

# English Regional Transport Association (ERTA)



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ERTA Acting Chairman and Nationwide Coordinator, Also Responsible for the coordination of administration including Finance, Delegated Meetings, Recruitment, Administration, Membership, Teams (Great Central, Westminster, London, Northern and Southern Teams etc), the oversight of all forums, forwarding the route protection/reopening agendas, West Country Area Rep, Consultations, Media Officer (Newspapers, Magazines and main Spokesperson) and Railfuture Liaison Officer:

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**A Station for the Retail Park, Kempston and Surrounds on the Bedford-Bletchley Railway would be just the ticket for enabling more without the congestion!**



**~ ERTA Calls for a determined effort to implement a new station for inclusive benefit. ~**

**A Report by [REDACTED]**

**£3.00**

**February 2021**

**Foreword:**

Although not the final word, none-the-less a word needs to be said about the possibility of a railway station for the Retail Park Kempston and surrounding areas. It is for voluntary campaigners to plant ideas and for professionals elected or other, to pick up on these ideas, work them up and trade and ply their craft unto delivery ideally where appropriate. When I ran Transport 2000 Bedfordshire Branch from 1990-1994, we flagged up the absurdity of on the one hand a growing and popular place to shop with volumes of traffic generated and an adjacent ailing local line, but with no station access to mutual benefit were one such provided. The idea did capture some interest, but opposition also embedded itself. In circa 2001 a study was commissioned by the local authorities and found that of the numerous benefits a station could inform, one was some 100 extra off-peak rail users. For an ailing local railway between Bedford and Bletchley you would have thought such a boost of patronage, wherever sourced in origin and destination terms, would be welcome. However, whether behind the scenes there was enthusiasm, it drifted until 2004/2006 when it made it to planning stage but floundered on votes. Those votes may be associated with local residents' objections amidst fears of extended back gardens removed, potential influxes of people and vehicles perceived or actual and cul-de-sacs hemmed in and a reduction in the peace, quiet and tranquillity let alone more crime. However, the issue remains that a station was envisaged when the Retail Park was built in the early 1980's but other agendas and the diminished status of the line, often under threat of closure, meant investment was not found. Some 40 years later, the Retail Park has grown, demand and usage has grown and so has surrounding areas. The missing link increasingly is the absence of this station.

ERTA likes to be considerate of other people's views and feelings and seeks to accommodate both what we wish to see and how it may be done in a way which minimises disruption and aggravation perceived or actual. We can see a new 4-coach halt-style walk-on, walk-off station with a connecting footbridge inclusive of cycle access, linking the Retail Park with adjacent estates of Kempston and vice versa. We do not see any logic in directing any traffic down Magnolia Close, rather the other end of the playing field, an extended car park could be facilitated which rail users, local residents and overflow to/from the Retail Park could use and share. There's plenty of land which would not necessarily intrude on park amenity spaces. You could drain marshy scrub-land and make it a useful facility accessed off Elstow Road and via Southfields Road. This with signals with priority lanes for Fire Service Vehicles to answer the call of duty be prioritised in traffic flow. The station with footbridge, parking and radial cycleway enhancement would boost local areas and the Retail Park turnover itself and enable a more diverse audience to benefit from it be it shopping, amenity or employment or wider travel. Without a station, it seems akin to a toothless tiger, with a station at heart of it, it is a robust idea whose time has long come. Please join ERTA and get involved and add your voice to those who need to hear it. This outline paper seeks to reinforce what we wish for in such hope that leadership, direction and collaboration will be forthcoming.

██████████, ERTA Vice-Chairman  
February 2021

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## Executive Summary

1. There is a dormant opportunity awaiting to be recovered. Principally a new station on the Bedford-Bletchley Railway to serve the Retail Park Kempston and surrounding areas
2. It would boost patronage off-peak on the existing Bedford-Bletchley Railway train services and it in turn would draw new audiences to the Retail Park and a variety of visitorship to the surrounding areas.
3. There have long been calls for the new station, footbridge and parking off Southfields Roads and now, with interim growth, the need for a station and what it offers is more urgent.
4. B530 and adjoining roads are often congested and parking/land balances are constrained on the Retail site, more growth could overwhelm the situation, which a station could alleviate.
5. The Bedford-Bletchley Railway has been automated, modernised and upgraded progressively over the last few decades and now offers potential for more trains and services along it. The line serves employment and leisure markets as well as locals living along the line as a rail-based public transport service.
6. ERTA calls for the station, a footbridge and a car park north side of the railway to be done as one complex addition to the Retail Park and inclusive or and incorporating benefits to wider communities like Kempston, Elstow and South Bedford.
7. ERTA calls for the project to be provided with leadership, direction, the pulling together of various parties potentially involved, to work together and seek the earliest delivery of the project.
8. ERTA is in the business of planting ideas and welcomes people to come together and act in the social, economic and wider environmental opportunity this station could contribute to on and off the rails.



**Caption Above:** As we write in October 2020 there is an air of uncertainty over the exact route the railway into Bedford will go, as development plans, demand for parking and straightening rails abound. A single coach 153 DMU approaches Bedford 1984 St John's Halt taken by Mr [REDACTED] circa 2016.

**Caption Below:** Now a private dwelling, the old Elstow Road Station in the background and 153 train heads westwards towards Bletchley circa 2016. By Mr [REDACTED]





## Introduction

For many years the local Bedford-Bletchley Rail Link and shuttle services plying it have had a Cinderella status. However, in recent decades, with the on-going context of East-West Rail, it is seeing increased usage (notwithstanding the Pandemic) and demand for more serving audiences from employment to leisure to locals living along it using it as any public transport facility.

The idea of a station to serve the Retail Park and surrounds has long been flagged up, but despite a brief presentational to a planning committee circa 2004-2006, faded from the political agenda amidst a handful of concerns of cul-de-sacs getting bunged up with traffic.

Ever mindful of these factors, the English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) a voluntary public pressure group, advocates a station in the wider social, economic and environmental benefit and appeal.

We are mindful the success of the Retail Park brings with it a high demand for road access and parking spaces and with growth always a possibility, limits of land space can be reached and implications of people going elsewhere/loss of potential always a possibility.

ERTA calls for the station in the contribution it could make to a more inclusive and accessible amenity for surrounding Retail Park and wider areas of Kempston, Elstow and South Bedford which could benefit as a direct and indirect result.

We note the population catchment within a 2.5-mile cordon and deduce also the gains of time and convenience of station access south of the Bedford area and whilst Wixams on the main line would serve a London-centric commute and wider audience, the benefit and reach of the more modest Bedford-Bletchley service and station for the Retail Park offers respective benefit on and off the rails.

It is for professionals to take up our ideas if so inclined and work them up and see if in fact they hold valid in scrutiny but also other criteria which could be useful to make the case more and court funding streams to bring it about. Things are happening with East-West Rail and congestion to and from the south side of Bedford with the principal station of Bedford Midland, means rail access choice and free parking could lure rail users more to the site but with a Southfields Road access shared, would keep traffic away from cul-de-sac areas.

Better buses, cycleway access to link with nearby Woburn Road Industrial Estate and the employment radial to and from the station and the railway offers real choices to employees and employers with more audiences for what is on offer and access to it.

## 1.0 Train

In normal, non-pandemic times the Bedford-Bletchley rail shuttle service plies the line with one passenger train each way per hour more or less with slight modifications at certain times of the day. The line has seen investment over the last 3 decades, with from a threat of closure in the early 1980's to modernisation of stations, signalling, track and new professionally paid organisational representatives with volunteers to promote usage of the line, market its reaches and ranges to wider audiences and ensure/shore-up footfall. It has seen some success and the development of Kimberley College at Stewartby and the new Heritage Coffee Centre at Ridgmont are but two examples of how the line serves a variety of niche and key audiences as well as along-line, end-to-end and casual to leisure usage. Indeed, patronage from half-empty trains to overflowing and overcrowded, mixed fortunes and new problems to resolve arise. New trains and technical issues combined with Covid-19 issues have led to some trains doing diagrams and bus replacement to serve dwindling usage and save costs. There is a push for the line to be extended to Milton Keynes Central and indeed trackwork costing some £20 million was done to enable reversal out of Platform 5 at Bletchley was done. Alas, baying capacity and pathing on the West Coast Main Line has bedevilled access and the regular running of services into MK Central remains aloof.

Likewise, Sunday and Bank Holiday services are being progressed but taking an extraordinary amount of time and protractedness however informed or not. It is to be hoped for better times, more normalised times, to resolve these issues and the line to reach its fullest potential as a line of both work and leisure, for all ages and pockets. It is envisaged that a Retail Park Railway Station would boost patronage at the Bedford end of the line and give a gateway to the area it would serve off the railway into the wider community and vice versa. The railway is currently served by Class 230 ex-London Underground Stock converted by Vivarail. They replaced a combination of single-coach Class 153 and two-coach Class 150 configurations but the medium to long term must be a new configuration of infill electrification and electric stock or more standardised 4-coach operations, however powered. Does it make any sense to have 2 electrified main lines at either end and yet have a diesel dependent operation requiring specific trains for its purposes? Moreover, when we think of distanced freight operations, the reach of electric locomotives and efficiencies of using electric over diesel, apart from emissions, makes sense if the wires exist. Therefore, for a variety of reasons electrification should be considered and planned for, not discounted as 'no business case' because operational optimisation and gains could boost the purposefulness and business the line handles alongside of course, a freight plan. Passenger diagrams also have to be planned and timetable enhancement built in. (Ref. 7)

## **2.0 Track**

The Bedford-Bletchley Railway is mostly a double-track railway linking the Midland Main Line with the West Coast Main Line, Bedford and the expanded conurbation of Milton Keynes and a string of villages and small towns in between. It is both an outlet of leisure and employment-based usage as well as education, visiting local shops and other people. Both ends are single-track, but that remnant of rationalisation will be rectified with the coming of the Western Section of the East-West Rail Link (Oxford-Bedford). Although the frequency of trains is normally an hourly pattern, occasional freight and timetable changes, revisions and upgrades can occur and so the pattern of services and train activity along the line can be varied. The line by the Retail Park is double-track and therefore a bridge linking the Retail Park and Southfields Park of Kempston is necessary to ensure segregation of people from the railway for safety and the clinical delineation for efficient operations to be unimpeded both on and off the rails. It would be wrong to install a level crossing facility or even a new road link as we wish to avoid through traffic increases and congestion, especially given the Fire Station needs a clear access. Contrast cars parking and people shopping or going by rail for a period of time.

## **3.0 Retail Park**

The Retail Park is in 3 sections, with one, the largest adjacent to the Bedford-Bletchley Railway and the other two alongside the B530 Bedford-Amphill road and the Midland Main Line. Site 1, the first and largest site is our primary focus. It commands 1500 parking spaces filled x 7 days per week between 9am and 5pm and generates a lot of traffic to and from the compound. The success of the Retail Park some argue is at the expense of the traditional town centre, but free parking, ease of access and more space for warehouse-styled designs, means convenience and dynamic appeal with a social side, draws in audiences from about a 15-mile radius. It is also a main centre for retail and associated employment and better accessibility would bode well for reach and range. (Ref 1, 6)

### **Key points which ERTA believes pertinent:**

1. The new railway station would bring more shoppers and consumers to the sites, especially people who do not drive and/or people who live near the railway to have rail access to the outlet. That is a boost for trade, diversity and inclusive audiences.
2. The railway station would give choice of access from both ends of the railway and its connectives including a commute factor from Bedford and beyond. This is currently denied. Bedford Midland has links with Luton and Leicester in reach and range and it is not beyond wit that a portion may wish to change train and saunter down to the Retail Park to obtain, see and handle goods which are unavailable elsewhere or on the scale of choice.
3. The station and footbridge provide an opportunity for fine-tuning the current cycle and pedestrian accesses to the site and expanding that. So, for example the Kempston Cycle



Network should be connected to the station and footbridge. Likewise, at the back of houses, a new cycleway directly to the Woburn Road Industrial Estate could be fitted in on what is also a footpath (at least was). This is good for diverse usage of the railway, optimising the potential reach and range of the station and good for those seeking a variety of employment within a reasonable say 1.5-mile catchment of the station.

4. Within 1.5 miles of the station, most of South Bedford, Elstow, Kempston and parts of Wixams could be served better and by rail freeing up parking spaces and congestion otherwise associated with the Retail Park enabling more for all. The station idea is a winner!

#### **4.0 Station**

The 2004-2006 Brochure promoting the Retail Park Station showed a twin-platform walk-on, walk-off station with a footbridge with cycle access built in. Most stations on the Bedford-Bletchley Railway are unstaffed and a conductor sells tickets from the train. Both ends are principal stations which are staffed. Tickets can be purchased on line and from machines. The exact location of the station and configuration with both Southfields Park and the Retail Park needs to be examined carefully. Much has changed in the last 40 years and development of the Retail Park itself and sensitivities with residents the Kempston side, means a zig-zag foot-cum-cycle bridge entering it from the car park off Southfields Road and coming out between the shops somewhere would need to be considered. It would be ideal for the twin-platforms to be 4-coach length. Historically Fenny Stratford, Woburn Sands, Ridgmont and Lidlington Stations were 4-coach length, whilst halts at the remaining other locations of Bow Brickhill, Aspley Guise, Millbrook, Stewartby and Kempston Hardwick are just 2-coach length. Ideally there would be a push for these halts to be brought up to a standard 4-coach length. In the event of infill electrification, a 4-coach electric unit would therefore be able to serve all stations between Bedford and Bletchley. It could be that a variety of differential train services ply the railway be it Watford-Corby via Bletchley and Bedford, Oxford-Bedford via Ridgmont and the shuttle between Milton Keynes Central, reverse at Bletchley to Bedford Midland via all stations. This 4-coach standard prepares the ground for growth of usage, takes into account growth of development and spin-offs and also standardisation of platform length and train, enables better prediction of what to expect and catering for all diverse audiences. Second guessing which two coaches will align with halt platforms or overcrowding or indeed, the turning away of people because of a lack of bike storage or other issues is unacceptable, especially given only the train has toilet access and an hour's duration for the next service is a long time to wait, especially in colder, darker winter months. Some stations are isolated. However, the good news is that the Retail Station would enjoy the benefit of being near civilisation and the Retail Park commands toilets, eateries and the wider Kempston scene informs the Orchard Street Shopping Mall with goods and services as well as a pub.



**Caption Above:** A Class 230 ex-London Underground Stock from the District line sits in the Bedford Midland bay Platform 1A where Bletchley trains terminate. It can only take 6 coaches in length. Taken by [REDACTED]. **Caption Below:** Taken from Ampthill Road overbridge, looking west towards Cow Bridge. Beyond it is Retail Park left, Kempston Town right. Taken by Mr [REDACTED], October 2020.



## **5.0 Footbridge**

The essential dynamic of the footbridge apart from allowing people from both sides to access safely the right platforms for which direction be it Bletchley or Bedford, is that it connects adjacent residential areas with the Retail Park and vice versa. Currently it necessitates a drive which otherwise with the footbridge would be unnecessary. The wider benefit of a footbridge linking cycle paths off Elstow Road Kempston and onwards to Elstow direction via the Retail Park is another beneficial off-road safety dynamic appeal with coincidental shopping potential. The exact design needs to be worked out as per lighting. The benefit of such a footbridge should not be underestimated.

## **6.0 Extended Car Park**

It is envisaged that segregation holds a key to avoiding the concerns of Magnolia Close residents being realised. To avoid cars trekking to pick up from a cul-de-sac, access via a shared existence with Southfields Road. There is currently a car park at the end of Southfields Road, and plenty of marshy scrub land which could extend that parking capacity to up to 100 extra cars, ample for the station but also overflow from the Retail Park with an adjoining, well-lit foot-cum-cycle bridge, zig-zagged for direct off car park access and Retail Park the same with station access and cycleway links built in from day one. Free parking is part of the allure of out-of-town development plus more land and space for bigger showrooms, parking, food and drink outlets. Part of the lane would have to be better drained and cleared for parking surfaces, but in any case, this need not impede on the Southfields Park and recreation spaces. Hedgerows and tree planting could be landscaped in to blur the ecological balances between open space and functional utility spaces.

## **7.0 Kempston Town**

Kempston has a population of around 20, 000 and incrementally is still growing physically and population-wise. Once known as 'the largest village in England' it has town status, its own council and Mayor (Ref. 2). Whilst the immediate station reach and range would be Southfields-Orchard-Chantry areas; Woburn Road Industrial Estate, the draw with better footbridge access and cycle networks to the Retail Park, means a Kempston-wide dynamic appeal and coincidental use of rail and once patterned and experienced, use more than not at all which is currently the case. So, everything bodes well and is positive and the role of the station in enhancing the theatre more in catchment and business and employment access, can be linked to a more sustainable transport approach. Currently Kempston has no station and so no listing on the railway map of Great Britain. By putting the town on the rail map, indeed with prestigious links to Bedford Midland, Milton Keynes and the Oxford arc, it would bring causal visitorship and flows of footfall and spend to Kempston and enjoy its history, shops, eateries, parks and riverside ambiances. This means these outlets would be open and available to wider audiences and vice versa,

Kempston to the other areas as well. What is there to lose? Some may scoff that Kempston adjoins Bedford urban-area-wise, but that is to miss the following points:

1. It can take 20+ minutes to drive from Kempston via Prebend Street Bridge to Bedford Midland.
2. It is hard or impossible to find a parking space in normal times at Bedford Midland and surrounds are Community Parking Zone (CPZ) charged and well subscribed. With growth of population, development and flows, these situations will only be compounded.
3. Getting a train into Bedford Midland and crossing over platforms to go elsewhere offers potential for time and cost savings as well as the potential for Kempston people to leave the car at home and consider some other options.
4. The gains, even if a percentage looked at the Kempston park-and-ride option, is less congestion, more capacity and more lifestyle clean-green options.
5. Local buses call at nearby Orchard Street Shops as interchange and act in a route-distributive way meandering around most of Kempston to and from the vicinity and link with places like Sainsbury's which has other buses calling including No. 24 to Great Denham, C1 and C10 to Wootton and Marston Village respectively. There are also stops in Hillgrounds just across the road from Sainsbury's for the 53 bus to Wootton and Bedford Hospital for example and the wider Hillgrounds catchment. So, plenty of integrated public transport links and the station could compliment that and things like plus-bus ticketing and so forth, boost mutual footfall and spend. (Ref 2)

## **8.0 Elstow**

Elstow is less than a mile from the Retail Park and is linked by a cycleway and footpath. It has a population of around 2, 702 and has a rich history with links to John Bunyan, the Abbey Church itself and a collection of historic buildings, walk-in parks and associated mix of residential development and adjoins almost, Wixams, which is a new town and sprawl which aspires to have its own main line station further south from the Kempston cordon. ERTA takes a 'horses for courses' approach, but Elstow is a handy addendum for trips to explore more of what these places have to offer, accessed from a local halt-style station serving multiple audiences. There is also the Bedford Park-and-Ride, could it and the No. 44 buses be extended to link with the Retail Park to enable more non-car owners' better access to the facility and station? It can only increase patronage and reach and range of dynamic appeal. You cannot have inclusion if no infrastructure enables audiences to access facilities. We need fine sounding words on power-point presentations to be tangibly earthed in built realities which add up for all pockets, and persons, ages and genders. (Ref 3)

## **9.0 South Bedford**

If you take the population of urban Bedford as 106, 940, south Bedford would be about 1/3 of that population excluding Kempston as a separate entity. 35, 646 would be about right in terms of another population demographic which would be within easy reach of the Retail Park and Station. In this case, avoiding Bedford Midland and going west by rail to Milton Keynes and/or Oxford. It would save people time and money and make rail a choice more. Better buses which arc across in distributor roles could also be considered more as the half-hourly Nos 42 to Flitwick and Bedford do serve the front of the Retail Park but maybe others could make links including making more of buses using Spring Road and Elstow Road Kempston with regards accessing Southfields Road? Currently there is no demand, with a station, could there be an audience for better buses, re-routing and so forth? Likewise, a taxi rank at the Retail Park for extended flexi-hours operations. Better access to the other sites is a major concern for pedestrian-based users and that only bodes better for more footfall and spend on the back of the station being done. (Ref 4)

## **10.0 Traffic and Congestion**

We have already cited the traffic issues, but in sum:

1. Traffic to and from the Retail Park is considerable and congestion down Ampthill Road hinders other traffic as a result. Parking is oversubscribed and land capacity for expansion is limited. Better infrastructure is required and that is where the station dynamic comes into its own.
2. It takes 20+ minutes to drive to Bedford Midland each way due to congestion
3. Parking at Bedford Midland is an issue, which serves a wide catchment as far as Rushden as well as the wider Bedford Borough area cordon. Unless more station and parking capacity is provided, we lock-in more driving elsewhere with a loss of business.
4. Unless and until the station at Retail Park issue is resolved, the current trends and problems seem to be compounded and so we need fresh thinking and creativity.

## **11.0 Population**

Combining the populations of South Bedford, Kempston and Elstow, gives us an immediate catchment for the new station serving the Retail Park of 58, 348 within less than 2.5 miles of the facility. If rail-captured, by way of the new halt station just 10% of that catchment, that is 5, 834 people and say just 10% per day used rail that is 583 spread over say 8 hours is approximately 72 people new to rail audiences. But, whilst some may think this is a drain on locked-in audiences, consider that they may currently be alienated from the Retail Park and what of additional people flows off the railway new to the area including the Retail Park? That could increase patronage considerably including a supply of choice for employment quality choices as well. For workers, more choices along the rail corridor with local, cheaper rail commuting, suites more pockets and gives reach,



range and public transport/non-car dependency options more, better for pockets, environment and reach, range and dynamic of filling vacancies with the right people. It is a win, win.

## **12.0 A421 Bypass**

There have been calls for a slip road off the A421 Bypass to the Retail Park but fears are that it would soon fill up and tail back onto the main carriageways. The fact is that the volume of traffic seeking to get to and around the Retail Park and vicinity where various intersecting roads conjoin exceeds capacity. On the one hand the principal artery to and from Bedford urban area from Luton, Central Beds and off the A421 Bypass is the A6/Amphill Road. The B530 Bedford-Amphill Road serves the Retail Park off a 4-way junction one side of the railway bridge and a 2-way junction northern side of the Bedford – Bletchley Railway. The bridge from the southern junction with the road to Elstow, A421 Bypass and towards the Retail Park goes under a Victorian overbridge which carries the Midland Main Line at height. Not much wriggle room for upgrading the roads and so capacity constraint is locked in. The station offers new and innovative means and ways to bring in more people whilst mitigating the consequences of roads-only solutions. The footbridge and additional capacity parking off Southfields Road are another innovative solution and bridge + station+ extra parking is just the ticket to optimise trade and reduce spin-off effects.

It should be remembered buses get caught in congestion and timing and punctuality of buses serving the Retail and adequacy should be kept under review with an eye to what more could reasonably be done. Again, if audiences are coming on the A421 Bypass from the west of Kempston area, then these can be directed to the railway if a station is provided and a review with regards to providing more parking at the numerous stations along the line should also be done to make park-and-ride more a spread-out affair, courting as wide an audience as possible from daily commutes to casual visitors. The downside of the long way around off the Bypass to the Retail Park is that it adds to congestion and parking space demand and yet, if you come off early at Marsh Leys Roundabout, you then encroach the Kempston urban cordon and brings unnecessary traffic and wrong side of the proverbial fence to access the Retail Park. In short, in any scenario the station is not only necessitated but essential as a growth product but also proper management of traffic generation and wider impacts.

The English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) is a voluntary association seeking development towards better public transport. This includes calls for reopenings, rebuilds, select new builds and old rail route protection sanctions and incentives. We rely on volunteers and the generosity of the public to do this vital contribution to the betterment and well-being of society. Join us and vote with your feet and wallets: <https://ertarail.co.uk/become-a-member/>



### **13.0 East-West Rail**

ERTA welcomes the onslaught and advancement of the East-West Rail scheme, linking Oxford with Bedford and Aylesbury with Milton Keynes via a common station at Bletchley. It is our understanding a train of one per hour is envisaged from 2024 between Oxford and Bedford calling at Fenny Stratford, Ridgmont and Bedford Midland whilst the shuttle serves all the other stations and these inclusively. Therefore, at this stage there is no plan for a Retail Park Station to court the new service, but the hourly shuttle between Bedford and Bletchley. However, if the demand exists and a 4-coach 2-platform walk-on, walk-off station is established with free parking, the case and market for a direct and additional inclusive call from the Oxford-Bedford service would be wise to at least keep it under review. Meanwhile the shuttle, yes takes about 40 minutes between Bedford-Bletchley, could see increased frequency now signalling is 24x7 automated and keeping costs down, again needs demand for supply. Only by studying, making a case, sorting funding and opening the station can these other considerations be forthcoming. In funding application terms, the determination of best way to proceed would be wise to include the EWRC in discussions and maybe their umbrella could prove useful to including the station in their growth plans. Bringing that forward to coincide with 2024 would be a good goal to work towards however configured in terms of who does what or not. As for links further afield, a Watford-Corby service could exploit the semi – fast aspects of the line and add another dimension. As long as timetabled, surely a plethora of potential services and operators could be entertained and serve different markets and users. ERTA is confident a Retail Park Station would court consideration in any case for extra footfall on and off the trains. (Ref 5)

### **14.0 Jobs and Employment**

The Retail Park is a major employer as is the Woburn Road Industrial Park located to the West of the station. It could be connected by a new cycle-cum-walkway alongside the railway separated by suitable fencing and furnished with street lighting for winter months. The work patterns are more flexible and thus early morning and late evening patterns of usage increasingly make longer days of operations to ensure public transport is available. If not private access of walking, cycling, taxi or private car remains the norm, apart from objective lifestyle choices. Ampthill Road includes Morrisons, car showrooms and other employment as well as wider Kempston with small businesses and retail opportunities. A point being from an employment point of view, it is a location people will increasingly want better access to for employment and likewise as population grows, seeking the transport to enable wider searches and courting what the corridor it serves and better links offer. For example, Amazon has a large base at the Brogborough Marston Gate Industrial complex adjacent to Ridgmont Station. Bus links are scant and unless a car owner, is haphazard. The rail offers better transport options and again, Kempston should have ready access for such as much as anywhere else surely? Unless the station is kicked off and pursued now, it remains disenfranchised and unequal to those areas which

are rail-served. London has neither the capacity, cost or time benefits of localised work commutes and people do want diversification, choice and flexibility as well as time for family and other pursuits in life. The recent Pandemic has brought working from home to a new audience and mixing and matching in the use of talent, work and skills transfers and having other options to London centrality is a welcome health check development, cutting stress and waste. The annual rises in rail fares has been a disincentive unless salaries make it worthwhile, but for blue-collar and similar jobs, more localised reaches and ranges means London is largely irrelevant. What we want is to optimise the local dynamic appeal, reduce emissions and give people more choices, options and flexibility.

## **15.0 Recommendations**

1. We call on the owners of the site, the councils, Network Rail and the rail industry to pool resources and study this station and conditions of footbridge and Southfields parking with fresh eyes and thinking. The demand potential is there to be explored as a solution for off-rail issues and a boost to on-rail use and roles.
2. We call for location of a twin-platform station to be established and protected alongside configuration and type of foot-cum-cycle bridge to keep the option open.
3. If the study proves robust and beneficial to inform a pot for contributions of money and a broad coalition to input time and expertise to advancing the case and candidacy for Government funding support albeit match funding. If we are talking £20 million, that is £10 million to be found and £10 million from Governmental sources for example.
4. To aim to get the station implemented by 2024 or shortly after with a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the station as part of local infrastructure, service provision and access gatewaying the Retail Park, Kempston and wider adjacent areas.
5. For better pedestrian access between site 1 and the other 2 sites of the Retail Park with safe crossing of the B530 for pedestrians and cyclists.
6. For consideration of more buses serving the Retail Park and linking with Orchard Street/Spring Road to bring access to/from the railway station nearer and easier.
7. For consideration of aforementioned services including:
  - a. Enhancing the Bedford-Bletchley Shuttle Train Service: e.g. extension into Milton Keynes Central, Sunday and Bank Holiday Services, Half-hourly Peak Time Frequencies, Infill electrification, Better Trains with 4-coach capability including upgrading all stations to 4-coach capacity.

b. Oxford-Bedford East-West Rail Services from 2024 to be minimum of 4-coach length and made half-hourly, subject to demand/supply to avoid over-subscription eroding rider quality. That these services should keep calling at a Retail Park Station under review.

c. For other services and patterns to be explored including in-fill electrification and a Watford-Bedford-Corby semi-fast electric service which could again consider including a Retail Park Station in its service pattern, supplementing any gaps or more-than expected demand-supply issues. Bedford-Bletchley has loads of spare capacity!

### **References:**

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**Caption Above:** Part of site one of the Retail Park at Kempston which runs parallel to the railway. Questions arise on how you plug the station into the complex in access terms. **Caption Below:** The Mulberry Bush Pub, Orchard Street Kempston. Only less than 5 minutes from the station, the small cluster of shops would be boosted. Pictures by Mr [REDACTED] October 2020.

