

Submission by the Chair of the A428 Local Liaison Forum, for the Cambourne to Cambridge Phase 2 public consultation.

Helen Bradbury, March 8 2019

Summary:

The A428 Local Liaison Forum, established to advise on the Cambourne to Cambridge Busway project, is not scheduled to meet before the close of the Phase 2 consultation period, and therefore cannot provide a submission relating to the specific proposals laid out in the current consultation. Each individual parish will therefore be providing individual submissions.

However, the Local Liaison Forum did meet in November 2018, and concluded that, given greater clarity on several major, and potentially complementary, transport schemes will soon be forthcoming - including the Oxford/Cambridge Expressway, the upgrade of the Girton Interchange, the East/West Rail link and the CAM Metro Scheme – an immediate decision on the Cambourne to Cambridge busway alignment would seem unwise. Any of the above schemes could provide significant opportunity for synergies and better connectivity west of the city which are likely to render the Cambourne to Cambridge busway an expensive white elephant.

It was therefore concluded the most sensible form of action was to deliver a ‘quick win’ on existing infrastructure. An in-bound bus lane on the A1303, as far as the West Cambridge site with optimised signalling beyond, would provide commuters with significant journey time and reliability benefits now. These could suffice for 5-10 years whilst the large, strategic schemes develop. (See Resolution 3 below: passed unopposed).

Looking longer term, given the Oxford/Cambridge Expressway is likely to be constructed, with an upgrade to the Girton Interchange a likely corollary, the LLF would like to see a northern ‘Girton’ route developed, which would provide better connectivity to key destinations including the Science Park and Cambridge Biomedical Campus and NW Cambridge site. (See resolution 2 below; passed unanimously).

Ongoing concerns raised of the Local Liaison Forum about the C2C scheme

(i) It does not effectively serve commuters from Cambourne and Bourn

The Coalition of 23 Parish Councils West of Cambridge has undertaken several surveys on where people work. They show that only a very small proportion of commuters can benefit from this scheme, despite its hefty cost. Once all the ‘City deal’ money is spent on the Busway, the LLF is concerned that little further will be done to alleviate congestion for the vast majority of commuters who cannot benefit from this scheme.

(ii) Connectivity to key employment sites is poor

The LLF has repeatedly raised concerns about the poor connectivity of the Busway to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus, the Science Park and the City Centre, and that these connections are potentially better made on road, or via an alternative northern route. Whilst there is support, in principle, for tunnels, there is concern about their deliverability. The LLF believes there needs to be a greater degree of certainty about CAM before this route can be endorsed.

Resolution 1: passed unanimously

The LLF recommends that no decision be taken on a preferred route until greater clarity on CAM is provided: the proposed network, connectivity and funding. As it currently stands, this off-line bus road, with its poor connectivity to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus, Science Park and the City Centre; its poor transport benefits and low BCR, does not stand up to scrutiny.

(iii) The transport benefits of the off-road scheme do not justify the £154m. price-tag

Journey times: The LLF Technical Group calculates that the difference in journey time between on-road and off-road would be no more than 5 minutes, even at peak time. More importantly, journey times from Cambourne to Addenbrookes or the Science Park remain unclear, as onward routes from Grange Road are still undefined. It is conceivable, however, that an on-road route, or a northern route via Girton, would be faster to these key employment destinations, as both have easier access to rapid onward routes (e.g. M11). Greater clarity is required urgently.

Benefit Cost Ratio: The scheme has a BCR one tenth of that normally expected of public transport schemes. This is very poor.

Modal shift: GCP calculates a 3% increase in bus usage; 1% increase in walking; no change in cycling. These figures are very low given the huge cost.

The Wider Economic Benefits: The off-road scheme apparently provides half a billion more in Wider Economic Benefits than on-road alternative, despite offering no material benefit in journey time, patronage or modal shift. The LLF questions the validity of these calculations and assumptions.

(iv) The environmental assessments are considered flawed

The recent Mott MacDonald report, produced on behalf of the GCP in November 2018, concludes that an on-road route would be more damaging to ecology and the environment than a 5km new busway across Madingley Rise and through the West Fields. The LLF believes this assessment to be flawed, based on a poor understanding of the importance of the wider landscape to the setting of the city. Moreover the Natural England advice to the GCP, quoted in the report, was far more nuanced than reported, and that it has been selectively used to support the conclusions reached.

The LLF also remains concerned about the lack of heritage assessment beyond Grange Road, vital for the built heritage preservation of the city, and requests that GCP commission independent environmental and heritage assessments, and that they be completed before the full EIA and HIA at planning stage.

Suggested next steps

(i) Develop a northern 'Girton' route

The LLF believes there are major advantages in developing a northern off-road route, not only in terms of better connectivity to key employment sites, but also in order to futureproof the scheme.

Resolution 2: passed unanimously

The LLF notes that the GCP only has one route that is now compliant with CAM. We therefore ask that a northern off-road comparator be developed, for which there could be major advantages. It could better connect with the Oxford Cambridge Expressway and developments at the Girton Interchange in the longer term, but could link with the Science Park, Cambridge Biomedical Campus and the NW Cambridge site now.

(ii) Deliver a 'quick win' on existing infrastructure

The LLF considers the most sensible immediate way forward would be to build a simple, low-cost bus lane on Madingley Road, costing <£10 million, and then wait a couple of years to see what develops around the Girton Interchange and the CAM Metro Scheme.

Resolution 3: passed by majority, 2 abstentions

Given the likely lengthy timescale involved in building any off-road C2C scheme, not least because of the new CAM compliancy brief, the LLF recommends that an in-bound bus lane be designed on Madingley Road now. This will provide significant public transport benefit to the residents west of Cambridge, and can be undertaken immediately.

This would deliver significant journey time and reliability improvements, and for commuters west of the city, could be undertaken with immediate effect, and would suffice for a 5-10 year period whilst the larger, more strategic, schemes take shape.

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