
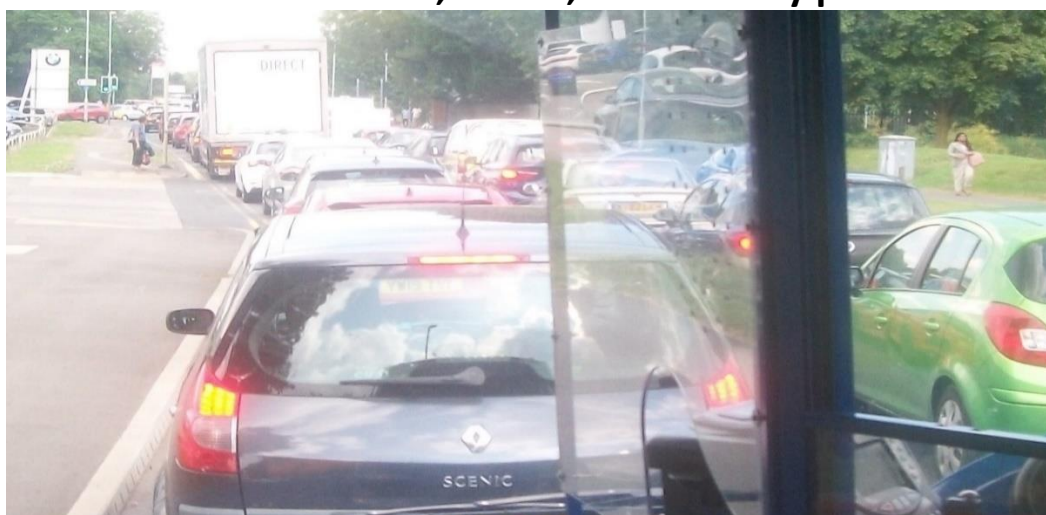


English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)

	Patrons: Sir Edmund Verney, The Rt Hon. the Lord Newby OBE, Mr George Bathurst, Professor Andrew N Williams BA, BM BCh, MSc, PhD, MRCP, FRCPCH, FRHistS, Mr Trevor Garrod, Mr Colin Crawford, Mr Leonard Lean, + Others welcome of professional, business or other acumen and of good repute.	
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	ERTA Northern/Yorkshire Area Rep: Mr Chris Hyomes, 10 Tythe Barn Road, Knottingley, West Yorkshire, WF11 9BU E. chris.hyomes@hotmail.co.uk T. 07971766207	
	An Other: Always welcome offers to help, assist, volunteer and be an area rep where you live to help recruit new members and support to ERTA and its causes. Please contact Richard Pill, ERTA CEO above.	
https://ertarail.co.uk/	www.linkedin.com/in/richard-pill-erta	https://ertarailvolunteer.blogspot.com/
Newsletter No. 53	January-February 2024	£1.50 where sold/donations welcome

Northampton – Market Harborough (N2MH) Rail Link – demands answers, action, and delivery please!



Picture above: typical traffic scene in Northampton, along the A428 Bedford Road, linking A45 with the Brackmills Industrial Estate, delaying deliveries, adding costs, and wasting time!

re: <https://www.networkrail.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/West-Coast-Main-Line-South-Capacity-Enhancement-Plan-v1.0.pdf>

This report was not communicated to ERTA and not me. Unsure if the link tallies with the named report featured in Rail Edn. 991 Sept 6-Sept 19 2023 pages 8-9 or an update? If 2021, was it delayed due to Pandemic or like 2020 Northampton-Market Harborough rail study, suppressed? In the case of the latter, it was only unearthed by my ERTA colleague and Patron Professor Andrew N. Williams via a Freedom of Information request. The report is comprehensive and shows a real case and can-be-done project, which could have been forged ahead as an investment in all our futures as a levelling up project 'around the regions' linking as it would and complementing East-West Rail with Leicester and East Midlands/The North and the Peterborough link to Felixstowe and the East Coast for example. Taking cars and lorries off local and regional roads through more choice, a win, win, for the environment, land use and reducing pollution, informing sustainable new investment and benefits for all, on and off the rails. So why was it suppressed until now or rather not reported until now?

According to the Rail Magazine reporting of it my reflection is:

1. HS2 may help with some capacity, but is not a panacea and has been over-egged on wider impact capacity-wise terms.

2. Besides, new links/reopenings to enable more by rail are needed and this study shows why Northampton-MH (N2MH) is a key candidate with many benefits.

3. The report goes on "too many trains, not enough tracks"

Capacity for existing trends fine, but any modal shift to rail, will demand more. What does that growth look like?

a. modal shift, with public health and environmental benefits.

b. new flows of business and commerce under-girded by a sustainable means for shifting people and goods, off local roads.

c. recovering ground lost thanks to the closures, of people and goods back to rail, we need infrastructure and services.

4. Network Rail's (WCSSA) - 340-page report cites known capacity demands, which is? But new demands now and going forward plus unexpected increased demand for modal shift/transport collapse if costs of logistics make by rail - if rail can rise to the challenge - means we need diversity of tracks and trains, speed it not a panacea per se unless you tackle volume and flows unserved by rail which would be if the closures had not of been so drastic. Can we learn lessons and stop the rot on closure of ticket offices, price-managing demand off rails and denting public health and environmental well-being in the broadest sense?

5. The article goes on "To fully unlock the benefits of released capacity, strategic investment will be required between Milton Keynes and Bletchley." Laudable, but work needs 'spades in the ground' now, not 2050 (assumed long-grassing measure by power deferring responsibility but increasing costs, risks, and liabilities if any complain posthumously). Moreover, we can note:

a. East Croydon/Gatwick-Watford-MK Central Station services cut back to Watford because of pathing capacity constraints now.

b. In a short space of time, Oxford-Milton Keynes services will want to traverse the 2–3-mile distance off the Bletchley Flyover to Milton Keynes Central Station, where through tracks and baying capacity is premium.

c. I attended a meeting where it was put forward a direct curve from the east off the Bedford-Bletchley Railway for direct running into Milton Keynes Central Station was envisaged for people and goods as a cheaper option to new-build a new Bedford-Northampton rail link, which needs a new 10-mile plus new-build between Midland Main Line and Great Houghton across remaining and diminishing countryside amidst unsustainable, expensive piecemeal housing encroachments. ERTA has blown the whistle many times, we need councils and officers to talk to us, work with us and together with NR, Great British Railways, DfT and Treasury and other agencies (too many at cost not delivering!) means like with NR's WCSSA Report, they should have consulted us as stakeholders interested in getting things done in a timely manner. That means pre-planning, that means case, support, and route management in one framework, not fragments, asking development consideration one hand, but plotting around to both hedge bets against the odds and scupper off main line capacity enhancements as the Bedford-Northampton-Market Harborough twin packaged rail links would engender.

6. On the Bedford-Bletchley curve element, for direct running of freight and passenger operations heading north-east respectively, you must understand that it would be considerably troublesome:

a. lack of capacity between Bletchley and Milton Keynes, leaves the door wide open to do nothing on Bedford-Northampton amidst blighty, whilst knowingly advocating more trains without major expansion of tracks, trains, and land-take? Does it square? We need definitive answers now and a map of intent of where it is going so, we can rally around and ensure some progress is made within a 7-year time frame.

b. Whether bolted on to the flyover or under and 90-degree curve (not viable?) across currently used sidings; Bletchley needs them now and going forward, keep shifting and longer delays for relief support service trains and maintenance. Maybe a new depot west of Bletchley at Swanbourne could offer some relief and capacity, ditto neglected Forders Sidings could also do more off main lines for servicing and storage for example?

c. Northampton2MH offers integrated service if capacity can exist, but even if Leicester-Northampton (twin northern facing bays off Northampton Loop as an interim facility) it enables Oxford-Leicester via principal MK City and Northampton (large population) and gains by taking on in real modal choice terms A43, M1, A508 for example and modal shift by more accessibility rail-based solutions and local-regional combined use of same tracks and strategic gap plugged.

d. Freight by rail, a north-west direct curve and additional tracks on the Northampton loop line, would enable Felixstowe/East Midlands/The North to Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT) and vice versa, has clearance status. Likewise, the new Northampton Freight Depot, taking more lorries off major road networks through choice and physical tracks enabling more.

e. Northampton Castle Station needs a new-build, more through tracks, more platforms, and diverse rails. The Brackmills Branch, long called for, could be re-railed to London Road with a triangle adjacent to Towcester Road Bridge. This could serve as a southern waitover 'off through tracks' for passenger and freight use, as a turnaround for any steam-hauled services from anywhere or just loco shunting off through tracks. Point is, multiple uses, plus the Brackmills and Bedford arm having rail-based access (competitiveness and inclusion) plus,

Northampton Public Meeting – a personal reflection by Richard Pill

ERTA held a public meeting at Northampton on 30th September 2023 at the Northampton Quakers in Wellington Street, Northampton. Despite a nationwide rail strike and bus networks overcrowded and, in some disarray, (fragmented privatised industries means a lack of joined-up consideration with extra buses laid on for example), so people had to use what is available. Some 17 people came and heard presentations from Mr Andrew Meaney from Oxera on business cases and the funding of rail schemes and his illustrated talk was an interesting contrast between the state of the financing of the railways in the Beeching era and that of today and subsidies. However, we wish to avoid the comparison whereby closures were thought to save money, there being no money for investment to modernise and save medium/long term. Now, government dithers and tilts between a roads-only future and a fragmented rail landscape with part private and part public involvement and virtually leaderless whereby a single voice speaks and champions rails and rail users market share. Moreover, the business models of maths, engineering and science are all very well, but surely other values and evaluations like people before profit, arts, and humanising what we do. Closure of ticket offices, disenfranchising swathes of users, in the name of modernisation and 'efficiency' in accountancy terms, must be balanced with the moral value of 'the right to travel' and what environmentally is best?

There then followed and the meeting was chaired admirably by Mr Peter Doveston who leads the Northampton Streets Campaign which arcs walking, cycling, buses and rails from a grassroots level upwards for a better deal for the people of Northampton. Peter was able to ameliorate concerns of impact such a new railway between Northampton and Market Harborough may inform like whether relocation or realigning in a widened 'green corridor' the Brampton Way (public footpath and cycle way) and keeping the preserved Northampton and Lamport Railway as well as single bore tunnels and much more.

Professor Andrew N. Williams then spoke eloquently of the study he had unearthed following a Freedom of Information enquiry and the 2020 study showed the benefits of reopening like a 35-minute Northampton-Leicester rail transit for passenger services and how a link at the Market Harborough end could be done. The new Northampton Rail Freight Depot and DIRFT at near Rugby could both be beneficiaries removing more lorries from local and regional roads like the M1 and A508 for example. If we do not embrace the railway option, more development going in now, will exacerbate some of the highest congestion and air pollution in the country and likewise, if we do not embrace more tracks for more trains on the West Coast Main Line inclusive of the Northampton Loop, then true modal shift, let alone current growth of existing lines, will be stifled with roads being widened, where does this traffic end up? At urban interfaces! You cannot build your way out of congestion, but you can inform more rail choice, if we all support and act now to retain that option. No reopening is trouble free, but examples like Ebbw Value in Wales and Borders Rail in Scotland shows reopenings have exceeded expectations and forecasts and Northampton-Market Harborough (N2MH) is no exception. On the one hand you have Oxford-Milton Keynes Central inform potential

consideration for more tracks between Bletchley and Milton Keynes Central, but to be able to commute between Oxford-Milton Keynes-Northampton-Leicester and vice versa, local, and regional options currently only road served.

ERTA will continue to build a team and chip by chip engage as we may and yes, the pinch points like the Northampton Northern Link Road which crosses the trackbed at Boughton, how the preserved railway can be retained and how the width of the corridor can be widened to incorporate 'interests' as much as reasonably possible. In Lewes, East Sussex, they put their cycle-walk-way alongside the A27, which is really where such alternatives belong x every motorway and trunk road surely?

See <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/23445960.a27-work-complete-cycle-path-built-east-lewes-scheme/> You can have a route alongside a widened railway, or alongside A508, but the idea that you can only walk on old trackbed, is a belief too far, sharing is an investment in all of us and the railway would protect land which otherwise will be developed with widened roads and congestion proliferation the end result.

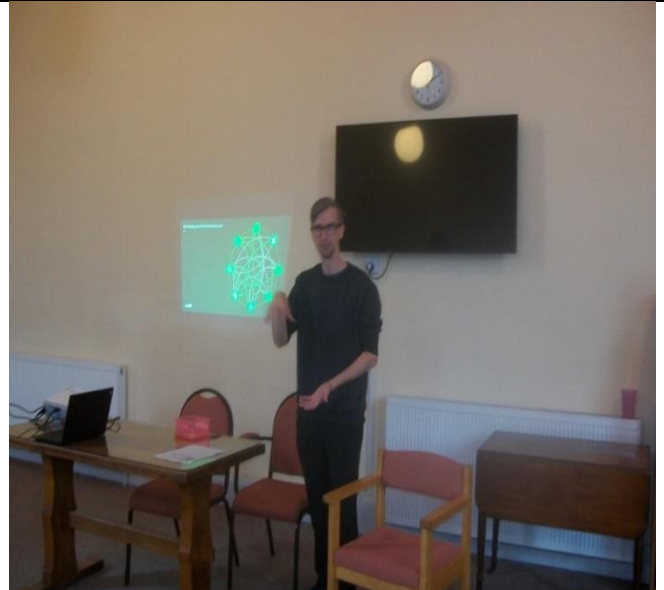
The meeting went well and we hope to build on it. ERTA needs more willing volunteers to help with organising meetings and practical considerations like light refreshments, lifts from stations and ensuring the smooth running as much as possible. On a personal front, I do not rule out more meetings in Market Harborough and Leicester, but it depends on more willing volunteers, costs-income and translating to the Working Group to be self-sustaining, self-perpetuating, and able to stand on its own feet.

On Air Pollution in Northampton see: <https://www.northantslive.news/news/northamptonshire-news/northampton-people-indirectly-smoke-189-8168681> This is just a law of averages, other towns like Bedford and elsewhere have their fair share too. Only re-railing can offer the modal choice to people and goods, even a 10 % shift nationwide would make substantial benefits and savings (preventative health for example) and yet Government seems in complete denial of this. Let us hope before, during and after a General Election, let alone the Climate Emergency, our elected leaders start to level up towards cleaner air, less congestion and getting UK PLC back on track!

Suffice to say I note Roade has got its bypass (A508), Parish Council dismissed the idea of a railway station... as the area grows, so the need becomes ever greater and we call for a. let the people decide in a vote and b. think again... think rail!

Archive Call Appeal: Richard Pill has files and other archive of the former ERTA and previous BRTA eras (going back 20+ years) and would love them to go to a good home. Likewise, some dry, safe storage of old magazines and stock for selling on-line or teaming up to cover sales stalls would be welcome to entertain asap please. Contact Richard Pill with enquiries via richard.erta@gmail.com or phone him (see front page for details). It will be junked if no interest is forthcoming sadly. Plastic containers provided, but must have own transport.

Photos of the Northampton Public Meeting!



Top left: Mr Andrew Meaney from Oxera talks on rail finances and sound business cases, whilst **Professor Andrew N. Williams** awaits in the wings to talk on Northampton to Market Harborough Rail Link and Study and **Richard Pill** mans the sales stall. £43 in donations. Thanks to all.

Top Right: Peter Doveston from the Northampton Streets Campaign chaired the meeting admirably and spoke on the range of transport issues from walking/cycling to roads/buses and rails. **Below left and right**, the scattered audience, some out of the picture, did number 17! We need more all-weather-proof volunteers too!

Guildford-Horsham Working Group Gets Underway!



Caption Left: Great Western Turbo stands awaiting to depart to Guildford and Reading on Saturday 18th November at Redhill. The North Downs Railways is diesel rail service of a half-hourly frequency and one runs semi-fast. It is good and those who shriek 'diesel,' remember that for every passenger or lorry by rail means less traffic, less congestion, less pollution, and that overall is good for the environment as rail carriage is far more efficient in handling large numbers of people or bulky goods. It is ERTA's view we need more of them and reopenings can enable that.

ERTA Guildford Working Group gets under way. It was quality not quantity at our meeting 18th November in Guildford at the URC Church Room. However, of those gathered it was agreed to do a leading question list flyer for delivery at Cranleigh, Wonersh and Bramley initially with other drops at Horsham and Guildford later in the year subject to funds. We are at the foothills of a mammoth climb to get the project moving, but have made this decision as an initial start to see what fires of interest arise out of it. ERTA's vision is for a Guildford-Cranleigh-Horsham local rail link which as part of a nationwide rail network enables travel by rail in a timely manner to other places and helps cut the commute into Guildford and Horsham respectively. Stations additionally at Bramley and Wonersh and a new Parkway Station adjacent to the Artington Park-and-Ride at Peasmarsh, all need to be studied and considered. Join us! Volunteers needed in 2024. Donations to the cost of printing welcome without obligation. Scroll down and do it electronically: <https://ertarail.co.uk/>
We now need donations and willing, reliable volunteers to assist with delivering the flyers in February-March time first all Cranleigh, then Bramley and Wonersh and once done and results in, drops in Guildford and Horsham respectively are welcome to entertain. Please email richard.erta@gmail.com and attend the next Working Group Meeting. Ability to liaise as part of a team is welcome.

St Albans – we have the vision, will the powers that be enable it to be shared?



Top Left: St Albans Cathedral and tower in all its historical splendour illustrates the long-time significance of the place, approximately halfway and central to the east-west spread of the county. The place boasts 2 railway stations but no rail links to the east! It is well worth a visit.

Bottom Left: Mr Tony Houghton speaks to the room and Colin Crawford chaired the meeting. Issues like relevance of bodies like England's Economic Heartlands (EEH), Freeports, more freight by rail, HS2, compulsory purchase and compensation and much more was covered. Renationalisation may help if free to act.

Bottom Right: A Class 700 Electric Multiple Unit stands at St Albans City Station. These units have been criticised for 'ironing board' hard seating, but if majority use for less than 1 hour, only long-distance journeys really notice the matter.



Dates for your diary:

ERTA Beds Forum: Wednesday 24 January 2024 – 1pm food; 2 – 4pm business, Venue: The Swan Pub, 1 Dunstable Road, Flitwick, Beds. MK45 1HP <https://www.swaninnflitwick.co.uk/> at the Side Lounge (no charge) Landlord Phone: 01525 – 754777 Mobile: 07944-044003 Discussions around Flitwick Traffic, Ampthill Parkway Station and General Public Transport Issues. Open to all.

ERTA Northampton Working Group Meeting – Saturday 3 February 2024 from 2 – 4pm. Venue: Northampton Quaker Meeting House (Emmeline Davies Room/upstairs), Wellington Street, Northampton. NN1 3AS www.northamptonshirequakers.org Contact Mr Simon Barber T. 0208 940 4399 E. simon4barber@gmail.com

ERTA Wellingborough Forum: Saturday 17th February 1pm food, 2-4 business. Discussing Stations (new) between Bedford and Leicester like Sharnbrook, Irchester, Desborough and Kibworth. Venue: **Wetherspoons The Red Well**, 16 Silver Street, Wellingborough, Northants, NN8 1BD <https://www.idwetherspoon.com/pubs/all-pubs/england/northamptonshire/the-red-well-wellingborough> All welcome. Contact Mr Simon Barber T. 0208 940 4399 E. simon4barber@gmail.com

ERTA Guildford-Cranleigh-Horsham Rail Reopening Working Group: Guildford URC Jubilee Room 83 Portsmouth Road, Guildford, GU2 4BS <https://guildfordurc.org.uk/> on **Saturday 24th February 2024** 2pm starts. All welcome, especially people who wish to join and help as volunteer assistants with jobs like leafleting, collating results, research, emails/letters to MP's and getting councils on board. Local people with local knowledge are especially welcome. Enquiries via richard.erta@gmail.com

A note on membership from 31st January 2024

Our membership is going up with a tiered set of rates to address different audiences. All memberships get the following:

- Regular newsletters and news-feed. Those on email get a pdf colour version, those not on email, get a printed black and white copy.
- All are welcome to attend meetings, get involved and offer to serve as volunteers.

New rates are:

Ordinary Member/Family £20 _____

Corporate Members (Business/Organisations) £100 _____

Concessionary Membership (Students or an any kind of welfare/disability) £10 _____

We recognise there is a cost-of-living crisis and those on the margins can still join. Those who pay the standard rate enable ERTA to do more and better and are the mainstay of our enablement. The corporate/organisation membership enables investors to take us seriously and fund us to do more and better. Postage, hall hire and increasingly digital matters all cost and campaigning likewise. Our newsletter may go to gloss for sales, but courting enough people to help with administration, committee work, leafleting reliably and fronting campaigns, area repping and engaging with elected and other key figures as a part of our teams, is always welcome to entertain. Investing in ERTA time and money, brings rewards and answers the

question 'will something happen or not?' You can make a difference! We hope to get more members and more database power to grow support and exercise more decision-making inputs.

From the CEO

As ERTA enters our 9th year, it is worth reflecting that we have worked hard and made a difference even if the things we advocate have not materialised yet. So, we have done plethora meetings of various description over the years and sought to engage with the public. Reality is there is the 'now' users of buses and trains and then the nostalgic 'yesteryear' brigades and then the futurists of what next, new and different. Communities like Rugby have moved on since the closures and now apart from remnant rail networks, have cars and buses for everything else besides the walking and cycling brigades. This repeats elsewhere with 'do we need x railway or station?' and given the plethora have cars, to not mind enough to pay a subscription for us advocating such to be provided. In short, we as a nation and discourses have gone away from bread-and-butter necessities to ability to buy in or out or not as the case may be. Our causes have floundered between councils strapped for cash but even when they did have it, reopenings and route protection was not as priority, bringing home to roost those neglected years in cases like Bedford-Cambridge rails. In other cases, alternative routes mooted or purported to be 'in the name of route protection,' then become ends-in-themselves objecting to the railway they once thought or pretended they wanted as well. Again Bedford-Sandy is a classic case, but nationwide these issues repeat. We have had successful public meetings; we have had heroic volunteers doing all they can to further the rail cause. East-West Rail Oxford-Bedford is winding its way towards full-on delivery, albeit it has taken absurdly too long, but better late than never. Elsewhere, our focusing on working groups for Northampton-Market Harborough and Guildford-Cranleigh-Horsham, gives the opportunity for growing local teams and there is nothing stopping others elsewhere doing the same. As ever, every initiative starts out in a storm of protest, the otherly suggestion or competing vested interests. Make no mistake canals, cycling and roads advocacy are big fraternities and are much better resourced than we are. But eventually the tide will turn and our nation will wake-up and realise we do need more and better rail links to inform modal shift based on modal choice.



Caption Left: A local Sunday Stagecoach bus sits at the front of Bedford Bus Station awaiting its turn to ply a skeletal Sunday service. ERTA has rightly applauded that buses generally are running and are overall a good service. Things like congestion but also driver shortages and not turning up on time, can make life harder for bus users and the discrepancy between retired people getting concessionary bus buses (free travel) whilst 18-65's for example must pay even as many like students may have much less expendable money. ERTA wants equality for all and reliability. How we get it is more complex.

ERTA Membership Form 2024 Onwards – Join or Renew

Official annual renewal date is circa 31st January in any given year.

Exemptions apply, see, or notify Mr Tony Houghton if you joined recently for example. Old forms or new



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:

I/We would like more information about volunteering opportunities with ERTA

Membership of ERTA is as follows:

Ordinary Member/Family £20

Corporate Members (Business/Organisations) £100

Concessionary Membership (Students or an any kind of welfare/disability) £10

Renewals are due 31st January every year.

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:

Postal address is: 2 Leigh Road, Hildenborough, Tonbridge, Kent, TN11 9AB

Membership Secretary: Mr Tony Houghton, T. 077659 77318, tonyh@hslaw.co.uk

Membership Payment can also be done on-line via our website:

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

Bank Details are Sort Code: 40-45-27 Account Number: 92086808