



Probe into guided bus is rejected

THERE will be no public inquiry into the guided busway fiasco – despite calls from opposition leaders on Cambridgeshire County Council.

Shire Hall bosses have rebuffed calls for a full probe into the construction of the track between Cambridge and St Ives, which is millions of pounds over budget and still has no opening date.

The battle over the bill looks set to end up with the county council and contractor BAM Nuttall fighting it out in court.

Cllr Nichola Harrison, the opposition Liberal Democrats' environment spokeswoman, asked council leader Cllr Jill Tuck if she would be launching a public inquiry at the authority's annual meeting.

Cllr Tuck replied: "The answer to that is no."

Cllr Harrison fears taxpayers could lose tens of millions of pounds in a protracted legal dispute.

■ CHRIS HAVERGAL
Local government correspondent

After the meeting, she said: "Cllr Tuck had no compunction in flatly refusing a public inquiry.

"The Tories have handled this whole situation badly from the outset and left taxpayers vulnerable to picking up the massive bill.

"Residents should be given the chance to ask questions of this administration and we should be given the chance to get to the bottom of what went wrong.

"Without scrutinising this whole affair openly and transparently we cannot ensure that it never happens again."

Yesterday, the *News* revealed how construction chiefs had admitted they will not be able to announce an opening date until July "at the earliest", with work on six defects that have been identified

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progressing slowly.

The council initially set aside £116 million for the busway, with about £87 million of that to go to BAM Nuttall.

But the final project cost is currently expected to hit £161 million, and the council will have to try to claw back about £50 million from the contractor, while facing an extra bill of about £4 million itself.

BAM Nuttall believes much of the additional expenditure should be met by the council and official documents say litigation is "inevitable".

Last night, Cllr Tuck said: "We always review our major projects once they have been completed and this project will certainly be no different.

"A full public inquiry is not necessary, but as we have said before we will fully assess how the contract has worked and identify any lessons that can be learned for us and others who will use this standard civil engineering contract in the future.

"The contract with



BAM Nuttall is robust and is used by many other organisations building projects of this size.

"Under the terms of the contract, the lion's share of any overspend falls to the contractor. The council only picks up a small proportion, which has been budgeted for."

The Government would have the power to order an inquiry into the project.

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Should there be a public inquiry into the guided bus scheme?

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