Wivenhoe Society response to EB/066

Comments on EB/066 North Essex Transit Study

These comments focus primarily on the TCBGC. In its response to SP8 the Wivenhoe Society stated in respect to a rapid public transport system

“It is difficult to see that there is any possible route into central Colchester to the west of Colne Causeway that could deliver a reliable service with predictable journey times. There are various background documents exploring the possibilities but in practice amount to a proposal for a bus link using the existing congested road network. One suggestion is to close the rail link from the Hythe to central Colchester. This would impact on those currently using the train service into Colchester centre who would be required to change at the Hythe. The policy speaks of bus priority measures. Even if feasible such measures could potentially have an adverse impact on existing road users. Without detailed proposals for a rapid transit system this seems to represent wishful thinking and some concrete and feasible proposals need to be included.”

This latest study does little to address these issues. In section 5.2.1 Tendring Colchester Borders garden community the following appears

“There are relatively few options which can be considered which are relevant for rapid transit services between the garden community and the city centre. It is assumed that the rapid transit route will leave the garden community by heading towards Hythe. This is the preferred route from east Colchester as it also gives the opportunity to access the university and the knowledge gateway. The proposed route continues to Hythe, via a new crossing of the A133 and then making use of existing bus only and restricted access roads to the rail station at Hythe. From Hythe, the route either connects to the local rail line into Colchester Town or takes a route on existing road with segregation and priority measures. The options depend on the choice of mode. Hythe would act as the major transit hub and would connect to various modes/routes to Colchester.”

This does not adequately address the issues.

- Assuming the first part of the text in bold refers to an improved link between Elmstead Road and Greenstead road at the Greenstead roundabout junction, rather than the crossing of the A133 near Wivenhoe Park, no explanation of how this could be achieved is given.
- To the west of the A134 Greenstead Road is relatively narrow and the restricted access road to Hythe Station (Hythe Station Road) from Greenstead Road is not much more than 100 metres long and would only form part of the rapid transit route if either the railway line to Colchester Town were taken over or if the route included a detour to Hythe Station.
- It would not seem possible to have segregation if the existing bus route along Greenstead Road, East St and East Hill is used. The roads are too narrow and a stretch of Greenstead Road is used for on-street parking as is part of East Hill. Precisely what is meant by “priority measures” is not explained.
- If this existing bus route is selected, diverting the rapid bus to Hythe Station then back to Greenstead Road would add to travel time into central Colchester and only save those wanting to use Hythe Station a 100+metre walk.
- If the rail link to the west of Hythe Station to Colchester Town Station were taken over this would increase journey times for those who use the genuinely rapid, though infrequent, rail route to central Colchester travelling from/to all the settlements on the branch line to Clacton/Walton on the Naze. Transfer from train to the new “rapid transport” link would not be seamless because of the need to segregate trains and the rapid transport vehicles
unless a vehicular bridge was built at the current level crossing site. A transfer from the rapid transport to rail at Hythe Station hardly constitutes a major transit hub.

- Presumably to the east of the A134 the rapid transport route would use Elmstead Road, Capon Road and Boundary Road as part of the link to the new garden settlement. These would not seem wide enough for any segregation and, for safety; speed restriction would have to apply for the route through the University campus. In the new development separate routes/lanes could be provided if this was thought desirable and economic.

On more general points the report talks of trams/guided buses and even light railways without specifying how these could be physically provided. There are rapid advances in electric bus technology. Electrified buses would seem to provide considerably more flexibility than trams. It is difficult to envisage how the current “bus station” in Osborne St and the various bus stops in the High St could function with a tram system. If by trams a system with overhead electric cables is meant this would detract from the appearance of what is an historic town. Improvements in the connectivity of the existing bus network would be welcomed however. Possibly, given that the Vineyard Gate Shopping Centre has been dropped consideration could be given to using some of the site to provide a proper bus station.

While not advocating this, the only feasible way of encouraging a modal shift on the scale envisaged would seem to be to impose a congestion charge.