

Cast-iron case against busway

By Jerry Alderson

jerry.alderson@virgin.net

For more than a decade, a small number of influential people at Cambridgeshire County Council have sought to build a kerb-guided busway on the dormant Cambridge-St Ives railway line.

Following a multi-modal study looking only at local journeys on a single route and three years of appraisal work with Government to obtain £65million of the necessary £101million funding, a Transport and Works Order has been applied for.

The Cambridge and St Ives Railway Organisation intends to reopen the line itself. A series of Cast.Iron road shows held in shopping centres and on the platform at Cambridge and Huntingdon stations plus the efforts of Railfuture members helped to generate 2,741 objections to the busway triggering a lengthy public inquiry.

The public inspector asked groups with common objections to work together. Railfuture East Anglia branch sensibly joined forces with St Ives Town Council and others to hire a transport expert.

Cast.Iron grouped the objections from its 1,150 members, and my fellow executive Dr Stephen Ades presented our evidence to demolish the case for a busway and champion our proposals.

We agreed that I would present a personal objection, focusing on the inadequacy of the Cambridge to Huntingdon multi-modal study, raise concerns about guided busways in general and promote rail as the best transport option for local, regional and national travel.

Inquiries are heavily weighted towards those with most money. The county had up to 20 people present with a team supporting their Queen's Counsel, who alone must have cost £150,000.

Each day up to a dozen new documents were introduced and much

of the information in the plans during the consultation period was subsequently corrected.

Objectors had little time to refute rebuttals against their objection before delivering their evidence. I spent a month attending the inquiry and could barely keep up with proceedings. I have great admiration for the inspector.

Although the inquiry was supposed to examine the busway, the county council put most effort into attacking Cast.Iron's rail plans.

Our single-track line with passing loops would cost more than the West Coast main line upgrade's £20million per route mile, we were told.

While platforms for the 35mph line at Wensleydale could be built for £100,000 each, their rail expert said our 70mph line must have industry-standard platforms costing £1million each. However, he could give no reason why.

Their 65-page report failed to discredit a single element of Cast.Iron's proposals, which were based on quotations for work from industry suppliers with a track record.

In the 31-day inquiry no objector delivered a knock-out blow to the busway, but we all remain hopeful that the sheer volume of valid criticism, negligible benefits and lack of public or political support will see the inspector recommend against.

We hope to hear the decision in May 2005, and will be asking Railfuture members for put the last nails in the busway's coffin.

I'm now using my experiences from the Cambridgeshire inquiry to help objectors to the Luton-Busway Translink busway scheme and will be appearing at that inquiry.

■ *Jerry Alderson is a founding executive of Cast.Iron. For further information please see <http://www.castiron.org.uk> or email info@castiron.org.uk or write to St Francis House, 10 Newmarket Road, Cambridge CB5 8DT.*



TRAM TECHNOLOGY THAT WORKS

France's second largest city, Marseille, has ordered 26 trams for its new tramway which opens in two years time. The Flexity Outlook trams, above, will be built by Bombardier for £42million.

The Flexity tram is based on a proven modular technology that features a 100% low-floor interior while using conventional wheel-set bogies which offer excellent dynamic characteristics for comfort and safety.

The vehicles have a propulsion and control system featuring the latest electronic technology.

Vehicles of the same family are in successful revenue service in the cities of Linz (Austria), Lodz (Poland) and have recently been put in service in Geneva (Switzerland) and Eskisehir (Turkey). They have also been ordered by the city of Brussels (Belgium).

Bombardier also received a £63million order in December for 38 low-floor light rail vehicles of a different design – with air-conditioning – for Vienna (Austria) and in January a £30million order for 36 trams in Rhein-Neckar (Germany).

In England, Liverpool City Council is hoping to have a 13-mile long tramline through the city centre from the Waterfront to Croxteth up and running in two year's time, following a favourable independent investigation which said the scheme would bring transport, regeneration and socio-economic benefits. And Manchester is working hard to reduce costs on its Metrolink tram phase three extension.

TRAMS ATTRACT CAR DRIVERS

New light rail schemes are far better at attracting motorists and cutting congestion than improvements to bus services, according to a new report, launched on 23 February.

What Light Rail Can Do for Cities says that trams achieve six times the level of traffic reduction achieved by major improvements to bus services.

Around 20% of rush hour light rail users have switched from the car, compared with between 4% and 6.5% for bus improvement schemes. At the weekends, up to 50% of light rail passengers previously travelled by car.

All UK light rail and tram systems are popular and are near or at capacity in the rush-hours. UK light rail now takes 22 million car journeys off the road every year.

When passenger numbers are high, light rail can be more cost effective than the bus alternative.

Tram schemes have played an important part in delivering regeneration and shaping how and where it occurs. All UK tram schemes have led to increases in commercial and residential property values

Kieran Preston, Chair of pteg which commissioned the report, said: "Light rail is hugely popular with the public. Although better bus services are key to any credible strategy for tackling urban congestion, this report shows that for many busy corridors the tram beats the bus every time."

The full report can be seen at <http://www.pteg.net/light-railandcities.htm>. For more information, contact Jonathan Bray on 0113 251 7445 or 07818 041485

The House of Commons Transport Select Committee is currently carrying out an inquiry into light rail.

Railfuture appeal

By Peter Harris

Membership, promotion and fundraising officer

peter.harris@sundonconsultancy.co.uk

Attracting sponsorship for an organisation's core activities is notoriously difficult.

But our core activities are absolutely vital - the work of our officers, committees, branches, volunteers and campaigning groups across the country.

I'm appealing for your help to make sure that our core activities continue to get the funding they need. Could you help us with fundraising or a donation for any or all of the following:

Committees (for example policy,

international, freight, passenger, network development), travel expenses, Railwatch, conferences, publications, websitemaintenance and general administration.

Over the years we've been able to achieve so much and without the generous funding that some other bodies receive. That's been because of the dedication and generosity of our members. Please help us with our core funding campaign in any way that you can.

Please send donations (cheques payable to Railfuture) to: David Harby, Railfuture Membership Secretary, 6 Carral Close, Lincoln LN5 9BD