

Ref: TWA/18/APP/04/RichardPill/ERTA/DOC1

English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)



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Chairman and Coordinator responsible for (Finance, Delegated Meetings, Recruitment and Administration):

Mr Simon Barber, 20 Fitzherbert House, Kingsmead, Richmond, Surrey, TW10 6HT
T. 0208 940 4399,
E. simon4barber@gmail.com

London and South-East Area Rep., Stations and Field Officer, Delegations Team and Northamptonshire Liaison Officer:

Mr David Ferguson, 25 Virginia House, 19 Kingston Lane, Teddington, TW11 9HL
T. 020 8977 4181
E. daferguson1212@gmail.com

Executive Committee, Campaigns Advisor, Membership, Publications, Sales, Media Spokesperson, Conference Organiser and Newsletter Editor:

Mr Richard Pill, 24c St Michaels Road, BEDFORD, MK40 2LT T. 01234 330090.
E. richard.erta@gmail.com

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T. 0208 940 4399, E. simon4barber@gmail.com

W. <https://ertarail.com/>

www.linkedin.com/in/richard-pill-erta

G. <https://plus.google.com/+ERTAVoluntaryTransport>

02 January 2019

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To Ms Joanna Vincent, Programme Officer, Persona Associates Limited, 1st Floor, Bailey House, Bartellot Road, Horsham, West Sussex, RH12 1DQ

Ref TWA/17/APP/05 Transport and Works Act 1992: Application for the Proposed Network Rail (East West Rail Bicester to Bedford Improvements) Order

Milton Keynes Community Foundation Conference and training facilities, Margaret Powell House, 433c Midsummer Boulevard, Milton Keynes, MK9 3BN Public Inquiry Submission by Mr Richard Pill on behalf of the English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) Ref: TWA/18/APP/04/RichardPill/ERTA/DOC1

Main Concerns

1.1 The Need for additional stations

1.2 Calvert

1.3 Claydon

1.4 Retail Park Kempston

2.0 Why stop at Ridgmont?

3.0 Bedford Midland Station Layout and Accommodation with growth in mind

4.0 Freight Planning?

5.0 Length of Stations and Halts

6.0 Infill Electrification

7.0 One Track, Multiple Operations

8. 0 Passenger Focus and Facilities

9.0 Parking

10.0 Bedford – Cambridge, passively relevant

11.0 Concern at Calvert Layout and passive provision or lack of

12.0 Northampton

Conclusions and summary of main points

1.1 The Need for additional stations

Welcome as the basic rail scheme for East-West Rail is, it is very basic and inadequate given the expected context of the railway off track and on it. You only have to look at the 'success' of Phase 1 Oxford-Bicester Village-London to observe that 8 coach trains are the norm, get filled am/pm and increasingly throughout the day. This precludes what we may expect with greater numbers when the second phase of Bicester/Aylesbury-Bletchley, Milton Keynes and Bedford is added making a whole unit of railway infrastructure and services on it.

1.2 Calvert

Mooted as a growth area and possible New Town, it surely needs a site identifying and made accessible now at planning stages for a new dedicated station to serve the new growth in that location. Otherwise people will drive south to Aylesbury North adding to road traffic and pressure on existing parking or in the case of going to Milton Keynes or further afield, the nearest station would be Winslow on current provision, which is less than direct from Calvert by road and there is a view that if you drive 5 miles, you may be tempted to continue another 5 and park and ride at Milton Keynes Central putting a strain on existing capacities or undermining the value and accessibility of the new local rail network, system and services?

1.3 Claydon

Again, whilst not designated a new town as per Calvert may be, the Claydons are a cluster of villages which have grown since closure and look set to grow in coming years. Coupled with the major tourist attraction of Claydon House, seat of the railway influential historically Verney Family, surely a station location, site and access should at very least be kept under review and considered like with Calvert for a modest station from day one while at the Planning Stages. Failure to do so could lose sites and access making it harder as an afterthought. This then lends to more local journeys further afield by road in any direction, disenfranchising communities and the wider benefits of the railway which may otherwise be felt.

1.4 Retail Park Kempston

Built in the early 1980's with a halt/station provision in mind but never delivered, the Retail Park today commands an expanded site with a 1500 parking provision full with long road queues x 7 days a week. It

is a location that a wide catchment makes a bee-line to as well as the fact that a new station would serve the population of Kempston, some 18, 000 and growing as well as wide areas of South Bedford, Elstow and Wixams. A study by Steer Davis Gleave circa 2000 was commissioned with Bedfordshire County Council which found that some 100 extra passengers per day would be added to the existing Bedford-Bletchley local rail shuttle many of which would be off-peak users new to rail accessing the Retail Park and wider Kempston as well as travelling further afield for school, shopping, leisure and further afield travel by rail. In 2004 it came to a worked-up station scheme with a footbridge (currently Kempston people have to drive or cycle a main detour to get to the Retail Park as the railway severs the community from it) was defeated by about 3 objections to implications of visitors and parking around Magnolia Close, Kempston. However, if new parking was expanded southern area of Southfields (off Southfields Road, off Elstow Road Kempston), it would be away from residential areas and that end of the park lends itself to expanded parking with possible picnic site and other facilities in the event of a new station being provided. In short, this site lends itself to benefit a local railway and given the wider catchment would command more patronage to fill any train, be it the local shuttle and/or semi fasts from Oxford-Bedford for example. A cycle track could be implemented alongside the railway at the back of Magnolia Close for direct access to and from the Woburn Road Industrial Estate which provides employment. It would help alleviate local roads and save Kempston area people having to trek 20 minutes either way into Bedford for Bedford Midland along congested emitting roads via Prebend Street Bridge which is congested daily most of day light hours and find full to capacity parking, disenfranchising new users and growth. The Kempston option makes a lot of environmental, operational and commercial growth sense, bolstering access to the railway, bolstering access to wider Kempston and the benefits of being named on a railway map itself for footfall, tourists and visitors should not be under-estimated. At very least a review should be made and site access and location of a twin platform and footbridge solution be passively allowed for in all future considerations.

2.0 Why stop at Ridgmont?

Contrast the vibrant potential at Retail Park Kempston near Bedford, the East-West semi fast railway service between Oxford and Bedford is proposed to stop at Ridgmont. Why? What is the justification for this? Firstly, the current local shuttle provides more or less and hourly pattern to the location and less than half a dozen board or alight at any one time. Amazon nearby for example provides a bus access and many factory/warehouse workers drive to work from locations other than which the railway serves. It is

proposed to halt a semi-fast regional service on top of this, slowing it down, taking time and will the usage justify the other gains of trains running through the station and shaving a few minutes on overall journeys? If the shuttle was cancelled or terminated, any other train would be something rail-wise, but we question the justification to slow trains down and stop at Ridgmont when the shuttle is perfectly adequate and otherwise would be undermined potentially. Ridgmont has no housing nearby, it is an isolated station building with a modest coffee and retail shop facility. Talk of a canal has its own problems and even on wildly optimistic views would take a decade to implement with a hoist expected up Brogborough Hill, it is a major engineering fete and commands some scepticism as to whether it is the wisest choice of route and location. For example, if it wishes to access Brogborough via the same under pass as the railway uses under the A507 Ridgmont Bypass, how will it do that if platforms are made 8 coach length up to the bridge area? Likewise, if the free gravel surfaced car park at Ridgmont is to be amalgamated as a canal, the growth of the location as a Park and Ride is diminished unless the scrap yard on the southern side of the station building is made an order for a change of use, which seems counter intuitive given it is a source of employment of fairly long standing? In short, apart from the politics of every Local Authority supporting the railway scheme having as a thank you a stop in their area (this being Central Beds area), there seems a very weak case to stop semi fast Oxford-Bedford trains here, so why do it? Kempston Retail Station (1.4) commands a better case if any for additional stops and if we are serving Central Beds token gesture wise, Lidlington is mooted for expansion housing-wise and would seem more logical to serve a body of people, albeit again the hourly shuttle out of Bletchley covers that adequately and given the central location of the halt to the village and the potential for long tail backs at the adjacent Level Crossing may make the location less than idea to attract traffic off the A421 to the location for rail access. So, saving the minutes to speed up end to end times seems a better investment, consideration of the Retail Park Kempston and Kempston Town as a location of more significance to consider a call by regional semi fast services, would seem to have more footfall to offer and potential to win from road to rail with environmental benefits/emission reduction.

3.0 Bedford Midland Station Layout and Accommodation with growth in mind

Oxford-Bedford trains are to terminate at Bedford Midland for connections with other rail services (London, Leicester and Brighton for example)? Where at Bedford Midland will they go? The 1A Bay Platform at Bedford Midland which accommodates the Bedford-Bletchley local shuttle service is 8 coaches long. 2 coaches Bedford-Bletchley local shuttle before or after the semi – fasts mean 6 coaches left. Given

current Oxford-Bicester Town services are often made up of 8 coach trains, surely integrative services would mean a standard normative of 8 coach trains for the whole integrative route and pattern of services? That being the case you either need to design the timetable with clearances between platform 1A at Bedford Midland and west of the single line working to and from it via St John's 1984 Halt under Ampthill Road Bridge to ensure clearance and thus access or are we envisaging a much demanded and wanted new railway but differentiated length of trains which may mean overcrowding, under-estimating usage or a two tier rail system whereby Oxford-Bicester enjoy one length of train and standard of facilities and Bicester-Milton Keynes Central and Bedford's another? That is a recipe for inconvenience for passengers. Surely from day one we need exact same rolling stock and configurations on the whole line in standard format so people can plan, know what to expect and adapt journeys accordingly? Thus, given the view an 8 coach Oxford-Bedford length trains are the order of the day, diagram/timetable workings need to keep the bay clear for the hourly Oxford trains and that also means clearance from West of St John's 1984 Halt to Bedford Midland and out again before the shuttle arrives before or after this manoeuvre. What would be better still is a review of track adequacy and access given new services, given possible need to upgrade to half hourly, given the shuttle service continues and given more freight over these tracks accessing Midland Main Line north of Bedford (getting into Platform 1 and 2 at Bedford Midland conflicts with stable Thameslink wait over trains and operations and has others like East Midlands Trains and other freight servicing getting through the Bedford Midland 'box' means that more capacity is required surely? So, taking a track from north of the A428 Bromham Road Bridge slow lines should fan out to a twin track solution through current Bedford Midland, under the arches through current serving sidings and in short, double track from west of 1984 St John's Halt to north of Bedford Midland, straight from Danfoss site for example. With electrification to Corby, the serving sidings could be relocated to Wellingborough or Kettering or Corby clearing the way for a return to through railway operations. A new located train shed for Bedford Midland passengers – more people accessing to and from means we need more capacity on and off the tracks. Realign platforms making 1A a through twin track and basically the order of layout as was pre-electrification. Unless we think in the round about these design issues now, it will be a major upheaval afterthought and a disruption with passengers being squeezed and operations potentially stifled for efficient in and out at Bedford Midland.

4.0 Freight Planning?

ERTA wants to see a freight by rail vision and plan for the new network of lines and connectives. In particular as well as cross country and London avoidance potential be it Midland Main Line north of Bedford – West Coast South at Bletchley, Aylesbury and beyond or Oxford and beyond and vice versa, we would also wish to see a vision and plan for fostering line-born new to rail freight from along the line itself. Locational sites could be Forders Sidings and Gantry's (near Stewartby) where a recycling plant bringing in by rail, recycling and sending out by rail off the main lines, slacker for manoeuvres and off the A421 (good road access) and with adjacent Kimberley College and associated Cranfield up the road, makes for a research and application location with 'by rail' at the heart cutting lorries on local roads. Indeed, the new Coventa Incinerator which ERTA has called to be rail served from day one if it goes ahead, could send waste or ash by rail after incineration and indeed in bringing materials in, as these plants deal with bulk and want regional business to serve their capacity, they are not just local consumers per se. Whatever our views on incineration, the opportunity to ignite more freight by rail and the environmental benefits and cost savings in road wear and tear should be looked into. Likewise, Newton Longville/Swanbourne and the Calvert area lend themselves to similar review and creative designs made to facilitate more freight by rail, waitover sidings to let passenger services get by and basically cater for more by rail and the buoyancy of the new lines as integrative to the wider rail net-work and market reach and dynamic. This seems to be hardly at the forefront of planning here and should be included in creative scoping and evaluation terms.

5.0 Length of Stations and Halts

If 8 coach trains are to be the norm of Oxford-Bedford operations then every station the new semi fast service calls will need to be made 8 coach length. Ridgmont is a case in point, it would be under the A507 Bypass Bridge, taking the mooted route of the canal. We prefer the railway as a greater asset than the canal in daily commute and travel terms, we have mentioned a need to look at capacity at Bedford Midland (3.0) and have mentioned our view on why Ridgmont (2.0), Woburn Sands may not be so much an issue, Fenny Stratford maybe, Retail Park Kempston can do providing provision even passively is provided and retained and not lost. Hence the need to consider now at the Planning Stage and commit to a win, win for rail usership and footfall on and off the track.

6.0 Infill Electrification

Whilst the Chiltern area is mainly a diesel operation, electrification has reached Reading and Oxford in due course no doubt. Bedford-Corby is being electrified which means Bedford-Bletchley operations will be an isolated diesel operation within an electrified context. Costs accrue with the need for dedicated rolling stock and maintenance and it should be considered whether there is a case for infill electrification from an operational expedience point of view? This could lend to a 4-coach electric EMU shuttle either from Bletchley-Bedford or wider Watford – Corby exploiting the end to end semi fast potential commute of the line, which lengthy duration, many halts and clapped out single car units fail to entice. LNW and/or Southern could be enticed to consider these opportunities as well as freight between WCML and MML using same electric locomotives. Saves time, adds to efficiency surely? So, whilst the business case may be uncertain, the operational benefits of infilling should be looked at in the round. Halts would have to be lengthened or closed but the benefits of park and ride at most halts if provided, a toilet access on-board trains, more carrying capacity and access to other places without a need to change and hang about on wind swept stations would be a plus for rail and what it could offer and chicken and egg, may lead to more rail usage fuelling demand for more investment and improvement.

7.0 One Track, Multiple Operations

Open Access has been tarnished with quasi political issues of competition and access capacity issues. However, we can recognise that shared tracks operations exist now and are working fairly well. The constrain is track and station access capacity. Bedford Midland bottlenecking is one, Milton Keynes Central and waitover trains sitting on through tracks are cases in point. We have an hourly train of some descript working between Oxford and Bedford and another between Aylesbury and MK Central informing a half hourly between Winslow and Bletchley. That will surely increase? But Whether multiple operators or a single will be the order of the day is less certain? The potential like Watford-Bletchley-Bedford-Corby exploiting end to end semi fast potential commutes for example, or Heathrow-Princes Risborough-Aylesbury-MK Central is another arterial potential using same tracks, avoiding changes in London and freeing up London centric capacity. But whatever transpires, it is our view that capacity issues along the WCML and baying at MK Central will be inadequate and plans need to be given consideration of how to boost capacity, baying and running onto elsewhere like Northampton in the Milton Keynes case, which again begs operator/s and modes of train diesel or electric or combinations, variated patterns of operation, services and catering expediently for both growth and diversity of local and regional user. MK

Central enjoys a contra commute community using Southern Trains from West London, however capacity constrain ration that to 1 per hourly into MK Central only. With Aylesbury trains and possibly the Bedford-Bletchley shuttle services vying for access to MK Central for other connections and Central based services and outlets, capacity creation must be considered at the planning stage – where will these trains stable, wait over, go and what expediency for open access, multiple operators or collaborative integrations? One suggestion is to rebuild as a long siding the old line back to Newport Pagnell to enable waitover trains at MK Central to run off the main lines to a location, wait over and re-enter after other services have cleared their turn of waitover. Even a bay at Wolverton would be other means-ways to accommodate more centred on MK Central, which lacks land capacity for more buying to be design implemented? It is these sorts of scenarios which we would expect to have been anticipated at Planning Stages with growth in mind, known as some schemes are already. Alas it seems somewhat straight-jacketed. Cost is a consideration, but all the studies and examples of reopenings elsewhere like the Borders Railway show demand often outstrips supply with reopenings and given the success of Oxford-Bicester, every reason to believe the exact same railway will be more of the same, which means growth and capacity issues come to the fore. 10 years retrospective planning is what we wish to avoid as with Bedford-Cambridge, other developments can means lost opportunities.

8. 0 Passenger Focus and Facilities

ERTA believes in people being at the centre of planning and design. That is why getting it right at the outset can mean savings further down the line. We need capacity and contingency and integrative railway design considerations to come together being Bedford Midland Station configurations, MK Central and how we shoe-horn wider outlets into a core system scheme. Northampton, Corby to the north respectively, Heathrow and access to Guildford as southern partners of potential wider origin and destinations to reach for with wider elsewhere capacity creation and benefit. Price savings, choice of route options and more off roads and onto rails is a core goal of ERTA and how that can best be achieved for wider good of society and public wellbeing, cutting emissions, air pollution, improving mobility, access and inclusion. For example, Bletchley Platform 6 has no lifts, so usage of that platform is either compromised, ruled out or wasted as a result. This is the same for Centre Parcs with Flitwick Station on the MML/Thameslink services. It is hoped that all stations the East-West Rail call at will be Disabled Friendly and fully accessible. Ditto the rolling stock and conductor on board to ensure the access ramps

are put down in a timely manner for wheel chair users. Better lock up bike facilities at all stations the new services will serve should also be looked at.

9.0 Parking:

Bedford Midland Station parking is inadequate for the volume of people who wish to use it. Unless a Retail Park Kempston Station is provided (1.4) Bedford Midland and roads to and from it will continue to be gridlocked and congested, emitting more fumes with canyoning down Prebend Street. Likewise (1.2, 1.3) Calvert, Claydon and Winslow will need decent parking given a growth corridor and around including Winslow for Buckingham commutes for example, they may drive 10 miles to Bletchley or MK Central, but if going to Oxford or Aylesbury or beyond may P&R at Winslow. That's a 10-mile catchment to consider going forward x every station served. However, given the obscurity of Ridgmont it is doubtful this would be the case. Decent and coordinated bus links from station locations need to be coordinated. Woburn Sands has good links with MK Central areas, but Bedford Midland only has 2 buses per hour (No. 41) linking to the town centre, Winslow, Claydon and Calvert sparse bus links needing more patronage which the rail could provide if timetables are conveniently designed, not buses leaving before train arrive or arriving after they have departed!

10.0 Bedford – Cambridge, passively relevant

Although this Inquiry is concerned with Oxford-Bedford in scope, all should be aware of published intent of the East-West Consortium and associated of intent to reopen a Bedford-Cambridge rail link as an add on to this initial phase of an Oxbridge Arc rail scheme. Therefore, if we design this railway without regards to the passive provision of a Bedford-Cambridge railway, we face 10 years hence, more upheaval and redoing/wasting money when a little consideration now could save costs and upheavals. For example, access into and out of Bedford Midland. Midland Main Line is busy and full of existing operational considerations. It does not lend itself to yet more varied trains (diesel under wires) getting onto it at Wixams or elsewhere and sharing tracks into existing Bedford Midland Platform configurations. Doubling from St John's 1984 halt to north of A428 Bromham Road Bridge with new platforms and alignments needs to include access into Bedford from the east via the old St John's trackbed corridor. Whether they cross over on the flat or share same tracks, whether they go west or east of Danfoss Industrial complex remains to be seen, but passive provision and consideration needs to be built in now at design stages. If we have an hourly shuttle in and out from Bletchley + 1 in and out from Oxford per hour too, Cambridge-

Bedford could double that, so sorting tracks into and through Bedford Midland are critical to get right and we would wish the Inspector to be satisfied of the adequacy and capacity currently with these operations in mind or if not, to call-in the plans for how it is to be done and make recommendations for full accommodation of more and diverse trains, buying/through tracking, better buses links from across the Bedford area to/from the railway station inclusive as part of their overall routes and more parking, remembering another growth area is North Bedfordshire and there is no station for over 20 miles north of Bedford or north-west of Bedford, Wellingborough having it's own growth, demand and accommodation issues to resolve.

11.0 Concern at Calvert Layout and passive provision or lack of

Calvert is a key arterial location for rail with it's links to London and Heathrow (via Princes Risborough and Old Oak Common) and is to have a waste transfer sidings facility, passenger trains (see 1.2) and possibly HS2. ERTA has a call for passive provision to be made for a station in the location and also for access to be accommodated for a possible new railway to Brackley/A43/Silverstone Park and Ride facility. Currently the old Great Central access would be obliterated by HS2. The Great Central used to go over the Oxford-Bletchley lines north of Calvert, west of Claydon Junction and join tracks at Calvert which had an island platform station in GC days. If this piece of railway was rebuilt, it would enable Park and Ride commute to London, Heathrow, Aylesbury for example but also a link onto the Oxford lines heading West giving a panoply of commuting out and footfall and spend into the Brackley area and associated links. Bus services are poor, much congestion on the roads, a rail link could bring a positive dynamic change and should be design accommodated passively for accessing existing lines in the Calvert area.

12.0 Northampton

Northampton, population excess of 200, 000 is on the same lines as Milton Keynes and Bletchley. Some have mooted a Northampton-Heathrow through service integrated with or sharing same tracks as Bletchley-Aylesbury services as would be. This laudable new north-south idea should be nurtured positively given the constraints of buying access and waitover inefficiencies at MK Central Station. However, a downside seems to be WCML capacity constrains on lines between Watford and Bletchley (for Bedford integrative) and Bletchley Flyover – MK – Northampton for more services on a busy WCML. People don't want to have to break journeys and change trains, so some consideration of how we include Northampton into Oxford and/or Aylesbury services should be given. Electrification may simplify things,

but until that time it is a consideration between inconvenience of changing trains, what numbers and things like track capacity and running diesels under wires for 10 miles or so. ERTA has suggested studies look again at reopening a Bedford-Northampton rail link for Cambridge-Bedford-Northampton/Rugby integrative and again, any service from Bletchley could wrap around to Northampton via Bedford off main lines altogether. End to end timings from Northampton-Bedford of a modern train were found in previous studies to be approximate 30 minutes end to end with one station somewhere in between.

Conclusions and summary of main points

1. The Need for additional stations: Calvert, Claydon and Retail Park Kempston should be looked at integrative to the scheme from commencement not as an afterthought.
2. Retail Park Kempston and Kempston Town itself lends to a new station bringing footfall mutually on and off the rails.
3. Why stop at Ridgmont, middle of nowhere, seems to lack demand or serve any population which current shuttle does already adequately?
4. Bedford Midland Station needs new track layouts, platform configurations and a Retail Park Station Kempston would compliment capacity north-south and River Bridge access time, fuel, cost and pollution waste considerations.
5. There needs to be a vision and plan for line born freight along the corridors the new railway would serve. Forders Sidings and Gantry, Swanbourne/Newton Longville and Calvert lend themselves as possible locations.
6. Infill electrification likely in coming years, Bedford-Bletchley may not have a strict 'business case' but operational gains and cost efficiencies could generate more usage and demand upwards not lowest common multiples and many a break downs and unreliability of old rolling stock.
7. The routes lend themselves for a consideration and exploration of Open Access and multiple operators using parts or all of the lines for example exploiting the end to end semi fast aspect of traversing the regions by rail more.
8. People must be at the centre of design with decent accessible facilities including disabled and toilet provision. Adequate staff and information, integration with bus services all lend to joined-up experiences or loose ends and estrangement.
9. Review of adequacy of parking at stations the trains will call at is required with growth and convenience in mind. Bedford Midland is a particular concern and shambles.

10. Passive inclusion at design stages of track, accommodation and through routing for passenger and freight of a Bedford-Cambridge railway must be incorporated especially at the Bedford/St John's end into the layout and design of track and station. This could prove expedient for one scheme ultimately.

Richard Pill B.A. (Hons)

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