Re Document EB 066 (New Rapid Transit Report)

Comments by C-BUS

(Also comments re the ‘rapid transit route’, not included in the other WTC submission).

Peter Kay 2.1.18

In its overall analysis this new report sets out in a reasonable manner the case for investigating further the possibilities of a lengthy ‘RT’ route between Stansted and the TCBGC, turning the very generalised talk of previous reports into a defined rough corridor (which is a sensible one) and reducing the mode options to three (Bus RT, Guided Bus RT, and Tram) (again a sensible conclusion in principle). Should such a system be possible / come to pass it would no doubt be welcomed by public transport users. (Whether it would see significant use by car owners is another matter altogether).

However the whole idea is at such a preliminary stage, with no detailed route investigations yet commenced for the larger part of the route (west of Colchester), and no possibility of remotely realistic investigation of costs until the decision on mode is made, that this work to date cannot possibly be regarded as providing the slightest evidence that such a major system might be affordably and practicably achievable.

In consequence it cannot constitute evidence that the garden communities might be viable in transport terms (i.e. by RT securing a massive diversion of journeys from car to RT, as the councils themselves agree to be necessary).

It therefore remains the case that it is too early yet for any of the garden communities to be deemed to be viable.

(There is also no attempt to analyse the annual revenue / costs situation, beyond the wholly unevidenced assumption at p.27 that ‘it would be expected that’ there should be an annual surplus. It must be obvious that this is unlikely in the first ten years at least. There is also an extraordinary assumption in Chapter 7 that ‘Bus RT’ would attract as many users as a Tram system).

Regarding the attraction of usage, the report begins with the claim (p.vii) that ‘RT will meet the need for those journeys that suit neither local bus or train, for which car is often used as the only [perceived option]’.

It would no doubt achieve some success on that front, but the real crunch question is how much it could abstract traffic from car at the times of traffic congestion, i.e. for journeys to/from work. Here the report ignores the whole way in which the previous

** He we refer to the TCBGC, the only one we have studied on this front.
garden community reports themselves show that a large % of the jobs available** will not be in the central area served by the RT system, but in Colchester peripheral or rural / distant places reached far more quickly by car than by other modes; and the way CBC itself enthuses openly elsewhere about the good road (car) access of employment areas as the thing that matters.

In addition the report ignores the point made in WTC letter of 14/11/17 about the pending further major drift of ‘destinations’ to peripheral locations encouraged by or forced upon CBC in the last year.***

*** The Vipond 1/12/17 reply to this merely refers to Local Plan retail policies, which have already been undermined by events in 2017, and talks as if promoting a very costly ‘RT’ system is somehow a sensible makeweight for ‘destinations’ being deliberately made more ‘remote’ for public transport users in the first place.

On the same page (vii) the new report once again stresses the notions of the RT system having ‘an inextricable link with the expansion of Park & Ride’ [in Colchester], i.e. in respect of an additional East P&R site supposedly providing major traffic for the RT system (p.15); and (as ever with ECC and CBC) again ignores mention of the factors that make it impossible for P&R to achieve anything of substance in Colchester at Mon-Fri peak times.

In reality it has now been revealed that ECC was in the autumn conducting a major review of Colchester P&R (issued 28/11/17) because of its chronic annual loss (£590,000 expected in 2017/18, against £200,000 original forecast, mostly due to the lack of farepaying Mon-Fri peak traffic ****. Also, it is now proposed to try to lease off parts of the site for parking / storage by other parties, i.e. it is conceded that usage will never be such as to fill the site. To propose building a second P&R site at the University, to serve people who already mostly have easy access to Cuckoo Farm via the A12 in only 3-4 minutes more, now becomes yet more crazy.

**** Compare the incredible claim in Vipond’s reply that the P&R is achieving everything that ECC expected of it!

ROUTES FOR A COLCHESTER - TCBGC ‘RT’ SYSTEM

Whereas 5.2.2 - 5.2.10 are the first attempts at identifying alignments for everything west of Colchester, 5.2.1 is only a (garbled) summary of what had already been said in the October 2016 Jacobs report, and it is clear that the new report was never intended to include any further work on firming up the Colchester - TCBGC section.

Thus the position remains exactly the same now as set out in our Hearing Statement, i.e. that it has already been demonstrated by ECC’s own consultants that there are only two possible ‘RT’ options ***** for the Colchester - TCBGC section, the 2016 options 1 (bus on ordinary roads) and 2B (tram with compulsory closure of railway line *****), the former not meeting the definition of ‘RT’, and the latter conceded to be politically off the cards. And therefore that the TCBGC fails on the transport front.

***** This reality is of course ignored in Vipond’s reply. He also claimed that the new report would ‘progress the work’ on the east routeing, which has proved not to be the case.

****** The reference in the new report to £7m being allocated for a train turnback facility at Hythe confirms that the closing of the railway is still regarded as the desired option.
It is useful that the new report goes out of its way to stress (p.25) that ‘the RT system must be perceived as radically different from a bus’, if it is to succeed; a very wise comment. But Option 1 is indeed a bus and nothing but a bus (except for a possible short stretch of reserved road beyond the University).

Less truthfully, p.82 claims that all the options would be ‘segregated on sections where there is congestion’; apart from possible (but not yet agreed) very short lengths, Option 1 would only be segregated on the section where there is NOT congestion!

The new report also contains a note on the ‘challenges’ to constructing any separate ‘RT’ route through Colchester town centre. (For which read, ‘impossibility’!). In the streets in the town centre buses, trams or whatever would only be able to exist amongst the general traffic and its delays. p.51 also refers to the need to divert underground utilities away from tram lines (a major factor in the cost of tram systems), so that there is no subsequent disruption from hole-digging, but this can only be done where roads are more than a certain width, so it could not be done in parts of the town centre.

The fact that it is impossible to construct any RT route on the Colchester - TCBGC section is not, of course, an argument for abandoning further studies of its practicability west of Colchester.

Note that the maps in the new report show the RT route ending at Frating Green instead of at the TCBGC. This is however assumed to be simply a piece of cartographic incompetence??