

A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon Improvement Scheme

**These notes are a summary of the CTC Cambridge oral submission
as presented to the Issue Specific Hearing held on September 16 2015**

OPENING COMMENTS

I want to try and persuade you that this A14 project can and should include more and better NMU provision. The project as it stands has some good elements which are welcome, but there are too many missed opportunities. The costs of creating a better legacy for NMU are relatively small – I estimate that adding all of the NMU improvements that I have proposed would amount to less than 1% of the total budget.

I recognise that there are limitations on the NMU provisions. There are limitations for cost reasons and for engineering reasons. But I argue that the biggest limitation on good quality provision is the lack of national mandatory standards. We are missing a UK version of the widely acclaimed Dutch CROW manual (record 25).

Instead, we have to live with non-statutory recommendations for NMU infrastructure, supplemented by some encouraging words from the Department of Transport. For example the recent National Policy Statement for National Networks (Department of Transport; 2014) section 3.17 states:

*3.17 There is a direct role for the national road network to play in helping pedestrians and cyclists. The Government expects applicants to use reasonable endeavours to address the needs of cyclists and pedestrians in the design of new schemes. **The Government also expects applicants to identify opportunities to invest in infrastructure in locations where the national road network severs communities and acts as a barrier to cycling and walking, by correcting historic problems, retrofitting the latest solutions and ensuring that it is easy and safe for cyclists to use junctions.** [bold emphasis added]*

In my understanding, Highways England is required to adopt the principles of cycle proofing – a higher requirement than the local authorities. But this requirement is undermined by the absence of appropriate national design standards and a lack of mandatory requirements to ensure that the NMU elements are comprehensive and are designed and built to a high enough standard.

HE appear to unwilling to consider any significant changes to the NMUJ elements that are already included in their plans. It seems that HE feel that they have “done enough” to satisfy the rather vague DfT statement calling for “reasonable endeavours. I disagree.

I am therefore asking this inquiry to require a series of improvements to the NMU provision in this A14 scheme. I have suggested that this can be done by adding a series of NMU conditions on any consent – i.e. giving consent with conditions. I understand that the DCO process is designed to expedite the process of public inquiry into national infrastructure projects. But I hope that the panel will also play a more effective role by using their powers to fill the regulatory gap in NMU provision: namely to impose conditions on the project and help to create a better level of provision for NMUs.

I will focus on three different NMU topics to illustrate the sort of consent conditions that I am requesting. The panel will be aware that CTC and several NMU organisations have all submitted written comments. My words reflect my priorities on behalf of the CTC membership and as such these are just my priorities. The selected conditions should, of course, represent the best of all those submissions.

FIRST TOPIC – NMU routes north of Cambridge

There is a clear desire line for NMUs along the line of the A14 north of Cambridge to connect Girton to Histon and Histon to Milton. This matches a motor vehicle desire line – many motorists use the A14 for local journeys along this route as a more direct link and to avoid congestion on the city roads.

The A14 is not a motorway and hence cyclists can legally use the A14. But it cannot be considered as either a reasonable or safe cycle route. It will become a very busy 4-lane dual carriageway with over 100k vehicles per day and a high percentage of HGVs.

I have therefore argued that the A14 plans should include a separate NMU route alongside the A14 route on the north side. This is needed to create a safe alternative route for NMUs along this desire line. But the extra benefit - the added “magic” of this proposal - would be to create new connections to two grade separated crossing points of the A14 for NMUs: the Woodhouse Accommodation bridge and the Busway underpass.

I have chosen this example because I think there should be a legal requirement to provide these new NMU routes. I have noted that a TRO is proposed for the new A14 bypass that will ban cycles from the new section of road between Bar Hill and Brampton. I understand the rationale for this TRO, but I have argued that same TRO rationale should apply to the widened section of A14 north of Cambridge. Let me make it clear that my primary request is for a new separate NMU route along the line of the A14 on this busy section. The extended TRO is not an end in itself: I use this obvious need for a TRO simply to demonstrate that the A14 is clearly NOT suitable for NMU use and hence to argue that there should be a legal requirement to provide an alternative route for NMUs.

As a compromise, I understand that new developments are planned and expected alongside this section of the A14 and as such the County Council believe that these separate NMU routes can be delayed. But I think it is essential - as a minimum condition – that the A14 development reserves the necessary land for these NMU routes. Land acquisition can often be the stumbling block for NMU routes and the County Council do not have an alternative route underway. That is why I think it is essential that this enquiry places a condition to provide the needed space for these routes; i.e. to reserve space for these NMU routes as part of the A14 improvements so that this route can later be added as the north Cambridge developments proceed.

SECOND TOPIC – Improvements and guarantees to NMU routes alongside the local access roads

The HE plans shows a single-sided NMU path alongside the new local access roads from Cambridge to Bar Hill and also a new path from Bar Hill to Fenstanton alongside the old A14. These are both welcome elements.

But the proposed design is not specified in sufficient detail and I am therefore asking this inquiry to impose consent conditions to ensure that a suitable standard of construction is used.

The most important condition is to ensure the width of the planned routes. I understand that a width of 4m is proposed for the first section from Girton to Bar Hill, reducing to 3m beyond the Bar Hill junction. This is a good standard of provision and I simply ask for the conditions to ensure that these widths are maintained in the final design.

But I also want to ask for a second important condition: to add more separation between these NMU paths and the edge of the carriageway to allow space for some sound and light screening. I understand these NMU paths are currently located at the edge of the carriageway. This close spacing makes for unpleasant cycling and walking. By simply moving the paths a little further away – say 2m away from the edge– the impact of the motor traffic is reduced. In particular it allows space for a small hedge or other barrier to shield NMUs from the impact of headlights at night. Let me explain why this matters. Approaching headlights (even when dipped) cause severe loss of night vision making cycling difficult. On a quiet road this can be managed, but on a busy road with many vehicle movements, the impact is severe and the path is much less pleasant to use.

I understand the verge of these roads will include an approx. 8m wide swale for drainage, and it seems relatively simply to adjust the arrangement to achieve this 2m separation. This is a modest proposal that would make a lot of difference for very little added cost.

The point here is that good quality matters on NMU provision. The busway bridleway provides a clear demonstration of the latent demand for good cycling routes – this route is now well used by both keen racing cyclists and by family groups with very young children. I think the two important details that I have listed: namely the minimum width and the added verge separation should both be added as consent conditions to ensure these are good quality routes.

THIRD TOPIC – Improvements to NMU routes in Huntingdon

This is probably the most important issue. The plans for new roads in Huntingdon need to be revised to incorporate some significant improvements for NMUs in order to mitigate the increased volume of motor traffic that will result from the removal of the railway viaduct in Huntingdon.

The expected level of traffic on the southern section of the A14 is in excess of 30k rising to 40k motor vehicles per day. All of this motor traffic will be routed into Huntingdon and be funnelled into the ring road and Brampton Road. These are **added** vehicles that will be using roads that are already busy. The aggregate traffic levels will mean that the ring road and Brampton Road are totally unsuitable for cycling by any but the most confident cyclists. Also the new road junctions are likely to be congested leading to long delays for both motor vehicles and NMUs crossings.

The planned works include some provision for off-road routes, but the plans are inadequate in several important respects and I argue that significant changes are needed. I think this inquiry should ask HE to prepare new plans for Huntingdon centre to deal with this and other issues.

Let me take two specific examples of poor NMU provision in the current plans.

For a first example, I focus on the new junction at Brampton Road (the Edison Bell Way junction). This is a busy light controlled crossroad with multistage controlled NMU crossings on every arm. Each road crossing involves two or three separate stages crossings meaning that 4 separate crossings are required – so for the common diagonal crossing there will be four delays. This is a major pedestrian and cycling route – it is a cycle and walking route to the railway station and it lies on two Sustrans cycle routes. I think better NMU crossings are needed. To illustrate how this can be achieved I offer two alternative designs that would provide a better arrangement for NMUs.

- a) The signal controlled crossroads could be replaced with a signal controlled roundabout with all NMU movements being directed to a central island so that the common diagonal NMU movement only requires two stages of crossing.
- b) Or better, the junction should be redesigned to include a set of wide NMU underpasses that completely separate NMU movements from the motor vehicles above. I emphasise wide to demonstrate that I envisage a Dutch style underpass – wide and well-lit that creates a pleasant environment at both day and night (not the nasty narrow and dirty underpasses of old). I'd like to imagine instead a wide environment vista that could ideally become an extension of the railway station entrance.

As a second example, I focus on the NMU paths alongside the ring road and alongside Brampton Road. There are existing shared use paths in both locations, but both are of poor quality – too narrow and with poorly maintained surfaces. I think that the A14 plans should be extended to include significant improvements to these NMU paths as a necessary mitigation for the increased traffic volumes. Both of these paths should be increased in width to at least 3m, ideally 4m. And these path improvements would combine with the junction improvements discussed earlier to provide an integrated design that provides high quality connections between the railway station and the bus station, and into Huntingdon town centre. It would also provide welcome improvement to the two through connections for the Sustrans national cycle routes: NCN 12 and NCN 51.

CONCLUSION

To conclude: I am asking this panel to use its powers to impose additional NMU conditions on any consent. I see this as one of the positive elements that can be achieved via this new DCO process.

I recognise that it is difficult for HE to increase the level of NMU provision – even the modest NMU proposals I have outlined here - without the pressure of any national standards and the associated statutory NMU requirements. This is why I am asking the planning inspectorate to act to fill that legal void in national infrastructure planning and provide HE with the legal basis to create and promote a better set of infrastructure for NMUs. The current plans have many good bits, but I think we risk “spoiling the ship for a ha’porth of tar” by failing to take all of the opportunities that this major project presents.

We can and we should create better NMU infrastructure as part of this scheme.

Thankyou.

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