

Response to EX/075 (Matter 6) by Colchester Conservative Group

February 6 2020

Introduction

We do not wish to cover matters which have already been much discussed at the hearings and in written submissions both from ourselves and many other parties, but would make the following general observations on EX/075.

The maps provided to justify travel times are unfortunately of such a low resolution and are of a poor quality, it is therefore difficult to make out much of the detail. We are, however, concerned about some of the apparent assumptions made and how they correlate with the physical reality 'on the ground'.

The document claims that in "inter-urban" areas, travel speed can increase to 50-80km/h. Some of the areas they have defined as "inter urban" we would argue are not of this nature but are in fact heavily congested urban areas.

Route 2

For example, on Route 2 the section between the A134/Maldon Rd Roundabout (Post Code CO3 3BU, 51.887119 N 0.893494 E) and the A1124 "Tollgate Roundabout" (CO3 8PA, 51.887181 N, 0.833565 E) is shown as routed along the A1124 Lexden and London Roads via Lexden and Stanway and onwards towards Marks Tey.

The speeds shown on this section all seem to be 50-60km/h, predominantly 60km/h. This is not an inter-urban route. It is urban. In fact Stanway itself is defined in planning terms as an "urban growth area". It is heavily congested and there are many properties, shops and schools all directly on the route.

The speed limit on this entire stretch is also currently 30mph. Yet, if the diagram is interpreted directly, the RTS Bus will travel at 37.2mph (60km/h)? So, the only way the diagram and predicted travel times can be obtained is by the bus regularly exceeding the speed limit by nearly 10mph. From a legal point of view the speed limit on any road also applies in any separated bus or taxi lanes.

According to submissions, some of this stretch will be separated. However, much of this route has properties close to the road and the road can only be expanded with compulsory purchases at great cost. Travel times on this section in the morning can be 30+ minutes, so without separation the RTS has no hope of maintaining a timetable and will suffer similar issues to existing buses on the route. On some "pinch point" sections there are listed properties on either side of the road.

Route 1

Turning to the other side of town and Route 1, the route appears to travel along the A133 as far as the University 'Knowledge Gateway', 'dip' into this entrance and then onwards towards the 'magic roundabout' mentioned at the Hearings. The approach to this roundabout does not appear to be grade separated, yet the queue to it often backs up beyond the junction with the B1027.

The speed shown, which we concede is 'best case' is 40km/h. Ironically this road has 50, 30 and 40mph speed limits so at least the revenue model will not need to take account of multiple speeding fines.

Any bus along here has no hope of maintaining any timetable at peak times without complete separation from other traffic, and removing a lane to provide this would cause major congestion; so a third lane is needed but not provided for.

The typical pattern of congestion on this road is shown below:



Source: TomTom Live Traffic, 8.30am Wednesday February 5 2020.

Summary

We will not comment further on the finances as these have already been extensively discussed, in particular the lack of an inflation model and any detailed costs, but will summarise as follows:

In Paragraph 40 of IED011 it is stated that the original submission “is not a study which investigates whether such a network can be delivered on the ground”. Whilst of course the decision is for the Inspector to make, and we will respect whatever that decision is, we would maintain that the further submissions still fail to demonstrate that the network can actually be delivered.

Detailed engineering solutions are not a planning consideration and we recognise that. However, we feel the scheme should at least demonstrate that it will be possible to build on the physical reality which exists at the moment, and is not simply fantasy which will not migrate from paper to concrete.

Lack of detail on how four lanes of traffic will fit onto roads only two lanes wide with houses directly on each side, no separation at the most congested parts, and what on the face of it seems like a lack of awareness of speed limits raises suspicion as to exactly how much detailed thought has gone into establishing whether any of this is possible to deliver.

There is something of a “Mr Macawber – something will turn up” approach to many of the challenges, which is a dangerous assumption to make on any infrastructure project, particularly one with a limited budget.

We would also make the observation that from this (EX/075) document and the discussions which took place at the hearing sessions, all pretence that this scheme is anything but a regular bus seems to have been abandoned. There has been no mention of guided bus or tramways as implied in EB/079 and we think it is frankly disingenuous towards the Public to imply with many pictures that the scheme is a modern, expensive, rapid tramway system when it seems there is now no ambition above a regular bus service.

As paragraph 41 of IED011 states – further work is needed that RTS can be delivered in both practical and financial terms. Our strong view is that the further submissions including EXD/075 on RTS far from answering this question, actually raise yet more questions and challenges and the question itself has not been answered.