

The Proposed Cambridge County Council and Greater Cambridge Partnership Cambourne to Cambridge Transport and Work Act Order - Statement of Case

By Peter Singleton, [REDACTED]

Introduction

I am a resident of Cambridge, living in the western part of Cambridge, frequently walking our dogs in West Fields or cycling to Coton for a pub lunch. This allows me to reflect on similar excursions when I was a student in the early 1970s before the M11 was built and how wonderful it was to be able to enjoy the rolling fields between Coton and Cambridge, as well as discovering the American cemetery for the first time.

While the arrival of the M11 has transformed the economic position of Cambridge (as well as the A14 and improved rail services to London), it is important that we think carefully before simply covering more of the fields with roadways and destroying what makes Cambridge such an attractive place to live.

The original guided (or mis-guided) busway from Huntingdon and St Ives into Cambridge re-used old railway tracks and paralleled the then A14. However, when finished in 2011, it was only 5 years later that the A14 was redeveloped (though only completed in 2022), leaving the original A14 as a perfectly serviceable 'busway' which could have been used instead. This is not an argument for delaying developments (as there has been 10 years use and the track works well within Cambridge and beyond to Addenbrookes), but is a good example of why we need joined-up traffic management planning and not just localised 'fixes'.

The £181m cost of the busway if put into the business plan for the A14 redevelopment might have brought forward the wider scheme and generated far better economic returns with less environmental damage. It might also have left the old railway tracks open for consideration as part of the East-West rail link as well. The same considerations are likely to apply here as well.

Grounds for Objection

Cost of this scheme is disproportionate to benefits likely to arise

The estimated cost of this scheme is given as £160m [1]. The original cost of the Huntingdon busway was estimated at £116m (2001) but rose to £181m (2011)[2] though the actual final cost may be higher still, but is hard to determine because of the final litigation between parties. There is no reason to suppose that there will not be similar cost over-runs on this development.

There were three consultations[3]:

- 2015 consultation – ‘Better bus journeys’ – suggested total cost might be as high as £93m and that bus journeys (C2C) could be cut by 16min.
 - Respondents were only asked about ‘Cambridge’ as a destination – no question as to which part of Cambridge (e.g. West Cambridge which would be well-served by the busway, Science Park to the north or the Addenbrookes/Genomics area to the South, which would probably not benefit any current car-drivers so they would not switch to the bus
 - Most respondents (nearly 60%) objected to the route across West Fields
 - Much has been made of the c.70% in favour ‘in principle’ for ‘better bus journeys’ as though this justified any solution.
- 2017/18 consultation – Phase 1 – concerning the busway across West Fields
 - Introductory text emphasises better bus journey times, the new P&R site, and the so-say ‘high-quality’ walking & cycling facilities – no question of the significant extra (financial and environmental) costs of the possible busway
 - in terms of bus journey time savings there was only 2-3 minutes between the options with no allowance for the additional time that a bus would take to get from the middle of Grange Road back to the Maddingley Road to continue into Cambridge, so no like-for-like comparison
 - only a posited extra 3% of car drivers would switch to bus for the busway
- 2019 consultation – Phase 2 – concerning Cambourne to Maddingley Mulch roundabout

Reading the C2C evaluation of the consultation process[4] shows that the main conclusion was that (p62-63):

The appraisal process prescribes that the options development and evaluation should balance the economic, social, and environmental benefits and costs of the scheme in the broadest sense. The business case process is designed to explore all options from a number of dimensions: strategic, economic, financial, commercial and management. The audit is not in a position to comment on the specifics of the process or the options evaluation, but the evidence from the OBC and supporting documents indicates that the options shortlisted in Phase 1 (Grange Road to Maddingley Mulch roundabout) and Phase 2 (Maddingley Mulch roundabout to Cambourne including Scotland Farm transport hub) followed a robust procedure including consultations with stakeholders, and the option for a segregated busway and the specific alignment, such as parallel to St. Neots Road, was the preferred option that performed best on the evaluation criteria. Clearly, the objectors do not agree with this interpretation and challenge the assumptions and constraints that underpin the scheme and the preferred route option.

So there was a 'robust' consultation process, but it was not a confirmation that the initial criteria were appropriate as a whole. The whole mechanism of 'consultation' was biased in presentational terms towards the most expensive option: the busway across West Fields, even though the purported benefits for this option were minimal at best over the other significantly cheaper options.

Better and cheaper alternative proposals have been put forward by other parties but not given due weight in the consultation process.

Environmental damage caused by the new busway is very high

Others will probably dwell on this point. My main concern is that the busway seems totally unnecessary in terms of the objectives of reducing bus journey times or improving paths for walkers or cyclists. The busway is necessarily the most destructive of the available options with no compensating benefits that I can find.

Busway terminates at Grange Road with no obvious interchange with other forms of transport

There is the implication that the 'U' bus would now run every 10 minutes rather than every 20 minutes or so, but otherwise there seems to be no particular plans to get people from the middle of Grange Road (where the busway will terminate) to any other destination, so the busway will only serve those wishing to get to the University's West Cambridge site. The 'U' bus might be a meaningful option for those wishing to go to Addenbrookes hospital, but would take significant longer than simply driving as they probably do currently.

Otherwise, people would continue to go to the Madingley Road Park & ride to get into central Cambridge – or simply have to drive to get to the more significant business centres of the Science Park to the north of Cambridge or the Biomedical campus and Genome Park to the South.

Moreover, Grange Road is notoriously bad for traffic during peak times because of the private schools and also because of the unfortunate chicane in the middle by Clare Hall (apparently, it was built from North and South at the same time, but missed joining up correctly in the middle by about 6 foot). Having additional buses and cyclists would simply create yet more congestions and delays – wholly offsetting the purported 3 minutes journey time that this busway offers over alternative routings.

This is the most fundamental flaw in the whole scheme and one which the GCP seems to refuse to consider. It merely moves any potential traffic bottleneck, that it is claimed to remove, to Grange Road, where people will still have to wait stuck in traffic.

Suggested benefits to walkers, cyclists, and horse-riders are spurious

There are plenty of walks across the West Fields to and from Coton or Madingley. These were positively delightful during the COVID lock-down as the adverse impact of the M11 was reduced, so walkers will have a greater benefit by not having the busway.

For cyclists there is the existing path/cycleway from Coton to Wilberforce Road, though admittedly it is less easy for them to get from Cambourne to Coton (and hence to Cambridge). However, given the various other 'Greenway' developments to improve cycle paths into Cambridge, it would seem unnecessary to spend an extra £50m just to help cyclists get into Cambridge.

Further the proposed busway would just bring cyclists into Grange Road with the main option being to use Burrells Walk to get into central Cambridge, which is itself narrow, with a particularly small bridge to cross and merging bicycle and pedestrian traffic. The route over Garret Hostel Lane Bridge is difficult for some cyclists because of its steep incline and for all cyclists because tourists are very prone to stop and take selfies at the peak of the bridge, making the route virtually impassable, except with great care and patience. Banning tourists from Cambridge is an attractive idea, but a little beyond the scope of this proposal.

Conclusion

The GCP has simply failed to 'see the wood for the trees'. Their objectives may be worthy and worthwhile, but the proposed busway is simply ineffective at delivering any significant benefits. Other aspects of the overall scheme (e.g. the Scotland Farm P&R) may well deliver most of the benefits but at a far lower cost and a more flexible solution.

Evidence

1. GCP web-site: www.greatercambridge.org.uk/sustainable-transport-programme/public-transport-schemes/cambourne-to-cambridge/cambourne-to-cambridge-about
2. Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cambridgeshire_Guided_Busway
3. GCP C2C Consultation webpage: www.greatercambridge.org.uk/sustainable-transport-programme/public-transport-schemes/cambourne-to-cambridge/cambourne-to-cambridge-consultations-engagement
4. Amey Consulting Consultation Audit report (2024):
www.greatercambridge.org.uk/asset-library/Sustainable-Transport/Public-Transport/Cambourne-to-Cambridge/Independent-Audit/C2C-Independent-Audit-Final.pdf

Objection sent by email on 5th January 2025

I wish to object to the requested TWAO for the Cambourne to Cambridge Busway applied for by Cambridgeshire County Council.

My grounds for objection are:

- the cost of this scheme is disproportionate to the benefit that is likely to arise; the sums involved could be better spent on more limited and focussed interventions. This would seem to be simply a proposal to spend the GCP funds simply because they are there, not because it is an effective use of the funds; better and cheaper alternative proposals have been put forward by other parties but have been ignored by the GCP without any detailed consideration.
- the environmental damage caused by building a new busway across the West Fields and through Cambourne is very high - and could be easily mitigated (and at less cost and time) by improvements to the existing roads from Cambourne into Cambridge. These options have been poorly evaluated using only pessimistic parameters
- The termination of the busway in the middle of Grange Road with no obvious interchange with other forms of transport completely undermines the whole rationale of the scheme. There is no consideration of how potential users would get from Grange Road to their likely ultimate destination - if by bus then they will still experience the likely delays from increased traffic forecast anyway; the original proposal stated that journey times would only be reduced by 3 minutes, which would be lost by having to wait for the U1/2 bus on Grange Road. The strategic case clearly links West of Cambridge developments with the likely job creation to the south of Cambridge, but provides no meaningful solution as to how to get people from Grange Road to the Biomedical Campus in times that match driving by car
- The suggested benefits to walkers, cyclists, and horse-riders are spurious as there are plenty of existing paths which will be more pleasant to use; the existing guided busway from St Ives to Cambridge shows no significant increase in cycle traffic; the GCP is already funding numerous Greenways to promote cycling into Cambridge - without any evidence that there is any meaningful demand for such facilities over current routes.

I should note that I do not object to the creation of a Park & Ride site at Scotland Farm as this should help ease traffic pressures on all westward flows of traffic into Cambridge along the A428 and A1303 - without the need for the new busway itself. This alone would provide much of the benefits anticipated by the wider scheme but at far lower cost.