



BEDFORD COMMUTERS ASSOCIATION

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Dear Binal,

SUBJECT : BEDFORD STATION QUARTER REDEVELOPMENT

The BCA, a Rail User Group representing passengers on Stagecoach East Midlands Trains (EMT) & First Capital Connect (FCC) train services at Bedford, have viewed the consultation material for the Bedford Station Quarter Redevelopment which was recently displayed at Bedford Midland railway station. We are aware that an outline planning application has been submitted. However, we do not believe that the proposals in their present form follow best practice in urban regeneration or are innovative.

The BCA Committee and its membership are very concerned about the proposals, as we do **not** believe that the current plans satisfactorily address the capacity and flexibility issues at the railway station in terms of the day to day operation of train services or the passenger facilities to accompany them. The BCA require clarification that the platforms and station configuration will be forming part of the planning application and that rail facilities will be **enhanced**. If indeed this is not the case, then the proposals as they stand are unacceptable because they are merely a process for commercial development. It is essential that provision is made in the proposals for a fast line (up) platform, as well as longer through platforms and freight loops, amongst other things. The new station buildings must also be “fit for purpose”.

The proposals as displayed reveal several severe faults in the lack of room left for development of the station itself, its car parking and bus/rail interchange. Office development on the scale proposed will produce a rather overwhelming feature near the

new station site. In particular the tall office block on the site of the Focus store is inappropriate in this location and should be reduced in height and replaced by a Hotel, which the town does need more than offices. Whilst the BCA notice that a smaller hotel is to be provided farther up Ashburnham Road, on its western side, this location may not be the most appropriate of the sites available.

The railway facilities are certainly being '**sold short**'. Not only is there no plan for a Platform 5, or adequate accommodation for East-West rail developments, but the entrance to the station is crammed between commercial developments and has very little manoeuvrable land in front of it for cycles or taxis – and it seems there is no provision made for any sort of interchange with buses on the station frontage.

Any (operational & brownfield) “railway land” released to the commercial development should be at market valuation and the sums raised re-invested (ring-fenced) in to the station itself, its platforms and its passenger facilities. These monies should not be diverted elsewhere into Network Rail’s or the Treasury’s coffers!

The BCA have a number of important points that our Members were unable to comment on (on the general consultation ‘response-sheet’ handed out at the display on the station). These points are therefore covered as follows under a number of pertinent headings.

Please note that the BCA wish this information to be passed on to Network Rail and Bedford Borough Council as the joint clients/promoters for the scheme. It might also be sensible for other stakeholders to be included – the Train Operating Companies (TOCs) using Bedford station; Rail Freight Companies; Bedfordshire County Council (for highways & public transport/LTP); the local MPs; BBRUA & BABUS; Stagecoach (Bus); the Community Rail Partnership (CRP) for the Marston Vale railway line; Renaissance Bedford; English Partnerships and GO-East (Cambridge), amongst other stakeholders.

Thameslink 2000/Thameslink Programme & beyond – Operational Issues : Platform/Track layout, Carriage Sidings, EWRL.

As you are no doubt aware the Thameslink Programme (completion 2015/16) project will deliver 12-car trains on the current FCC route and these will need to be accommodated at Bedford. This is not just a question of platform accommodation, but also extended carriage sidings and train care to accommodate the longer trains. No mention is made in the proposals of where the longer trains are to be stabled in berthing sidings, where train wash & cleaning, etc. is to take place, nor where train-crew ‘signing-on’ and other key operational & commercial requirements for the station will be.

Whilst the BCA notes the addition of a new through platform, (currently terminating bay platform 1a), it nevertheless considers that **more** through platform faces will be required. Taking FCC (“Greater Thameslink” from 2015/16), EMT & EWRL into consideration a minimum of at least **seven**

through platforms will be required - preferably all wired (OLHE) for electric trains to allow full flexibility of operation. This is even more vital in the short-term, given phasing work for the Thameslink Programme improvement works which are likely to take place at the station & environs.

The BCA understand that platform 4 (down fast-line for EMT services) was originally designed to be easily converted into an island to provide additional capacity (platform 5 on its back-face/west side), but looking at the plans a new station entrance on the Ford End Road/Hurst Grove side of the station may block the alignment for the track required to serve this platform. Given the imperative to provide an up fast-line platform for EMT services these proposals must therefore be changed. They are **not** acceptable in the form presented.

The second access on the west side of the station therefore needs to be carefully considered so that it does not cause operational constraints in the future. If possible this access should be included in the new car park arrangements or set back further towards the western boundary, to allow a further through running line to be provided as and when required to serve platform 5.

Platforms 1 to 3 are signalled for bi-directional working; platforms 4 & 5 need to have the same utility, rather than one-way only. There are four running lines (up & down fast and up & down slow) on either side of the station, plus the running lines & junction to Ouse Bridge on to the Marston Vale Line. Lines through the station need to provide adequate capacity, not just for passenger services but also for freight. Whilst FCC & Go-Via London Midland services terminate at Bedford, other services do not. This pattern may change in the future.

In respect of the Marston Vale Line it is a key component of the East West Rail Link (EWRL) proposals and will see increased usage following the DCLG announcement on Eco-Towns, specifically Marston Vale and New Marston (DCLG 3rd April 2008) amongst others in the wider region. The route also features in Network Rail's Freight RUS.

Rail-side considerations : infrastructure, line speeds

When the current station was rebuilt by British Rail for the "Bed-Pan" electrification in the late 1970s line speeds were increased and the new platforms were longer than those they replaced at the old station. Given the likelihood of a higher speed profile for new/replacement rolling stock (Thameslink Programme light-weight electric trains; new IEP high speed passenger train build sponsored by the DfT; faster, heavier & more powerful freight trains, etc.), the speed capability of **all** the through platform lines at the station should be a *minimum* of 100 mph line speed.

All platforms should now be extended to accept 12-car length trains (and a safety margin for overrun). Given the possibility of the extension of electrification northwards beyond Bedford, all platforms should be wired

and signalled for through running – to both the up & down fast-lines and the up & down slow-lines in each direction. Bedford North & Kempston Road Junctions (at the north & south ends of the station respectively) **must** be reconfigured for higher speeds with appropriate ‘longer-lead’ turnouts and where the bridge abutments at Ford End Road and Bromham Road road bridges preclude the optimum track layout, elevation & cant for higher line speeds, these bridges should be rebuilt at the local highway authority’s expense. Bromham Road (A428) bridge should be rebuilt to electrification clearances/W10 loading gauge.

You should be aware that the BCA regard any improvements to the Midland Main Line/Thameslink route and its stations, in the same context as the Highways Agency M1 widening improvements. Indeed we would clearly welcome the same levels of investment (at £30m.- £40m. per mile for the HA) for Network Rail! Bedford station and its railway lines have to be seen in context to the proposed A421 dualling from Marsh Leys to Junction 13/M1 and the proposed M1 widening south of there! Our bench-mark and expectations are high and we will not be fobbed-off with a “cheap & cheerful” scheme at Bedford where property, highway and commercial development considerations outweigh those of the rail facilities to be provided!

It is evident that the Midland Main Line & EWRL will not just see a growth in passenger services but will increasingly be key freight routes. Planning for that network capacity and higher speeds must begin now! There should therefore be a progressive upgrade to higher speeds, beginning with the Bedford Station proposals currently under consideration.

Capacity and Operational Flexibility

In terms of capacity at the station the BCA believe it is sacrosanct flexibility of operation is built-in from the start. It is known that the ladder junction/crossovers to the north of the station are an operational problem for EMT & freight train operators (see point above).

The EMT problem can be addressed by additional work to the current platform 4, with the (blind) back-face being converted to a new platform 5 and track inserted here, thus making 4 & 5 an “island” platform with bi-directional working and improved higher speed turnouts to the south and north of the station at the respective ladder junctions. Re-signalling will in any event be necessary, replacing the present West Hampstead PSB/signalling centre as part of the Thameslink Programme upgrade work.

It is also key that the current Marston Vale line service is considered more carefully, as this will in future become part of East-West Rail Link (EWRL) as far as Oxford/Aylesbury and possibly on to the East Coast main line (ECML) and Cambridge in the other direction. It is paramount that these trains are able to enter the main station platforms, as well as being provided with their own dedicated platforms (bay 1a at present) - so that they can call at Bedford Midland and then reverse, as they do currently. The route in to

Bedford station from the St. John's curve should be **doubled** and the restrictive single-track section and tight curve upgraded along this short portion of the line. There is already double track on the Ouse bridge.

Flexibility of future operation is important for both the Thameslink Programme and East-West Rail, as they will require facilities **above those** currently provided.

Should a Corby-Manton routing for EWRL east of Bedford be a possibility, this will also have to be factored-in with through running necessary to the north of the station.

The Midland Main Line is also likely to see greater usage for freight trains as capacity constraints 'kick-in' on the West & East Coast main lines.

Bus-Rail Interchange

The other glaring issue to be addressed is bus-rail integration at Bedford Station. The proposals as envisaged are hardly "best practice". Elsewhere on the FCC routes there are excellent bus rail interchanges (St.Albans City and Elstree & Borehamwood both in Hertfordshire; and Cambridge, for example) and best practice from around the UK would suggest that bus rail integration should be provided at the **front** of the station.

Examples of good practice can be found at Bournemouth, Barnsley Interchange, Burnley, Clitheroe and Caerphilly. The 'Park & Ride' bus services (from Biddenham & Clapham) that will assumedly serve the station should connect in to a dedicated bus-rail interchange that is easy to use on the main station frontage – not via a lay-by/bus stop hidden at the back (Ford End Road/Hurst Grove) on the west side of the station!

In addition, the current lack of town buses and through services (X5) not calling at the railway station needs to be addressed - if necessary by a "Bus Quality Partnership" agreement to be arranged with bus operators, Stagecoach/Bedfordshire County Council (or the successor unitary authority taking highways/public transport responsibilities from April 2009). Dedicated bus lanes on the roads approaching the station are also a prerequisite.

Traffic and Pedestrian/Cycle Access

Traffic congestion is a serious problem in Bedford, mainly due to the number of road bridges over the River Ouse. The BCA are aware from earlier transport studies, that there were previous plans to improve Prebend Street/Midland Road/Ashburnham Road and that these highway improvement plans if brought to fruition could effectively "cut-off" the station from the town centre. This would **not** be acceptable. This happened at Welshpool and the BCA do not want a "Berlin Wall" dual-carriageway or *inner ring road* in front of the station effectively isolating it from the rest of the town and the central business district! A direct walking route to the

town centre is essential from the station frontage.

The location and access of the proposed station car parks (on the former Engine Shed site) needs to be considered carefully. Could a possible land-swap be arranged with the Post Office (or other freeholders) to release the current Royal Mail sorting office site? This may allow better use of rail-owned land adjacent to the Marston Vale/East-West running lines. This would allow the scheme promoters to provide car parks on the town centre side of the railway and reduce traffic issues at the Midland Road/Prebend Street/Ford End Road junction. Access to the car parks and the additional traffic generated is likely to be a contentious issue that will need to be addressed with sensitivity. The BCA are already aware of comments about the proposed siting leading to serious criticism, with some justification.

Access to and from the centre of Bedford to the station should be considered as a main improvement of the proposals. Whilst the BCA note that a second access will be provided and that this will be a great improvement for the west side, its location is nevertheless key – it is **not** in an optimum position and this has been covered elsewhere.

In terms of the main access, the BCA although having reservations, welcome the fact that it will be returned to the original location at the end of Midland Road. Nevertheless another entrance is required at the Bromham Road (north) end of the station. Under the current proposals everything is skewed to the south end of the station.

In terms of access to the town Midland Road is key and if it could be pedestrianised or at least traffic-calmed with widened pavements/footways, then it could provide an attractive dedicated route to the town centre. Raised table pedestrian crossings would make access easier for those with mobility issues and be fully DDA compliant. Furthermore, any pedestrian and cycle improvements should be supported by signal-controlled crossing facilities to ensure that all crossings are safe and priority is given to pedestrians and cyclists **rather** than vehicles.

If possible the station should be tied into existing cycle routes around Bedford and this is something that Bedfordshire County Council and Bedford Borough Council can assist in. Secure and safe cycle parking should be provided close to the station entrances. Sustrans & the CTC may also need to be consulted.

In terms of general best practice for station access “London Travel Watch” held a conference about station access last year; this included a forum on best practice. The promoters should refer to the published report as a document of best practice and take on board the main points therein. The BCA are aware that a representative from FCC attended (along with other TOCs) and FCC may be able to supply the promoters with details. There is concern that the proposals as published do not reflect this best practice!

Key Stakeholders – Consultation

In terms of consultation the BCA think that it is important that you hold key stakeholder workshops or meetings. It may be advisable to talk to the three current TOCs at Bedford Station - First Capital Connect (FCC), Stagecoach East Midlands Trains (EMT) and Go-Via London Midland (for the Marston Vale line). Also there a number of local transport and rail users groups mainly the BBRUA and ourselves, as well as a Community Rail Partnership officer for the Marston Vale Line and BABUS representing bus users. All these groups **must** be consulted as a first port of call to represent users/commuters. A meeting should be arranged.

General Points

The BCA are aware that any scheme must pay for itself, however, there are a great number of empty office blocks in Bedford and it may be prudent to check to see if the town requires more office space, retailing, or more housing/flats. Some form of local study to ascertain need may be required if this has not already been carried out by Renaissance Bedford or English Partnerships.

Whilst the Borough's draft 'Local Development Framework' (LDF) states that the main economic driver for the town is the provision of high-class office development and warehousing, nevertheless there is strong evidence of plenty of vacant office development in Bedford already.

In addition as the local planning structure will change with unitary status the effect this may have should be considered at this stage to ensure the project can be delivered, once the changes in responsibility take place.

Yours sincerely,

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on behalf of the BCA.

C.c.

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Renaissance Bedford.

English Partnerships, Milton Keynes Regional Office.

Transport, GO-East, Cambridge.

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Managing Director, First Capital Connect.

Managing Director, Stagecoach East Midlands Trains.

Managing Director, Go-Via London Midland.

Dyan Crowther, Route Director Network Rail.
Head of Stations, Network Rail.
Director General, Rail Freight Group.
Bedford-Bletchley Rail Users Association (BBRUA)
OBRAC.
BR & TA.
BABUS (Bedford Area Bus Users Group)
Community Rail Partnership Officer, Marston Vale Line.
Portfolio Holder, Bedfordshire County Council.
Executive Member responsible for Transport, Bedford Borough Council.

Please reply to: Andrew Long

For more information, see the BCA website - www.bedfordcommuters.org.uk

If there's something you want to tell us about, please email
admin@bedfordcommuters.org.uk

The Bedford Commuters Association Committee comprises : -

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Secretary:	Eva Culleton-Oltay,
Treasurer:	Jim Allwood,
Membership Secretary:	John MacLeod,
Communications:	Andrew Long,

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