

English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

	Patrons: Sir Edmund Verney, The Rt Hon. the Lord Newby OBE + Others welcome of professional, business or other acumen and of good repute.	
	Chairman, Campaigns Coordinator, Bedford Area Rep/Forum/Coordinator, Publications, Green Fair Convenor, Executive Committee Member, Newsletter Editor, Social Media/Media Officer and General Advisor: Mr Richard Pill, 24c St Michaels Road, Bedford, MK40 2LT T. 01234 330090 E. richard.erta@gmail.com	
	Vice Chairman and Treasurer; Business and Hertfordshire Liaison Officer: Mr Colin Crawford, 21 Clunbury Court, Manor Street, Berkhamsted, HP4 2FF T. 01442 870904 Mobile 07836-693977 E: colin.crawford1@btconnect.com	
	West London and Surrey Liaison Officer, Forums Convenor, Railfuture Liaisons and General Assistant: Mr David Ferguson, 25 Virginia House, 19 Kingston Lane, Teddington, TW11 9HL T. 0208 9774181 E. daferguson1212@gmail.com	
West Country, Northern and Central London Area Rep, Liaison Officer and Assistant Forum Convenor. Helper and assistant to the Executive Committee, Consultations and Co-convenor and marketing of stalls, events, ERTA recruitment and membership administration: Mr Simon Barber, 20 Fitzherbert House, Kingsmead, Richmond, Surrey, TW10 6HT T. 0208 940 4399, E. simon4barber@gmail.com		
https://ertarail.co.uk/	www.linkedin.com/in/richard-pill-erta	https://ertarailvolunteer.blogspot.com
Newsletter No. 39	September-October 2021	£1.00 where sold

To lock or un-lock, that is the question – ERTA continues to operate in such circumstances.

Despite prolonged lockdowns, ERTA continues to hold meetings on and off line. Successes were:

1. **Guildford Physical Meeting:** Guildford is one of our target areas and we wish to recruit more people. Out-gunned by the larger lobbies of road, canal, cycle and NIMBY brigades, our calls for the restoration of a local rail link to Horsham and Shoreham in a sensible world would not hardly be needed, but rather, elected politicians and the public at large would be filling that brief.

2. **Northampton Meeting:** Growing attendance via Zoom, there's a sense that a coming together and recognition that roads alone cannot cope, translates to a realisation re-railing and keeping options 'open' is crucial from social, economic and environmental aspects.

3. **Great Central Corridor Zoom Meeting:** Again, we have brought people together, compared notes, listened to arguments and concerns aplenty and the basic bottom line is given development great and small is happening now, to reject a domestic rail solution to the corridor throws 2.5 vehicles per household onto local roads and associated others from delivery vans to juggernauts and all in between. Congestion wastes time, fuel, emits more and people need modal choices not straight-jackets!



Caption Above: ERTA calls for a study and support for a new Retail Park/Kempston Town inclusive new station to serve both with a connecting footbridge on the Bedford-Bletchley Railway as part of East-West Rail/greener transport solutions for access, integration and regeneration. Local bus sits at The Mulberry Bush Bus Stop adjacent to the fields near the railway and linking Bedford, rest of Kempston (upwards of 18, 000 population) and the main A&E Hospital. Surely the rail and bus could feed each other and bring numerous inward and outward benefits? See our Blogspot for more ideas: <https://ertarailvolunteer.blogspot.com/>

News and Notes:

<p>Old Oak Common (OOC) Conundrum: What ERTA wants is as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There to be a through tunnel linking physically rail-wise the proposed Southern Heathrow Rail Link from Woking to join the Chiltern Main Line. This would facilitate with our Great Central Spinal Domestic Rail Extension (GCSDE) a Banbury/Brackley/Aylesbury – Guildford and (if we get Guildford-Horsham et al reinstated) a new north-south domestic rail link serving intermediate places for passenger and freight use. 2. All Underground, other rails and public transport generally to be joined up including the proposed reopening Cricklewood-Dudding Hill-Heathrow railway for less traffic on the roads! 3. Whilst the building of the interchange started June 2021, we have no idea whether the joined-up-ness and through north-south opportunity has been realised, supported and is designed into the construction plan or not? 4. Likewise the Interchange should have ample baying facilities in any case from the north (Chiltern second terminal capacity to Marylebone) and other operators including maybe a Northampton-Milton Keynes-Aylesbury-OOC feeder rail service. 5. We have made calls for a domestic station and more land given over for domestic rails at Calvert for growing surrounds of development and to control and mitigate environmental impact. 	<p>Harrogate – Ripon-Northallerton – if we can’t afford to do it, we can’t afford not to either.</p> <p>On this rail link, apart from commuting and challenging as an alternative to the A61 trunk road, would enable Midland Main Line and East Coast Main Line passenger and freight connectivity more and reduce sending everything via York or on the roads. We need advocates for this corridor to be re-railed. It would complement existing services and boost more modal shift to rail. Councils are urged to protect lands and former trackbed to enable realignments where blockages exist including select new build in some places. Failure to properly steward the asset means locked-in congestion and land-use parking demand.</p>
<p>Joined-up Hertfordshire: Hertfordshire is a large county across the top of London and M25 cordon. It has had creeping urbanisation for decades. ERTA is fed up with road-based solutions to the problem of tackling congestion, believing rail-based solutions give real alternative choices and this should be the number one priority when talking about public transport. The closures of the 1960’s went too far and, in some cases, we need both to reclaim old corridors and in others build new rail corridors to bring better and direct rail connectivity. No gain without pain? The real pain is the status quo!</p>	<p>Gloucester-Ross-on-Wye-Hereford: ERTA has a few members scattered in the West Country and we welcome help to recruit more please. These in turn should act as area reps, table forums and grow teams and set a list of priorities under the oversight of the ERTA Executive Committee. These sorts of rebuilds needs a determined support from MP’s, Local Councils, Public-at-large, media and Government. A third-party delivery vehicle (tpdv) should not be ruled out to help push through and get the job done. Realignments in some places are needed. Local roads are being progressively upgraded and delivers congestion to beauty spots eroding the charm and experience they otherwise offer. Horses for courses, but we need rail choices too! ERTA wants real rail reopenings progressed.</p> <p>West Country Call – You can have a west-south coast curve at Yeovil as well as a Bridport reopening and bolster rails to Weymouth from Bristol as part of a package of making more of the core rail asset and resort. The Bristol-Yeovil-Weymouth line needs more business of passenger and freight to use it, it is an under-used corridor. A vision and plan are needed along with local advocacy for getting these pieces of infrastructure factored in to optimise reach and range of rail, cut time lost and wasted changing trains and bringing new flows by rail to footfall and spend in the places the railway serves. Bring on the pro-affirma development plan!</p>

Woodhead, making the case – a model example: The report by University of Hull’s LHOFT which stands for Liverpool-Humber Optimisation of Freight Transport is outstanding because it makes salient points and comes back to a clear definition that unless we re-rail trans-Pennines routes not only do we add time-cost penalties to freight and logistics, the default is roads and synthetic demand for more roads/road upgrades which have a huge impact on land, environment and doesn’t reduce congestion. Rail can. I think of the Great Central Corridor and really the campaigners our side, need to see the model of approach and work to nurture it – if the demand exists or can be made to exist, then the investors can be found and walla a whole new set of dynamics pro-affirma may come to the conclusion re-railing is the way to go and that with a proverbial ‘head of steam’ of gritty-delivery-determination, not woolly nostalgia!

Some key observations:

1. They identify the nub of current problems
2. They identify a better solution for want of re-railing.
3. They gather a broad-based coalition of industry and related players
4. They obtain funding for the study (funded by InnovateUK to the value of £1.5 million
5. If the case is robust, the demand and quick wins immediate, politicians of any persuasion would have to look at it and reckon it as an option/opportunity with the regenerative benefits on the back of it on and off the rails.

ERTA needs a willing volunteer to coordinate such a venture and bring right parties together using things like Zoom.

See: <https://www.hull.ac.uk/work-with-us/research/institutes/logistics-institute/our-work/lhoft>

ERTA welcomes people to join our association and volunteer to advance our ‘Northern Agenda’s’.



The ERTA Response to the model:

ERTA needs someone capable to act as responsible coordinator for our Great Central Corridor Re-Railing. As Chairman, I am willing to work with anyone so able to court the listed and other groups in the LHOFT Report ‘The Approach’ Column and make a similar case for our corridor we want re-railing. You need to bring to a Zoom Round Table – book a date say 6 months ahead and get organised. Any offers via richard.erta@gmail.com You must be reliable and fail safely, do it right at all possible and reasonable lengths. A lot rests on it going ahead and being successful.

1. HS2 leaves gaps which a domestic line can serve
2. More capacity created for more by rail
3. Declutter north-south roads like M1 more
4. Cut emissions, speed up end-to-end timings
5. If the case is found to be robust, it saves businesses and consumers cost
6. By rail is good for the environment, saves land-use which default to roads only exacerbates.
7. Profits can be shared to investors = their project!

Great Central Concern: Places along the corridor we are concerned about include:

1. **Calvert:** A major theatre of activity. The HS2 project assumes the old Great Central corridor as far as south of Brackley whereby it goes east of the built town but provides no station access between Old Oak Common and Solihull for whatever reason. What we need for our domestic line purposes which would provide a rail access, is land given over to a new twin-track rail corridor off the current freight-only Aylesbury-Claydon-Milton Keynes line (possibly and should be part of east-west rail) to go over the Oxford-Claydon part of the east-west rail and head north parallel to the HS2 corridor erring to the east thereof and a new station adjacent to the A43 with bus or similar links with Silverstone which would be a booster market to any such rail project surely?

2. As well as **Brackley-Woodford Halse-Willoughby**, access to Rugby West Coast needs studying. Meanwhile buy-in and support needs coherence and tangibility, ditto volunteers.

Brackmills, Northampton News: We are delighted that ERTA has helped bring people together who in turn are teaming up to take the project forward. This is good news and already they are shoring up key contacts and producing a document laying out the case for such a project. Whether Light Rapid Transit (LRT) – Trams in old money or a variation, our input has been to remind people it is the only access to Northampton remaining and any scheme must be upgradable to heavy rail for passenger and freight usage. Indeed, were there to be a push for the Bedford and East-West Rail scheme linkage, this corridor would be required. Good news is that any rail-based project helps to these ends by keeping a corridor ready and doing something rail-based interim. So, we wish it well and will report news as it unfolds.

English Regional Transport Association (ERTA):

One of our strengths is in bringing people together. That is the best of it. We seek to plant ideas and give support for local rail-based solutions as well as advocating integration radial of stations. That can mean better pedestrian access, cycle lanes joined up and bus-rail coherence as well. We believe Government needs to be held to account on Reverse Beeching media outbursts and charged with timely and cost-effective delivery. Sadly, few have focused consensus or a serious grasp of what is needed. It is like denominationalism in the past, when you ask 100 people what sort of railway they wish for, you can get 100 different answers! Politicians have to work through that jumbled feed and clarity can be from closure to keep what we have but only High Speed ‘new’ to mix ‘n’ match. For some Light Rail is the be-all but does it cater for freight? For others it is buses and bus substitutes which again is a costly lesson in rearranging deck-chairs on the proverbial Titanic! Modal shift demands rail!

Guildford-Horsham-Shoreham: We tabled a forum at Brighton on a lovely sunny Saturday in August. Upshot is that we hope to pioneer a committee-style public meeting in Spring 2022 at Horsham and whilst running forums at other places including Guildford, will seek to build a team of activists and gather support based at Horsham. It was observed that Thameslink services were stifled on the day because of a break-down at Blackfriars meaning one had to travel to St Pancras, get the Underground to Victoria and out to Brighton via that route. On both trains it was standing room only. Coming back between Brighton and Gatwick, it was again standing room only with the train to Victoria, so I opted for the Thameslink which by that time was operational again, to Bedford from Gatwick, thankful for a flexible Saturday!

Northampton-Market Harborough Re-Rail; Thoughts on the rail link can be:

- a. The trackbed needs widening to cater for plethora uses as a 'green corridor' inclusive of walk-way, cycle-way, railway.
- b. It would link Oxford-Milton Keynes/Aylesbury with Leicester/East Midlands and vice versa inclusive of Northampton as a main beneficiary.
- c. Tracks can be lowered for tunnel 9'6 clearances for freight and with a north-west curve, would enable direct running to / from DIRFT.
- d. Would take on the M1 as a parallel rail alternative for passenger and freight
- e. Market Harborough end would need some new alignment and linkage with the Midland Main Line.
- f. Nothing is trouble free, but we need to restore strategic missing rail alternatives.
- g. Studies done hitherto show positive case merits and these should be built on/consolidated.
- h. A508 corridor grows, more traffic and congestion end up at urban centres and land-use parking demand exacerbates and needs stemming at source.
- i. Buses can link with rail and feed each other, does not translate to a challenge per se as these transport modes cater for different audiences. Buses have a largely stabilized audience pattern, whereas rail deals with bulk and gets people out of their cars as per other reopenings can illustrate. Hope helpful.
- j. Trains could also run onto the Brackmills Branch for freight (Industrial Market) and passenger - clearing through lines for other pathing/services. The Brackmills Branch could have wait-over capacity for trains between turns in some cases.

You can NOW read the climate emergency action plan and have your say at: www.harborough.gov.uk/climateconsultation Paper copies, for those without the internet, are available at Broughton Astley, Lutterworth and Market Harborough libraries.

Alternatively, people can complete the survey, via telephone, with a customer service advisor, by making an appointment on 01858 828282.

Please, please do contribute, and share widely!

Deadlines missed? Not too late: Please write/email:

1. **Harborough District Council:** <https://www.harborough.gov.uk/contact>

Harborough District Council
The Symington Building, Adam and Eve Street,
Market Harborough
Leicestershire LE16 7AG

2. **West Northamptonshire Council:** <https://westnorthants.moderngov.co.uk/mgM emberIndex.aspx?bcr=1>

One Angel Square, Angel Street, Northampton,
NN1 1ED

3. **Leicestershire County Council:** County Hall,
Glenfield, Leicester LE3 8RA

State you support the idea of restoring the railway in full. That you want the corridor expanded and protected from further compromise and destruction and that more coalitions should be built to pool resources and invest in studies and courting Government backing.

4. **Neil O'Brien MP:** [https://www.harboroughconservatives.com/people/neil-obrien-](https://www.harboroughconservatives.com/people/neil-obrien-mp#:~:text=Neil%20%E2%80%99Brien%2C%20MP%20for%20Harborough%20has%20welcomed%20the,spoke%20in%20the%20Parliamentary%20debate%20on%20Unsafe%20Cladding)

[mp#:~:text=Neil%20%E2%80%99Brien%2C%20MP%20for%20Harborough%20has%20welcomed%20the,spoke%20in%20the%20Parliamentary%20debate%20on%20Unsafe%20Cladding](https://www.harboroughconservatives.com/people/neil-obrien-mp#:~:text=Neil%20%E2%80%99Brien%2C%20MP%20for%20Harborough%20has%20welcomed%20the,spoke%20in%20the%20Parliamentary%20debate%20on%20Unsafe%20Cladding).

Neil O'Brien MP, Neil O'Brien, Conservative MP for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston Constituency: **24 Nelson Street, Market Harborough, Leicestershire, LE16 9AY**

Great Central Corridor Report by Richard Cooper, one of our volunteers.

Between February and April 2021, I took on the volunteer role of Trackbed Watcher for the ERTA's Great Central Railway restoration project, which involved walking as much of the old trackbed as was possible, and reporting back. I agreed to cover the 16-mile section between Woodford Halse in Northamptonshire and Rugby in Warwickshire.

Living in Rugby I was familiar with the northern end of this route, as it has been re-opened in a deep cutting through Hillmorton as a popular walking and cycle path through to the point where the old line once crossed the West Coast Main Line, just a short distance south of the present Rugby station. On the other side of the WCML the cycle path continues for another couple of miles, and comes to an abrupt end just a few metres south of the M6.

There is some hope that an alternative route between Rugby and Leicester could be re-opened, so perhaps my survey of this area may not be quite so useful now. However, south of Rugby I explored what was, for me, much new territory, and it was interesting to see how much of the trackbed was still in place, and how much could still be accessed, despite what is shown on Ordnance Survey maps.

Starting at the southern end of my section, at Woodford Halse, the GCR connected to some other disused lines, and proceeded northwards through the small town. There is a tall embankment running through Woodford Halse, on which it is possible to walk, through to a small business park where the line has been obliterated. After a brief interruption it is possible to pick up the line again towards Charwelton, and just north of here is the 2.7km long Catesby Tunnel. This recently featured on Rob Bell's "Walking Britain's Lost Railways" on Channel 5, as it has recently been redeveloped for testing racing cars, and is therefore currently out of bounds. So, I left it there, and on another day, I found the northern portal of the tunnel, where it was possible, for some of the way at least, to trace the line to the impressive Catesby Viaduct, which crosses the River Leam in its early stages.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to walk along the top of the viaduct, so a detour was required to resume the route. We also think that the smaller Staverton Viaduct, a short distance to the north, has now been removed, and from there it isn't far until the railway would have crossed the A425 between Staverton and Lower Shuckburgh, again on a bridge that is now missing.



Caption Left: Taken by Mr Richard Cooper 2021, picture shows this track was recently placed on the Great Central Walkway near the site of Rugby Central Station to commemorate its former use. Again, nostalgia and serious intent can be two different things. But if the case exists, the support should follow. ERTA needs willing and reliable volunteers to help bring to the table business, academic, elected representatives who in turn are better placed to bid for appropriate funding and get studies underway. We do help bring people together.

Access was intermittent between here and the A45 near Braunston. As the trackbed passed to the east of Flecknoe there were occasional blockages due to dense vegetation and water, but there were other stretches where it was possible to walk on embankments or within cuttings, with brief interruptions where the old east-west railway between Braunston and Long Itchington would have crossed, and also where the Oxford Canal is met south-west of Braunston. Just north of this canal it was possible to follow an embankment for about another half kilometre as far as a gap across the Leam Valley, where once there must have been a viaduct.

North of the A45 the line would have continued to the west of Barby Hill. Once again, access was not always possible, but from the Oxford Canal it is easy to see the line of trees that would have flanked the railway, and there are points where it is possible to get a glimpse of the now overgrown trackbed before a new marina near Onley Prison has been built over the line. It was interesting for me to see where the line crossed the old contour sections of the canal that were straightened out before the railway came into being.

Proceeding further north, the line crosses the M45 motorway on a bridge that is still there, although the trackbed then gets very thick with vegetation as it continues on a long embankment before reaching the aforementioned cycle track on the southern edge of Rugby.

It is clear that there is plenty to work with on this section, but also some significant puzzles to solve, such as the Catesby Tunnel, a few missing viaducts, and the new marina.



Caption Left: Catesby Viaduct taken by Richard Cooper, a kind volunteer doing a layman's survey of the old corridor in 2021. The viaduct is part of the old Great Central Railway closed in 1966 controversially. Of course, any rail enthusiast worth their salt would like nothing less than trains plying part of the route. However, ERTA believes a strong case exists for re-railing part of the corridor for nowadays-needs, issues and uses. In other words, new markets exist now including reducing traffic on the M1!
ED. If anyone wants pdf versions of Richard's Report, email richard.erta@gmail.com and request them.

From the Campaigns Coordinator: Strengths and weaknesses and the tide of ebb and flow opportunities: ERTA operates in a context of the people and financial resources available and the coming and going of political fads, fashions and priorities. Grant Shapps M.P., Secretary of State for Transport talked much of 'Reversing Beeching', Government talks much about Carbon Emission Reductions. Yet the same Government commits £27 billion to new roads and only £500 million to Rail Reopenings Funding. Okehampton (Devon) and Ashington in the north-east look likely sooner and later respectively, but falls far short of mooted goal tout 'Reverse Beeching'. Even a rolling programme, identification and allocation of trickle-down enablement for regions to realise what local lines need rebuilding (prelude to reopening!) and where new lines or gap fillers are needed as well. On all this, ERTA is both a player and ahead of the game. We don't set out to get people's backs up, but stoke fires of endeavour to ensure that larger lobby groups do not posture politick of 'safe' gagging for electrification of existing lines and small 'c' conservative caution on approaches to local, conventional rail reopenings. We need to think big, think local and also how small beginnings can always be upgraded. Government can set frameworks to inform best practise. Like for example, a dire need to protect railway formations, structures and keep options open. Alas, it is failing to do this. Likewise, third party delivery vehicle models take on projects and carry some arm's length share of risk, liability and cost where to rebuild a railway, relocation packages and some demolition has to be entertained, maybe a bit like the current East-West Rail project Bedford-Cambridge for example. But we need a nationwide vision, leadership and direction. Government better needs to appreciate the pivotal role rail can play in reducing road dependency whilst at the same time enabling better mobility, giving speed advantages congestion fails to deliver. Electric vehicles are not a panacea, as they still provide us with growing volumes of motorists on roads informing congestion, tyre particle pollution, bunging up junctions and urban interfaces. ERTA is engaging on all these fronts and as our team comes together, will continue the endeavour. However, every member counts; we need your help to build ERTA up! <https://blog.greenflag.com/2019/tyre-particles/>

Use form below. Please Join or Renew your Membership of ERTA and help us help you!

✂ _____
Tear Off and Send with Your Subscription or Renewal or go to on-line:

<https://ertarail.co.uk/become-a-member/>

Tick if a New Member: _____ Tick if renewing as an existing member: _____

Membership of ERTA costs £15 per annum. I/We wish to join _____

Name (Please Print): _____

Address: _____ **Postcode:** _____

Tel/Mobile: _____ **Email** _____

I/We hereby give consent to our data being used and stored for the purposes of communication with ERTA and its purposes compliant with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) _____

Signed: _____ **Dated:** _____

Please send completed form and payment to ERTA Membership:

ERTA, 24c St Michael's Road, Bedford, MK40 2LT (01234 330090)

Join our free email loop: E. richard.erta@gmail.com