

'Misguided, Bust' - but due to open this month

World's Longest White Elephant (well, half of it) limps into service two years late and massively over budget

The Cambridgeshire Guided Bus system - given the catchy official name The Busway by promoters Cambridgeshire County Council - is due to open on 29th November.

Roy Pegram, county councillor for growth, infrastructure and strategic planning, claims that there will be an average of 10,000 passenger journeys per weekday in the first year and that there will 'never be a delay on the guided sections'.

However the story behind the project has been - and continues to be - a catalogue of spin, hype, planning failure and PR disasters. Opponents of the scheme have grave doubts about its future success and viability.

"By the time the scheme is fully completed as far as Trumpington Park & Ride and Addenbrookes Hospital, it is likely to be three to four years late and will probably have cost over three times as much as the figure used to promote it to the public in 2003", says Tim Phillips, chairman of CAST.IRON, who campaigned for the railway to be reopened and were the principal objectors at the Busway Public Inquiry.

"Incredibly, despite all this time and money, the journey from Cambridge City Centre to St Ives centre will be longer via the busway, both in terms of time and of distance."

As a result of three main issues, the County Council was complicit in forcing the scheme ahead against overwhelming public opposition:

- A 'rapid transit' scheme was a government requirement before the development of the new town of Northstowe.
- A government select committee had already stated in 2000 that it wanted to see bus-based 'demonstration schemes' to compare costs with tram- or rail-based options.
- The fragmented UK rail industry completely failed to make a case for the reopening of the mothballed but viable railway.

The history of the scheme has turned these aspects on their heads:

- The work on Northstowe has stalled indefinitely with nothing built as yet.
- Cost escalations on the busway have taken the budget way beyond reopening the railway.
- A similar rail route at Ebbw Vale was reopened for £30 million while ATOC (the Association of Train Operating Companies) costed reinstatement of the 12-mile March - Wisbech line at £12 million.

"At every level and in every detail the misguided bus scheme has been a failure so far, so its prospects for operational success are slim", said Mr Phillips. "I firmly believe its promoters will be forced into ever higher levels of spin and hype to claim the system is viable. In the absence of industry support, CAST.IRON may have failed to win the case for rail - but we are not going to let the forces of political and career ambition disguise the truth behind the busway's eventual operation".

A catalogue of misinformation and failure...

Cost

Advertised during 'consultation'	Promoted in advance of Public Inquiry	Given to Inquiry Inspector	Approved by Government after Inquiry	Current estimate	Final outturn
£65 million	£75 million	£86 million	£116.5 million	£150 million	Secret?

Opening Date

Advertised during 'consultation'	Claimed at Inquiry	Cambridge-St Ives Opens	Station to Addenbrookes	Station to Trumpington
2007/2008	Spring 2009	Late November 2009	2010?	2011?

Promoters Cambridgeshire County Council promised the whole scheme would be opened at the same time.

Journey Times, Cambridge centre to St Ives centre

Conventional service (current)	Via Busway
31 – 32 mins	35 – 36 mins

Journey Mileage, Cambridge centre to St Ives centre

Conventional service (current)	Via Busway
16 miles	18.5 miles

Traffic reduction on A14, Cambridge to St Ives (based on promoter's own figures):

Peak hours, cars	Peak hours, goods vehicles	Off-peak hours, cars	Off-peak hours, goods vehicles
2%	0%	Irrelevant	0%

Look what CAST.IRON told the public in 2004 at <http://www.castiron.org.uk/docs/SpotTheDifference.pdf>

Competition

Advertised during 'consultation'	Claimed at Inquiry	At opening
Consortium including County Council operating all services. Declared illegal.	Four operators	Two operators: Stagecoach operating brand new buses on one in four services on busway, Whippet operating adapted existing vehicles and offering no competition to Huntingdon

Ticket availability

Claimed at Inquiry	At opening
One ticket, one price for four operators	Separate tickets, different prices for two operators

Service frequency at Science Park

Claimed at Inquiry	At opening
Up to 20 per hour (every three minutes)	Three per hour (every 20 minutes)

Public support for guided bus

	Letter writers in local press	Public Inquiry	Petition	'Consultation' – of those who expressed a preference
For	1. James Strachan 2. Alan Shepherd 3. Colin Barker 4. County Council promoters 5. One or two others 6. Err... 7. That's it	4	-	33% for bus-based system
Against	Scores of separate contributors	2,751	3,800	67% for rail-based system

Journey times compared with rail

	Science Park to City Centre	St Ives to London	Northstowe to Stansted A/P	Science Park to Station
Via Guided Bus	15-20 minutes, street running throughout	100 mins	70 mins	20-25 minutes through City Centre
Via Rail	15-20 minutes: 4-6 mins to station then 11-14 mins bus to centre	70 mins	50 mins	4-6 minutes avoiding City Centre

Other comparisons with rail

	Maximum unbroken journey segregated from road traffic	Capacity per journey	Rescue of failed vehicle	Freight journeys
Guided Bus	11 miles	70 per bus	Using special vehicle on parallel service road; other buses on guideway trapped	None
Rail	Unlimited in mainland UK and Europe	240 per four-car unit	Push or tow from either direction and/or divert to other line	Subject only to capacity

Additional benefits and facilities

Claimed at Inquiry	At opening
Heated waiting room and facilities, St Ives P&R	One bus shelter
Heated waiting room and facilities, Longstanton P&R	One bus shelter
Parallel bridleway	Equestrian organisations advise proximity of fast buses make it dangerous to use
Parallel cycleway and footpath	Incomplete, unlit for long stretches
Swavesey 'Kiss and Ride'	Abandoned
Low emission buses	Can be used on conventional services regardless of busway
Leather seats, Wi-Fi, Air Cooling	Can be used on conventional services regardless of busway
Through services to Trumpington P&R and Addenbrookes	Southern section not built; services terminating in city centre
Through services beyond Huntingdon to Hinchinbrooke Hospital	Abandoned

Pollution and disruption

- Months of major works on Hills Road Bridge caused major delays, congestion and loss of earnings for road users.
- Road closures and construction fencing created losses for businesses in Histon/Impington and elsewhere and diverted road traffic over many weeks. No compensation offered.
- Total mass of concrete for guideway: 100,000 tonnes. Carbon emissions for concrete manufacture: 70%. Therefore 70,000 tonnes of carbon emitted plus associated emissions from construction transport.
- Between the Science Park, the city centre and Cambridge station, buses are un-guided and join all other conventional traffic. This will spread passenger loadings over more vehicles and slow all traffic, thereby adding pollution.
- Through journeys to Cambridge station take passengers unnecessarily through the city centre.

A note on usage, travel mode and cost benefit

Roy Pegram, county councillor for growth, infrastructure and strategic planning, claims that there will be 3 million passenger journeys in the first year (Cambridge News, 16/6/09). This equates to 10,000 per weekday (5,000 Saturdays and 2,500 Sundays). The public inquiry was told the daily figure would be 20,000 once Northstowe was built. Northstowe's maximum population is planned to be 24,000.

At present, the guideway primarily serves journeys from Huntingdon, St Ives and their hinterland settlements, plus A14 corridor villages to the north of the A14. Destinations will be Histon, Regional College, Science Park and City Centre. The combined population of these settlements is 50,000 to 60,000.

Observed current loadings on existing conventional services suggest 500 - 1,000 inbound passenger journeys in the peak and 250 - 500 at the 'shoulder' for shoppers and leisure. Allowing for all-day use, it is reasonable to estimate the current maximum number of journeys in a single direction at 2,000, equating to 4,000 passenger return journeys per working day. These figures would be halved on Saturdays and at least quartered on Sundays.

Councillor Pegram's suggestion is therefore that the provision of the guided bus will multiply the current weekday usage by 150% from day one, presumably by a) tempting people out of their cars and/or b) creating new journey opportunities.

Very few of those currently using cars in the peak will be heading for the city centre, since this is largely impractical already. Therefore those journeys will simply be abstracted from existing bus services and make no difference.

As the journey time for most purposes is no faster via the guideway, all but the peak journeys will derive no benefit from it. This is unlikely to tempt any significant numbers from their cars - and any encouragement from leather seats, Wi-Fi or air cooling could be provided on conventional routes anyway.

In summary, the vast majority of journeys on the guideway are likely to be abstractions from existing bus journeys. The congestion benefit on the A14 will be marginal as only one conventional bus will be removed per 50 - 70 passengers per peak journey. Congestion will be slightly eased in Cambridge on the Huntingdon Road but will be made correspondingly worse where the buses run un-guided on normal roads from the Science Park to the city centre.

Therefore even if the figure of 10,000 is achieved, which is in any case almost unbelievable, the vast majority will be existing bus users and new journeys not previously made in the first place (including free bus-pass holders). There will be no noticeable reduction of traffic on the A14.

And even if Northstowe is eventually built to maximum planned numbers, it really is beyond belief that a 40% (24,000) addition to the catchment population will result in a 100% (10,000) increase in guided bus usage. That's over 40% of Northstowe's population using the busway every weekday.

Even if this was the case, how is this reflected in the cost-benefit calculations?

Here are the principal factors:

- 1 Reduction in congestion on A14 - negligible.
- 2 Reduction in pollution from car use - negligible.
- 3 Reduction in journey times – none, except for some peak hour services resulting (unpredictably) from delays on the A14 and journeys made wholly within the guideway (St Ives P&R to the Science Park).

Using a very *generous* factor of £1 per passenger cost-benefit for time saved on peak-hour and busway-only journeys and allowing generously for half of the *unbelievable* figure of 20,000 journeys per day on those journeys, *five* days a week, the accruing benefit is £10,000 per weekday or £2.61 million per year.

Even if the guideway *remained on budget* at £116.5 million, with a design life of 25 years and *before even considering* interest on the capital or depreciation of the assets, the cost of construction is £4.66 million per year.

Statistics used – note for editors

Throughout this article, we have tried to be as generous as possible to the promoters of the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway. Common sense alone would suggest that the case for the busway is considerably worse than that portrayed here. To demonstrate this, we summarise hereunder how we have arrived at current conventional bus usage:

There are 11 peak time bus services arriving in Cambridge between 0733 and 0943 (this is a very generous definition of the peak). For there to be 1,000 journeys, each bus would have to carry 91 passengers, which is clearly impossible. Recent observations and actual journeys taken on these services suggest average loadings of 50, which suggests peak period arrivals of 550.

There will be other journeys from intermediate villages served by other routes but clearly the maximum cannot possibly exceed 1,000 in the peak.

Equally clearly, inbound numbers for the rest of the day including evening leisure trips cannot possibly exceed the peak total – simple observation of sample bus loadings on the A14 at various times of the day confirms this.

CAST.IRON (the Cambridge And ST Ives Railway OrganisatioN) will be secretly monitoring conventional and guided journey times and passenger numbers regularly once the busway is open. Email chairman@castiron.org.uk during office hours in the first instance for all communications (include a direct telephone number) or call 07768 845950.