

Letter from County Councillor John Reynolds November 2010

A14 ON HOLD

Many local residents, the business community and myself have been dismayed at the recent announcement of the cancellation of the proposed A14 Ellington to Fen Ditton Scheme. We need urgent action to explore an alternative scheme to solve the acute problems.

The CHUMMS study made it clear that a multi modal solution is needed for this transport corridor; Guided Busway, rail improvements on the Felixstowe to Nuneaton route and improvements to the A14. The first two of these are well underway and of course efforts to increase the share of movement by public transport and on rail must continue. But the road is the missing piece. The A14 provides an essential corridor for both people and freight and links the east coast ports with the Midlands and the North. The Ellington to Girton section is of particular importance. In addition to its east-west function, it also links the north and midlands with Stansted and London and a wide range of destinations in the South East. As such, it serves a vital local, regional, national and indeed international function.

Whilst I fully appreciate the financial pressures facing the country and the need for deficit reduction, the cancellation of the A14 Scheme puts at risk the very issues that we are all trying to promote – sustainable economic growth and development. It is intrinsically linked to the delivery of the major new development at Northstowe which is a key element of the plans of this area to realise its economic potential. All of the key stakeholders, public and private sector, are clear that something must be done to overcome the problems. Given the cancellation of the existing scheme, I welcome the announcement that there is funding for work to identify cost effective solutions to the problems on the A14. However, we are most concerned to ensure that this happens quickly and identifies a clear and deliverable way forward.

In particular, we are concerned at the suggestion of a further large scale multi modal study. As mentioned above, much information already exists from the CHUMMS study. The most pressing priority is on the Ellington to Girton section where the problem is essentially one of insufficient road capacity and it is unlikely that even significant success in modal shift would address this.

To move this forward, we request an early meeting of key representatives from this area with officials from your department and the Highways Agency. Following that, we suggest the creation of a joint task force, commissioned and overseen by Mike Penning MP, Minister for Strategic Transport, to develop an action plan. This should address the points you made in your recent statement around developing a credible and affordable alternative to the previous A14 scheme, addressing the specific problem of the Huntingdon Viaduct and looking at the extent to which private money could assist. We are clear that a key objective for the task force must be to preserve as much as possible of the design and legal processes of the original scheme to facilitate quick progress.

Immediate action is needed to address the pressing problems of safety and delay on the A14, and separately to ensure that some of the major development sites around Cambridge that already have planning permission can go ahead.

I would like to emphasize that the status quo is unacceptable for all of us, locally, regionally, nationally. Something must be done and soon. For safety reasons, for economic growth, for housing growth, we urge that you respond positively and quickly to what we believe are constructive proposals in this letter and, by setting up a Ministerially commissioned A14 task force, we can collectively put our shoulders to the wheel, business, local and central government; to address one of the most pressing transport problems facing the country.

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COUNCIL TAX FREEZE

Council tax bills will be frozen next year - as a result of a deal struck in the Spending Review. With the Treasury agreeing to set aside an extra £650 million all councils will be able to freeze bills next year - meaning local taxpayers living in an average Band D home in England could save up to £70. Hard working families and pensioners have seen their council tax bills more than double since 1997. But the new Government is standing up for hard-pressed local residents, providing special funding to help councils freeze their bills next year.

Further financial freedoms announced for councils will mean they can better protect frontline services like rubbish collections and care for the elderly. The new Government has already stopped the council tax revaluation which would have led to higher council tax bills over this Parliament for many families. A new grant scheme will be open to all authorities, including police and fire authorities, which decide to freeze their council tax next year. If they do, they will receive additional funding in 2011-12, equivalent to raising their 2010-11 council tax by 2.5 per cent.

BUSES RUN ON FINAL STRETCH OF BUSWAY - BUT STILL WORK TO DO

Buses have completed the first trial run on the final stretch of the Busway track through Trumpington Cutting - which means buses have now run on every section of the route. The first buses have run on the final stretch of the southern section, but there is still work for BAM Nuttall to complete before the route can be handed over to the Council. Buses also carried out preliminary tests on new traffic signals in Trumpington Cutting where buses will switch onto a section of single track guideway.

The Busway is expected to be handed over to the Council in mid-January when the contractors should have completed all the work. BAM Nuttall then has four weeks under the terms of the contract to fix all the notified defects on the project, including the six outstanding issues on the northern section of the route between St Ives and Cambridge. Council bosses are already making plans to fix the defects that have been stopping the Busway from St Ives to Cambridge opening after BAM Nuttall have had the four weeks they are allowed. The cost of rectifying defects will be charged to the contractor. BAM Nuttall was due to complete both sections of the Busway in February 2009 and the Council has deducted damages almost £14,000 each day - a total in excess of £8.3 million so far.

BUS OPERATORS ALSO WANT DEFECTS FIXED BEFORE BUSWAY OPENING

Bus operator want outstanding defects that are stopping buses running between St Ives and Cambridge fixed before the Guided Busway opens so the track does not close again for corrections. But bus operators also reiterated that the outstanding defects that are stopping buses running on the route from St Ives to Cambridge must be rectified before beginning to run services for passengers.

Stagecoach has invested over £3 million in some of the most environmentally friendly buses as we are confident the route will be well used by passengers. But these buses have not been able to be put in use on the route as yet. The parts of the track we have tested so far are of a good standard. BAM Nuttall will continue to be deducted damages of almost £14,000 a day for late delivery until they complete the route. So far over £8 million has been deducted by the Council in damages.

COUNCILLORS BRAND BAM NUTTALL' S EXPLANATIONS AS LAUGHABLE

Council leaders have described statements made by BAM Nuttall as laughable as the contractor's Chief Executive Steve Fox has said the company needs to be told how to fix defective work on the Busway. Defective works include parts of a cycleway that have been built in a drainage ditch so they flood and are impassable for more than half the year, a car park that has been built with a gradient that does not conform with national standards so puddles form when it rains and a leaky bridge.

The latest interview given by Steve Fox where he talked about the notified defects and said" the Council has not clearly demonstrated that they are defects" and "if you tell us what to do we'll even see if we can do it for you ". The Council has clearly indicated to BAM Nuttall why the works are defective and has even given the contractor solutions to deal with the problems. In addition BAM Nuttall told the people of Cambridgeshire in a public statement in April that it was working towards rectifying the six defects.

Any work that does not meet the standards set in the contract is documented by an independent Project Manager and notified to BAM Nuttall and the County Council. The contractor is then responsible for correcting defective work, even if they disagree with the independent assessment. Despite the public statement in April the contractors have made no meaningful progress and are now refusing to correct some defects without being instructed to do so - an order that means paying more to the contractor to correct defective work they built.

The Council has been clear that it is not prepared to accept the route on a 'sold as seen' basis with outstanding liabilities. Opening the route before the defects are corrected would also mean it would need to close again for the work to be carried out.

Busway Q and A

Common questions for CCC following Steve Fox's (BAM Nuttall CEO) interview with the BBC on Tuesday 26 October – broadcast Wednesday 27 October.

Q) Could the Busway between St Ives and Cambridge have opened last year?

A) There are still six outstanding defects on the St Ives to Cambridge stretch, some of which require physical works to correct. If the Council had accepted and opened the route last year it would have been taking it on a 'sold as seen' basis with outstanding long term liabilities. The route would have also needed to close for some of the defects to be corrected which is something that the Council and bus operators do not think is beneficial for bus passengers who would become accustomed to the new service. Accepting the Busway with outstanding defects would be similar to someone buying a new car and driving it away with a dent in the door without saying anything to the salesperson.

Q) What are the defects on the Busway from St Ives to Cambridge?

A) There are six well documented outstanding defects on the St Ives to Cambridge stretch of the Busway. These are:

Maintenance track – some areas of the track have been built at too low level which means rain water collects and floods the maintenance track. These areas of the track need to be raised without affecting the flood balance in the area.

Rubber tyres – an acceptable Fire Risk Assessment and Fire Safety Report is required by the County Council to show the tyres are suitable to be used as fill material between the beams.

Beam expansion gaps – the County Council requires the contractor to show that the gaps between the beams will allow for expansion of the beams during periods of hot weather while still giving a smooth ride for passengers.

St Ives Park & Ride car park – the car park has been built with less than the specified gradient and rain water ponds on the surface of the car park.

Foundations – the County Council requires the contractor to show that the use of shallow pad foundations on some short sections of track where deeper piled foundations were originally planned is appropriate. The County Council needs calculations to show the track will not move over time reducing the ride quality.

River Great Ouse Viaduct – rain water is leaking through an unsealed expansion joint onto the steel below. If this was not fixed now council taxpayers would pick up future bills for additional maintenance costs.

Q) BAM Nuttall has said they do not know what the outstanding defects on the Busway are?

A) This is complete nonsense. The independent Project Manager notifies both the contractor and the Council if any of the work does not meet the specifications set in the contract. For example, in the contract it states that water must not collect in pedestrian areas of car parks. By definition the surface of a car park is a pedestrian area and as puddles form on the surface of the car park the contractor has been notified in writing by the Project Manager that it is defective. In all the cases where work does not meet the specifications set in the contract the contractor has been notified in the correct manner and it is clear what the defects are. The contractor even put out a public statement in April saying they would rectify the defects so they knew then what the problems were.

Q) Who is responsible for making sure the work meets the standards set in the contract?

A) The contractor is responsible for designing and building each part of the route to the required standards set in the contract. They submit their design to the Council for acceptance, but are still responsible making sure what is built on site meets the set standards. The contractor does not have authority to vary from the standards set unless the Council gives them documented permission, known as a 'Departure from Standard'. A Departure has not been given to BAM Nuttall for any of the six outstanding defective works and they do not meet the standards set in the contract. All the Council is therefore asking them to do is meet their responsibilities under the terms of the contract.

Q) BAM Nuttall has said that CCC has accepted their designs for the works that are defective – is this true?

A) CCC has not accepted BAM Nuttall's designs for the defective works. In the case of the maintenance track and the shallow foundations BAM Nuttall proceeded to build in full knowledge that their designs had not been accepted – therefore proceeding at risk. The narrow joints and River Great Ouse viaduct defects are a result of the contractor not building the works in accordance with the design they submitted. What they have built does not meet the specification set.

When BAM Nuttall submitted their design for the St Ives Park & Ride car park they were warned of the risks they were taking in reducing the gradient, but the contractor was confident they could build a car park with a gentle gradient that still drained properly. The principle of using shredded rubber tyres to help drain the track is sound, but as yet the contractor has not provided an acceptable Risk Assessment and Fire Safety Report through the contract. This is standard practice and the defect cannot be closed without the documentation which acts as a guarantee.

Q) The contractor has said if you instruct them to carry out work to correct defects they will do them – is this a sensible option so the route can open?

A) BAM Nuttall is responsible for making sure all the works meet the standards set in the contract and do not need a formal 'instruction' to correct defects. This is not necessary as they should correct notified defects. Issuing an instruction to the contractor could have significant contractual consequences and might mean the Council would pay the contractor more. If they do correct the defects the Council can step in four weeks after the contract is completed and carry out the necessary work. The cost of the defect corrections would be charged to the contractor.

Q) Should you tell BAM Nuttall how to correct the defects as they have said they will correct them if you do?

A) The Council has clearly indicated to BAM Nuttall why the works are defective and has even given the contractor solutions to deal with the problems. The contractor also put out a public statement in April saying they would rectify the defects so they knew then what the problems were. There is nothing standing in their way if they wanted to correct what are relatively straightforward problems.

Q) Are we correct to deduct financial damages from BAM Nuttall – they have suggested they do not agree with these deductions?

A) It is clearly stated in the contract that the Council will deduct damages of almost £14,000 a day if BAM Nuttall do not complete the contract on time. These damages are in lieu of the Council not having use of the asset. This is fairly standard in building contracts and should be an incentive for the contractor to finish the job on time. By the end of the project it is expected that in the region of £9 million in damages will have been deducted from BAM Nuttall for late delivery.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR LOW CARBON BUILDING ON THE BUSWAY

Cambridgeshire has banked £430,000 of Government funding for a new exhibition space and passenger building at the Busway Park & Ride site in Longstanton. The low carbon building will have a ground source heat pump for environmentally friendly heating and hot water, top specification insulation made of natural materials on the roof and walls, and there are plans for solar panels to generate electricity.

The new building will have a learning and exhibition centre to showcase low carbon living and environmentally friendly initiatives to encourage local residents to go green in their own homes. It will also include toilets for bus users and office space for park and ride staff. Once complete the centre will help set a benchmark for low carbon properties on the proposed new town of Northstowe. Funding for the building has been awarded to Cambridgeshire County Council following a bid to Government in partnership with Cambridgeshire Horizons and South Cambridgeshire District Council.

The building will be an asset for passengers on The Busway, local communities who can learn more about low carbon construction and renewable energy and will set a benchmark for what can be achieved in Northstowe. The County Council and partners have always fought hard for the funding Cambridgeshire deserves and this will help the development of one of Cambridgeshire's newest communities. This new exhibition space will provide us with a unique opportunity to showcase low carbon living to the future residents of Northstowe, before the town is built. We are keen to encourage a more environmentally friendly way of living within the new town, to compliment a range of low carbon technologies and sustainable transport options that will be available to local residents.

MULTI-MILLION POUND ACCESS ROAD TO HOSPITAL OPENED

A new £25 million road which will link major new developments and the internationally recognised Addenbrooke's Hospital directly to Trumpington / M11, opened last month. The road provides a vital link to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus (CBC) which is home to Addenbrooke's and the Rosie hospitals as well as research and teaching partners including the MRC, CRUK and the University of Cambridge. It will also help with the expansion of CBC into an international centre for patient care, biomedical research and healthcare education and will unlock land for major housing developments in the area around Clay Farm and Glebe Farm.