

## **A14 Challenge**

### **Response on behalf of Old Chesterton Residents' Association (OCRA)**

#### **Back ground to this submission**

1. Old Chesterton Residents' Association (OCRA) was formed nearly twenty years ago to make collective comments on behalf of residents of Old Chesterton on planning and highways matters. During that period there have been extensive redevelopments in Old Chesterton as former industrial buildings have given way to housing.
2. One of the issues we have been working on since 2006 is the need to improve access to and services into Chesterton Fen, an area that lies partly within Cambridge and partly in Milton parish in South Cambridgeshire. Chesterton Fen is home to a large and growing traveller community whose major industries are landscape gardening and sorting waste materials for recycling. In addition there are a number of long-established businesses affording a variety of employment opportunities. These all give rise to significant traffic movements which have to use a single rural road, a level crossing on a busy main line railway and residential streets of East Chesterton to go about their lawful occasions. This traffic includes skip lorries and other heavy goods vehicles.
3. In discussions with the settled community in Chesterton Fen we have identified a need for a new road access that avoids the level crossing and enables vehicles to access Milton Road without having to go all round the houses to get there. We are also aware that with more intense use of the railway the periods during which the level crossing is closed to road traffic are increasing and we expect this closure time to increase as and when Chesterton Station is built. We already know that some users of the crossing indulge in very risky behaviour in their desire to 'beat the lights' or use the outside lane to overtake traffic waiting at the closed crossing gate. It is only a matter of time before there is a serious accident at the crossing that closes the railway and road for an extended period
4. Whilst there is an acceptance by local members and officers of the highway authority, Cambridgeshire County Council, that a new access is highly desirable they take the view that it cannot command a high priority given the demands on limited budgets for highways improvements in Cambridgeshire as a standalone project. In the recent bid to the Transport Innovation Fund there was a proposal to extend the Guided Busway across Chesterton Fen and the River Cam into the eastern part of Cambridge. OCRA made representations that if such an extension were approved the bridge carrying the buses over the railway should be made available to all traffic as a permanent solution to the access problem at Chesterton Fen.
5. When the Ellington to Fen Ditton Trunk Road proposals were produced the Chesterton Fen traveller community came up with the idea that when the bridges over the river and railway were widened that there should be an additional widening of the railway bridge to provide a new access into Chesterton Fen to produce an effective long-term solution to their access problem.

#### **The A14 and Chesterton**

6. The A14 Cambridge northern bypass is a noisy neighbour but otherwise not a problem when traffic is running smoothly. Unfortunately it is subject to frequent disruption necessitating the use of the City as the prime diversion route to get around the problem if it occurs between

Girton and Quy interchanges. Chesterton tends to take the full impact of diversionary traffic as drivers attempt to find a way though and find that ultimately all roads lead to the same very small area of the City. Chesterton residents therefore have a strong interest in ending this situation.

### **The A14 Challenge**

7. We have studied the documents accompanying the A14 Challenge and accept the analysis of Chapter 6: Developing Key Challenges of the Steer Davies Gleave report. We note that the former proposals to improve the A14 were abandoned on grounds of cost. OCRA would wish to make the point that the toll of death, injury and delays arising since 1994, when the inadequacies of the A14 first became apparent with the opening of the A1-M1 link, has far exceeded the costs of dealing with the problem.
8. We note that a large part of the problem on the section passing by Cambridge is that it is acting as both a through route and a local distributor road. We think the simplest solution would be to separate the two functions permanently and at a stroke remove the hazard caused by impatient motorists weaving from lane to lane as they use the A14 to pass from one junction to another.

### **Separating local traffic**

7. We note that the abandoned plans provided for a three lane dual carriageway between Fen Ditton and Bar Hill with the Girton interchange being remodelled to allow through traffic to pass smoothly through this section from east to west and merge with traffic from the M11. We suggest that this basic plan should be modified by:
  - retaining the A14 as a two lane dual carriageway and removing access to it from the existing junctions at Fen Ditton, Milton and Histon;
  - creating a two lane local traffic Service Road alongside it between Fen Ditton and the Girton interchange;
  - creating a link from High Ditch Road to the point at which the local traffic service Road starts at Fen Ditton; and
  - remodelling the Girton interchange as originally proposed with the local service road joining the A1307 at Girton.
8. We consider that this would improve traffic flow along the A14 by eliminating the disruptive effects of local traffic entering and leaving it. In the event of an accident the local service road would provide a preferred alternative route for most users. We consider that the closure of the local access points would result in minimal increases in traffic on the radial routes into Cambridge as some drivers would use alternative routes to pick up access to the A14.
9. This would not be a cheap solution but would have the great merit of addressing a number of problems simultaneously and eliminating several triggers for serious accidents that are inherent in the present road layout.

### **The Local Service Road**

10. The Service Road would start at the Quy junction where westbound traffic for Cambridge would leave the A14 and follow the A1303 as now to High Ditch Road where traffic for the

north of the City would branch off to take the Service Road. We envisage some new road building being necessary to skirt the centre of Fen Ditton.

11. From Fen Ditton the Service Road would run along the south side of the A14 to the Milton interchange with the bridges over the river and railway being widened accordingly. Where it crosses Chesterton Fen we envisage a link to Chesterton Fen Road to provide a permanent alternative access to Chesterton Fen. We would not expect this road to carry other than local traffic as the continuing operation of the level crossing and Access Only signage should prove sufficient to deter rat-runners. This section could also provide a link to the Guided Busway from the eastern part of the city.
12. From the Milton interchange to Histon interchange the road would continue to run on the south side of the A14 to provide a 'buffer' for the new developments on Orchard Park and probably reduce the impact of reflected noise on the residents of Impington and Histon. We do not envisage any other links being made on to this section of the road.
13. At the Histon interchange the Service Road would switch to the north side of the A14 to facilitate its linkage to the A1307 at Girton before merging with the A14 northbound. Access to the A428 could be by a link at Girton or via the Oakington interchange.

#### **Cost of the Proposals**

14. We are not in a position to cost our proposal but would envisage it being close to the costs for the originally proposed works on the Cambridge northern bypass plus the addition of the new road to the east of Fen Ditton. The main benefit of our proposal comes from the segregation of local traffic from through traffic at a critical junction of the A14 with the M11 and A428 and more effective use of the limited width available on the line of the A14 north of Cambridge. We think it will lead to slight reductions in journey times on radial routes in and out of Cambridge during peak hours. The loss of the three access points to the A14 will cause some minor inconvenience and lead to slightly longer journey times off peak but with improved traffic flow during most of the day there will be significant improvements in overall journey times and a significant reduction in air pollution from slow moving or stationary traffic.

#### **Lane Discipline**

15. Retaining the A14 as a two lane dual carriageway loses the principal benefit of the original proposals for a three lane dual carriageway, the third lane for light vehicles. Regular users of the A14 know that one of its greatest frustrations is the rolling roadblocks caused by HGVs inching past each other effectively reducing the speed limit from 70 mph to 55 for most of the day. By restricting slower vehicles and all HGVs to the near side lane, as is the case in many European countries, this source of delay can be eliminated. The need for this long-overdue rule will be greater if there is an increase in the maximum speed limit for dual carriageways as is currently being suggested.

Report compiled by Michael Bond on behalf of OCRA.

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