

# English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

~ A membership-based association seeking reopening of select rail lines making for a better environment. ~



**Patron:** Sir Edmund Verney + Others welcome of professional, business or other acumen and of good standing.

**Chairperson for Executive Committee and External Representations:**

Vacancy exists – offers welcome to entertain. Must be a member first.



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~ Making a contribution towards retention and improvement in better public transport. ~

ERTA Newsletter

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## The Level Crossing debate – where are the lobbyists for some balance and common sense?

Thanks to a few accidents at Level Crossings over recent years, there seems to be a policy emanating from Government (which has ultimate buck-stops responsibility for the laws and enablers or prohibitions of what can be done here) that existing Level Crossings are to be made into bridges over railways and new/reopened lines are to be bridges not Level Crossings. This carries a huge cost but means a prohibition to reopenings where in tight spots land and room may not lend itself to underpasses or bridges being inserted. The conversion on fully operational railway to bridge over or duck under a railway again means resources allocated cannot be available for other expenditures and needs. We need rail lobbyists to point out that many level crossing accidents are done by abuse of road usage as per hitting bridges with high sided lorries and buses! Level Crossings, providing they are regularly checked and properly maintained should work adequately and whilst some delay to traffic causes inconvenience none-the-less the benefits of a railway outweigh the losses of short delays. For a reader, please see the Office for Road and Rail (ORR) page: <http://orr.gov.uk/rail/health-and-safety/infrastructure-safety/level-crossings/level-crossings-policy>



### The Clouds are a-gathering!

**Caption Above:** The train at Bicester London Road Crossing which has been sought for a study to examine whether it can be bridged or tunnelled under to prevent long queues and delays to traffic. However, it is a confined space and space does not lend itself to widening without demolition of buildings. As an operational railway it stays as it is for now, but crossings like this are needed for any new rail link into Northampton from Bedford via London Road and across Cardington Road at Bedford for East-West Rail if it takes a Bedford inclusive traditional approach.

## Bedford-Olney-Northampton reopening in the balance as two planning applications impinge vital rail access around Olney and into Northampton.

ERTA has lodged an objection to this proposed local road infill scheme. We are concerned it will impinge in a detrimental way the former Northampton-Bedford/Brackmills Branch corridor and make reopening much harder if not prohibitively so. We are of the view, following positive studies in the last 20 years be it the Handley Study, LSMMMS, Capita Symonds for Connex and several others, which indicate the line could provide a worthwhile role and function beneficial to the areas it would serve including Northampton. We are of the view the railway would enable a quicker transit between Northampton and Bedford, East-West Rail to Cambridge – quicker and cheaper than changing at Bletchley; fast single train access to Luton Airport Station and the Waterside Campus. The rejuvenation of the town centres with more footfall and spend minus the traffic is another benefit commensurate to make this corridor worthy of protection, further study, case making and appeal to Chris Grayling to invest in re-railing Northampton. The road scheme seems to link 2 congestion hot spots with no way out of the current congested London Road artery. ERTA and its predecessor have done sterling work for Bedford-Northampton with many arm chair critics and cynics on all sides raining against us. However, the crunch cometh whereby a road scheme seeks to block the old trackbed at Northampton and a new development would take the field needed for the Handley Realignment and station at Olney. See attached for details. We have done enough. It should not be down to us alone, it is a collective issue and responsibility. We get buck passed and public pass responsibility to Councils and Councils to Government and Government to Councils and Councils to voters = you the public! It is chicken and egg and casualties are that the strategic oversight is lost, the railway is under threat from piecemeal development and enough IS enough!

However, there are consequences. By all means wade in and make your voices heard, but the community at large will bear the brunt stretching in a triangle box from Felixstowe-West Midlands via London and all in between. Freight and people flung to roads, roads widened slowly and new build at £billions even as Government preaches austerity and the environment, land use, conflict, parking, urban congestion worsens/diminishes. The railway is needed, it would fulfil multiple benefits and roles, locally and regionally and the regions to the nation as a whole - starts in our own back yards. Well this seeming insignificant backwater has wider repercussions. Fight the good fight, but we've done all we can at this stage. Thank you. If you want to join our loop email [richard.erta@gmail.com](mailto:richard.erta@gmail.com). Touching heaven, touching earth - we need to be 'ready aye ready' to engage both, alas it is divide and rule and chaos instead. If any wish to take a lead please do, otherwise we await to see the outcome and will judge the situation accordingly. Please read attachments and diagram on our Blogspot: <https://ertarailvolunteer.blogspot.co.uk/> which shows the pitfalls we have come up against of buck passing basically and no overall responsibility/strategic consideration where it counts - to keep alive the rail interest at the heart of the strategic interest. Funny how the rail media can go on about things from seats to electrification, branch line reopenings to HS2 but Northampton, population of some 200, 000 is written off as marginal or whacky or somehow not cutting the mustard for deserving a new modern rail link to Bedford, Thameslink integration, East-West Rail to Cambridge and beyond and a rail parallel to A14-A45 interfaces which these rail links would deliver? Pluralism, randomness, commuter-London fixations based on 'today' which are inadequate, meanwhile this rail link could slip through our hands when, with a backer yet to be emergent, it could fulfil a vital role. Passenger and freight carriage are staple to the railway and it conveys bulk, decluttering roads!

If these applications succeed for either a road at Northampton or Lands north of Lavendon Road Olney, it is a severance of the access required for proper link up and realignment respectively. If they are both rejected, for whatever reason, then it is a stay of execution, meanwhile the project needs a backer still – not for want of us tirelessly asking and making our appeal for strategic enlightenment.

## **ERTA Newsletter Article – May 2018**

### **A New Chapter for the Marston Vale Line with Vivarail!**

As many readers will no doubt be aware, the new West Midlands franchise began on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2017 and is due to continue until 2026, with provisions in place for further extension under various criteria.

The company name is West Midlands Trains operating under two brands:

- London Northwestern Railway (LNR, which includes the Marston Vale services)
- West Midlands Railway.

The franchise will deliver about £1 billion in investment, with the main Marston Vale benefits being the introduction of Class 230 trains and the introduction of Bank Holiday services in 2018 and Sunday services by May 2021.

Vivarail has purchased a number of 230 'D-train' units formerly operated by London Underground on the District Line. West Midlands Trains are the first Train Operating Company to place an order; this is for 3 x 2 car units for the Marston Line to replace the current 150s and 153s. Units will be stabled and maintained at the Bletchley Train Maintenance Depot by Vivarail. The units will be completely overhauled with just the bodyshell and bogeys remaining from the original. The new trains will come into service in December 2018.

Marston Vale Community Rail Partnership (MVCRP) has been working closely with London Northwestern Railway over the specification. This includes:

- Forward facing seating, some around full-sized tables
- Fully accessible toilet
- Dedicated cycle & buggy space
- LED lighting
- Automatic announcements on arrival at each station, which can be customised for local attractions, such as Ridgmont Station Heritage Centre
- Passenger Information Display system, which can also be customised for local attractions
- Map of local attractions

They will initially diesel powered but there is scope to convert to battery operation in future. Further information is available at <http://vivarail.co.uk>

### **Stop Press! Special Services for Bedford River Festival – 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> July 2018**

MVCRP is delighted to announce that we have special services for the Bedford River Festival again this year!

Highlights include:

- Late evening 'Fireworks Flyer' leaving Bedford at 11:10pm on the Saturday night
- Hourly Sunday service The timetable will be published shortly.

**There have been no late evening or Sunday services on the Marston Vale Line since the last Bedford River Festival in July 2016 so it's important that these trains are as well patronised as possible. Please do travel if you possibly can and spread the word!**

MVCRP hopes to have a stand in the Heritage Village (situated in St. Mary's Gardens) at the Festival. Please pop in and say hello!

For further information on any aspect of MVCRP please visit [www.marstonvalecommunityrail.org.uk](http://www.marstonvalecommunityrail.org.uk) or contact Stephen Sleight on 01234 832645 or e-mail [stephens@bedsrcc.org.uk](mailto:stephens@bedsrcc.org.uk). **Find us on Facebook!** [www.facebook.com/marstonvalecrp](http://www.facebook.com/marstonvalecrp)

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Unfortunately, space did not allow us to include a picture provided but you can see this whole item and picture on our ERTA Blogspot: <https://ertarailvolunteer.blogspot.co.uk/>

**Sorting the East Lincs. Reopening**

**Conundrum:** A Google Earth overview and pdf document is freely available. Compiled by Richard Pill, identifies some of the blockages and hazards. Basically March-Spalding with modest realignments could be done and more ambitiously if roads can be slewed or moved, Spalding-Boston also. But the lines to Mablethorpe and Grimsby are seemingly beyond the pale notwithstanding a complete reversal of the closures as a Government intention and the A16 being curtailed to let the railway into the urban interface. Alas, whilst examples of Stratford upon Avon-Long Marston are precedents for small reversals, large scale is currently seen as a bridge too far. Email richard.erta@gmail.com for a pdf copy. So, the recommendation is we support a March-Spalding reopening for route protection and further study notwithstanding the campaign to reopen the Wisbech branch would probably come first and to avoid Whitemoor Prison, taking a link off the Wisbech branch seems logical. Commuting to and from Cambridge/Stansted would boost economies.

**Great Central Meeting and Route Analysis**

As per other lines, Google Earth enables one to look at former railway courses and see blockages and developments and identify what might be reasonably be done to recover a rail route. In phases you could have a Chiltern Line extended line to interface with a Park and Ride Station at the A43 and Brackley area, whether on the south hill-side or taking the old railway route down and realigned in the valley alongside the A43 to the eastern side main roundabout area for town-rail-road interface. A phase 2 would be to interface with the West Coast at Rugby. This would require a new chord link with tracks coming over the West Coast Main Line to run alongside into Rugby from Willoughby. This would enable a diversionary to and from the West Coast Main Line. The old route to Leicester-Nuneaton line can be recovered/new built in places. It needs a backer to examine it further and see the potential. But Rugby is such a critical station as per the West Coast Main Line (WCML) for interface, tracks going out south parallel and then via a flyover to cross over the WCML and a new deviation to link onto the old GC route at the Willoughby area, links with lines to London, Oxford, Old Oak Common, Heathrow are all end to end possibilities and vice versa. Leicester via old Midland route north of Rugby joining old GC route to Leicester-Nuneaton line via parallel to M1 rebuild is another option to consider.



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

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