds are being progressed and gardening taking place. The centre has proved popular and adds to Bedfordshire's map of railway spread.



Bottom right: Richard Pill in 1984 was invited to join the Bedford-Bletchley Rail Users Association (BBRUA) Committee and he served for 2 years. Here in 1985, aged just 18 he poses for the camera beside a class 104 DMU on Platform 6. Note the drivers mess rooms on the left now gone and most trains are using the Platform 5 in anticipation of eventual reversal to Milton Keynes Central. Capacity for the number of trains on the West Coast Main Line is an issue.

### **Notice of Annual General Meeting (AGM): ERTA AGM + Public Meeting – Tuesday 11 July**

1pm Food and Social – please note everyone is responsible for paying for their own food and drink, 2pm – 4pm Business. Ask at the bar for the Function Room, The Tavistock Carvery Pub, 117 Tavistock Street, Bedford, MK40 2SB. If you can't walk get a taxi from either the bus or rail station. It is a 10-minute walk from both, but worth it!

**Other news:** Richard Pill has taken custody of the membership for now and aims to stand as the Bedford Area Rep at the AGM and possibly Association Chairman too. He is aiming to head up a new initiative called the 'Get Bedford Moving Campaign' – aimed via leafleting to focus on improvements to public transport in and radially from Bedford. Bedford is central to 3 regions and gets a lot of cross traffic – there being no east-west rail link for 100 miles north of London and this traffic has a detrimental effect on the quality of life for urban dwellers. ERTA has and needs its members to get involved and help run and share some of the case work to continue to do its job effectively. If we do not get more people involved, ultimately, we may have to go into suspension mode. We are scaling back to fit who and what talent we possess. If you want more and better, be willing to be part of the answer. Our Executive Committee meets about 4 times a year, our other meetings give plenty of opportunity to meet up, compare notes, interact, ask questions and find your niche. Thank you.



**Events:** There's little excuse not to know where and when you can meet with us, tap in, compare note and offer support. Go to our updated website page to see what we're doing for the rest of the year: <https://ertarail.com/events/>

**Caption Left by Simon Barber:** This is a photograph which I took last Autumn (2016) when I was up in Northampton. David and I were on our way to catch a bus to Daventry for the delegation with its Council, and I took a photo of this bus stop closest to Northampton Station. The photo shows how inconvenient this stop is for the station, since one has to cross at least one busy road to get to and from it! There was in modern times a move for bus-rail site integration, seems remiss here!

## Delegation with Network Rail 7 March 2017 – Report by Simon Barber

This took place at Network Rail's Milton Keynes office, and was attended by Simon Barber and Leonard Lean. The officer whom we had met was David Golding, the Network Strategy and Capacity Planning Manager for the LNW patch (i.e. West Coast Main Line). He stated that Network Rail cannot make a business case for re-opening Bedford - Northampton or the old Great Central since they do not own the disused trackbeds. I raised the point that re-opening the old Great Central would be a better alternative than HS2, which Network Rail fully supports for capacity and connectivity reasons, although they are not actually responsible for building it since that comes under the jurisdiction of HS2 Ltd. They suggested the best people to lead delegations are the England's Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance, Local Authorities with Transport Authorities; Local Enterprise Partnerships and Train Operating Companies. As regards East - West Rail, the Western Section is now expected to be complete by 2024 at the latest.

**Stalls at the Antiques and Collectors Fairs at St. Paul's Church, Bedford** - Richard Pill now holds stalls promoting our cause at the Antiques and Collectors Fairs at St. Paul's Church, Bedford which are held at that venue monthly. His first stall was at the end of January and he had been assisted by either Simon Barber or David Ferguson on these occasions - we are hoping to attract other members to assist.

**National Rail Re-openings Forum 18 March 2017** - This took place at the Tavistock Pub in Bedford and six people attended. Apart from some ERTA members, one attendee had found out about this event through our web-site. The main issues were the East - West Rail Link (particularly Bedford - Sandy - Cambridge) and Bedford - Olney - Northampton.

**\_\_ Fill In, Tear Off and Send with Your Subscription. Please help us recruit more members! \_\_**

Tick if a New Member:  \_\_\_\_\_ Tick if renewing as an existing member:  \_\_\_\_\_

Membership of ERTA costs £10 per annum. I/We wish to join  \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel/Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send completed form to ERTA Membership:

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