

Letters

WRITE TO
 Letters to the Editor,
 Cambridge News,
 Winship Road, Milton,
 Cambridge CB24 6PP

Direct route is beside the A14

IT IS perhaps time to take a mature step back and reflect on why the

Cambridgeshire guided busway was so fundamentally flawed before the first sod was turned.

The scheme has required an unprecedented level of design and engineering input since no-one has ever before laid thousands of stiff, heavy concrete beams on a soggy fen and expected them to stay true to within a few millimetres. This has required, for example, sinking of over 2,000 deep piles and the construction of massive, expensive and unique machinery. There is simply no comparison with any other busway and credit is due to the design and construction teams.

However, it can never open up new benefits for the greater good because the rural, out-of-the-way route does not closely mirror local traffic flows.

Supporters of the scheme have consistently argued it is flexible because "it goes where people want to go". In reality, it does precisely the opposite; to benefit from the guideway requires considerable diversion from the optimal route for almost all journeys.

In order to get to St Ives and Huntingdon, a bus from Cambridge city centre has to travel about two miles along congested roads in the wrong direction before accessing the busway at Milton Road. In all that time, passengers much beyond the Science Park are getting no closer to their destination. That is why the overall journey time is longer than via the A14, the most direct route.

This fact itself must astonish anyone who thought using the railway route for buses was ever a good idea.

Allowing for Northstowe being some distance from the A14, the situation is marginally better; but there is still no overall advantage compared with conventional bus routes.

The solution is, of course, glaringly obvious. If the underlying advantage of a guided busway is greater speed and safety for local journeys along a narrower corridor, then a guideway should be constructed alongside the improved A14. This would be much cheaper and would provide flexibility.

Sadly, the opportunity to reopen the railway to the station and for longer and more varied journeys (without the

need for all that expensive piling and concrete) has now been lost. I condemn absolutely the council's politicians and officers who blindly pursued this scheme. It shows monumentally poor judgment and understandably, there are growing calls for their resignations.

For the record, I condemn in equal measure the current Government for pursuing this experiment and its failure to recognise the fundamental flaws of a "public inquiry" where over £2 million of its own money was used to argue the case for this truly disastrous mistake in the face of such substantial and well-considered opposition.

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