A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon Improvement Scheme

Sustrans submission to Highways Agency Consultation

June 2014

3 (objectives): Unsure

I am responding on behalf of Sustrans, a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We coordinate the expansion of the National Cycle Network (NCN) which is now 14,500 miles long, and carries some 300 million journeys each year.

We believe that the objectives would be best achieved not by the proposed works to the A14 road but by an integrated multi-modal scheme for this important transport corridor, one which would enable far higher proportions of rail freight and of public transport use, for example. In the case of personal transport we understand that a high proportion of vehicles using the A14 within Cambridgeshire are doing so for short journeys, poorly loaded, indeed that a car on this section of the A14 most commonly carries only the driver.

We welcome the objective of freeing up local capacity for non-motorised users (NMU). However, we believe that the scheme proposed, though it mitigates adverse impacts on NMU better than did the previous A14 proposals, should give NMU still greater consideration. Also that whether or not the proposals are implemented works should be carried out to improve NMU links along and across the existing A14 and within its wider corridor, and making them integrate much better with improved public transport services.

It is essential that all NMU links (new and as diversions of existing) should be provided with a sealed tarmac surface of width no less than 2.5 metres plus verges, one of which should be wide to permit walking or horse riding on a softer surface.

We believe that the legacy for the region of the scheme as proposed will be to a significant degree adverse, because it focusses on the single mode of motorised road transport. A multi-modal approach would have benefits for personal health, would generate less carbon dioxide and would have a less detrimental effect on the character of the streetscapes of the places where people live. We believe that the streets of towns and villages should be principally places for people, not tracks for the movement of motor vehicles.
We have particular concerns for the scheme’s very seriously adverse legacy to the public realm within and near the historic streets of Godmanchester and Huntingdon (see 5 below).

Our responses to the proposals for various elements of the scheme are intended to be constructive, and not to imply our consent to the proposals in whole or part.

4 (meeting current problems, future needs): No

A major current problem nationally and globally is climate change. The Climate Change Act 2008 requires an 80% reduction in the UK carbon account from the 1990 baseline by 2050. This has created a very important future need. The scheme’s Consultation Document has no reference in its text to “climate change” and its only reference to “climate” is a reference to “economic climate” in the context of the withdrawal of the previous scheme. Its only reference to carbon is to the possibility of reducing emissions by sourcing materials for the project locally, and reusing them where possible. This is very welcome, but does not address the major issue of the whole life carbon implications of the scheme including the embedded carbon in the materials – there is just a tiny peripheral reference in the context of the works of the scheme and the consequences of the rise in road traffic it would bring. The only references to “climate change” in the Preliminary Environmental Information Report are to designing the scheme to be resilient to the local consequences of climate change, eg to high capacity drainage. There are no textual references to “carbon reduction” in the document and “carbon” appears only in the context of sourcing materials locally.

We note that carbon reduction is not included in the scheme objectives. Thus we are forced to conclude that the A14 proposals are considered to be outside the ambit of the 2008 Act, and their carbon emissions not considered, in the phases of construction or use. We find this inexplicable and unacceptable. Carbon reduction should be included in the objectives of any major scheme such as this, and its inclusion here would rightly favour a multi-modal solution.

Current problems also include obesity air quality and poor health, which we believe would be made worse by the A14 proposals, which will tend to entrench the normalisation of private car travel even for local and short journeys.

There are current problems locally in Huntingdon and Godmanchester in the sense that there is far too much traffic in and around the historic town cores, where the impacts of noise and severance are unacceptable. In Huntingdon in particular the ring road creates a significant barrier to walking and cycling into and through the town centre, and walking and cycling routes in the central area remain of poor quality. The scheme proposed, and above all the proposal to retain and link the dual carriageways of the detrunked A14 as major new motor accesses into the town centre would increase traffic levels greatly, and make this very much worse. The road layout proposed would be completely at odds with the guidance of Manual for Streets and MfS 2, which show similar schemes as serious errors from the past. The proposals around Huntingdon and Godmanchester are totally unacceptable.

5 Scheme impact: No

As stated in 3 and 4 above, it appears that the scheme’s impact on carbon emissions, streetscape and accessibility in two historic towns, and on public health are unacceptable.
6 Construction period: No comments.

7 Between Brampton Hut and Alconbury: No

A NMU route should be provided between Brampton village, Brampton Hut, Ellington Junction (new) Bridge, Huntingdon Recycling Ltd and onwards to Ellington. You should consider first using the abandoned Thrapston Road and passing beneath the A1 flyover, as the most direct between Brampton and Brampton Hut Services. The route is to replace NMU access along the line of the A14 lost to earlier road widenings and increased levels of motor traffic, and to link adjoining villages and enable people to reach workplaces (or to shop) at Brampton Hut and Huntingdon Recycling. A NMU link from this needs also to be provided to the new access road between Brampton Hut and Huntingdon Research, again for access to work and to link adjoining villages along a previously lost line. Steps need to be provided to shorten the new bridleway hairpin on the new A14 embankment south of Brampton Hut.

8 Layout adjacent to Brampton: No

Park Road-Brampton Road is an important cycle route, NCN route 12. It is mostly a single track road, used also for walking and jogging, but increasingly used by fast light motor traffic, which in passing manoeuvres is causing considerable damage to protected verges. It is important that the new Grafham Road Bridge road should be constructed as a narrow quiet lane with sharper turns, to encourage motor traffic between Grafham and Brampton to take the more appropriate route through Brampton Hut junction, allowing more people to choose to cycle Brampton Road on their daily and leisure journeys. This is supported by Huntingdonshire’s Core Strategy Policy CS9, which is to “…create new Green Infrastructure, where these projects demonstrate a high degree of public benefit in the form of increased access for quiet recreation and increased provision for biodiversity.”, one of the Green Corridors proposed being to provide “The Grafham Water/ Brampton Woodlands area with links to Huntingdon and St Neots…”

If a road over Grafham Road Bridge were provided as shown in the drawings, in neglect of Policy CS9, it should be provided with a NMU path alongside. It would nonetheless fail to satisfy the criteria of the policy for a “green corridor”.

9 Effects on Huntingdon: No

Allowing the dual carriageways of the detrunked A14 to enter the central area of Huntingdon as proposed would bring in high levels of motor traffic to a most attractive, historic streetscape, which contains many listed buildings, and be extremely damaging. These surviving major roads, with their proposed link roads to Brampton Road would be likely to attract a lot of “rat-running” traffic using them as a short cut instead of the new southern bypass. It seems astounding that the levels of traffic through this town centre area predicted in the forecasts shown in the Consultation Brochure (33,500 on Mill Common and 13,500 on Views Common) should be presented as if they might be acceptable.

The proposals provide an opportunity to reduce the current adverse noise and visual impact, and environmental damage currently caused by the occupation of the two ancient commons. We believe this opportunity must be taken. We recommend that the detrunked A14 here and elsewhere in the entire proposals should be reduced to local road status by its reduction to single carriageway, the other side of the former trunk road to be used as a top-quality landscaped “greenway” for non-motorised users (NMU). This would reduce the
likely rat-running and provide very high quality pedestrian and cycle routes linking the
town centre with Godmanchester (with views from the Ouse Viaduct over Port Holme) and
linking the prospective developments at Alconbury Weald and “Northbridge” with
Hinchinbrooke and its country park. Though in the immediate term this capacity
reduction would cost more than than simply declaring the dual carriageway to be a local
access road, the benefits for Huntingdon would be enormous. People do not value towns
and cities whose streets are primarily corridors for motor traffic, and they do not prosper.
Huntingdon town centre already suffers from excessive motor traffic, which reduces local
residents’ ability and inclination to walk and cycle. To proceed as proposed would be to
ignore the principles of highway and spatial planning set out in Manual for Streets and
Mfs2. Indeed Mfs2, which covers busier roads, presents case studies of inner ring roads
which sever community centres from their residential hinterlands as examples of the worst
transport planning of former years.

More particularly the multi-stage cycle/pedestrian crossings proposed close to
Hinchinbrooke School, on busy NMU routes and part of the National Cycle Network are
unacceptable, as they give priority to motor traffic and would discourage walking and
cycling.

Godmanchester for many years has suffered from heavy traffic along its principal street.
We consider it essential that whatever treatment the detrunked A14 dual carriageways are
given the old River Bridge should be closed to all traffic except for cycles, pedestrians,
buses and emergency vehicles. All other local motor traffic should be routed via the
detrunked roads. This would enable a far higher proportion of people in Godmanchester
and Huntingdon to make their regular journeys between the two towns by healthy,
sustainable means.

10 Huntingdon Southern Bypass: No

A high quality NMU route to include a cycle path minimum 2.5m wide plus verges must be
provided along one side of the new bypass road between Brampton Interchange and
Swavesey Junction but at an attractive distance from the moving motor traffic, linked to
the proposed emergency lay-bys and to safe and convenient crossings of the new road
provided for all existing rights of way, which also should be given a sealed surface to
make cycling safe and easy. Reason: to ensure that NMU travel in the area is given the
greatest priority, enabling walking, cycling and riding journeys to be made between
villages and on circular leisure journeys, and to be in place for possible future
development induced by the new road. To give drivers of vehicles stopped in an
emergency walking exit routes where possible.

It is essential that the Brampton-Buckden NMU route alongside the B1514 and A1 be
given continuity and a greater width (minimum 2.5m plus verges) than the substandard
shared-use footways it links (adjacent to the southern edge of RAF Brampton and
alongside the A1). It seems appropriate that it is made to cross the B1514 at the
roundabout junction proposed. It should be set back and given priority across the access
to Kasauli and the emergency access to the bypass. Reason: to encourage walking and
cycling between Buckden and Huntingdon via Brampton by making this mixed-use route
safe and attractive.

11 Widening of existing A14 Swavesey – Girton: No

At commercial properties some 300m east of the Swavesey NMU bridge the NMU route
should continue alongside the local access road, to allow access to the properties, and
given an appropriate crossing of the accesses. This to allow cycle access to workplaces, and to provide a shorter through route – the route around the rear would be unlit and unlikely to be taken by path users.

12 Widening existing bypass Histon to Milton: No

We believe there is a strong case to be made for providing a NMU route along the northern side of the widened road between Histon and Milton, linking with the byway towards Landbeach and no doubt using the access track proposed, to the pond near the Milton Junction, and for the surfacing of the full length of the byway to tarmac and grass NMU standards.

We have been in regular contact with the Cambridge Cycling Campaign, who know the Cambridge area very well indeed, and the A14NMU group, on the need for NMU provision between Swavesey and Cambridge. Rather than repeating all their points we urge you to take their recommendations for this section very seriously. Given the high levels of cycling in this area already inadequate provision will be very obvious and would cause serious problems.

13 Local access road between Fen Drayton and Girton: No

We welcome the provision of NMU path between Bar Hill Junction and the footpath accommodation bridge at Girton. However it is essential that the NMU route be linked conveniently into the streets of Girton, and it should be continued eastwards to link with the former Cambridge Road at Histon. These improvements would no doubt involve land purchase, but the benefits would be great. The routes in combination would give direct NMU access between adjoining villages and onwards using the NMU path of the guided busway or Kings Hedges Road to the Regional College, Cambridge Science Park and other major workplace areas. The extension we propose to Histon would potentially give access (via the NIAB accommodation bridge) to the new Darwin Green development south of the A14, and direct access to land north of the A14 which is expected to be developed. The distances between Bar Hill and all the other places named are easily within cycling distance, providing a high quality, direct route is provided. To omit them would be to prolong the car-dependency from which Bar Hill has long suffered.

As we said in 12 above: We have been in regular contact with the Cambridge Cycling Campaign and the A14NMU group on the need for NMU provision between Swavesey and Cambridge. Rather than repeating all their points we urge you to take their recommendations for this section very seriously. Given the high levels of cycling in this area already inadequate provision will be very obvious and would cause serious problems.

Dry Drayton – Oakington bridge: the existing bridge is too narrow to provide an adequate NMU path alongside the road. Either a wider bridge should be provided, or some other arrangement made to calm traffic so as to make the bridge link safe for NMU use. This might be to provide a road with the character of a country lane and without centreline markings, between the roundabouts, which in any case we believe should be replaced with T-junctions, to make traffic aware that this road is a lane shared with NMU’s. The road between the two villages is the route of the Pathfinder Way long distance footpath, and needs NMU provision extending to the villages, not just in the vicinity of the A14 as proposed. Reason: to raise NMU safety and convenience to acceptable levels.

14 Swavesey Junction: No; Bar Hill Junction: No; Girton Junction: No
At Swavesey Junction we welcome the NMU provision, including the NMU bridge. We question however the need for such a large area of land for this junction, and the size and geometry of the roundabouts, which will encourage unduly fast traffic speeds in sections of road which being off the A14 must be considered “local network”. In particular the large roundabout at Cambridge Services seems oversized. We recommend its reduction and proper segregated provision for NMU access around it from Boxworth (1.6km on a country lane) and Swavesey (3km from village centre on a minor local road).

At Bar Hill Junction we welcome the provision of NMU routes, and the NMU bridge. However, the provision of dual carriageway for the access road to Bar Hill is excessive, and the geometry of the roundabout is too tangential, encouraging unacceptably high vehicle speeds at the entrance to the community. We question the need for dual carriageway at the southern end of Haddon’s Road, since Northstowe, for which it is the principal access to the A14, is being designed to demonstrate a very low private car usage, and we understand to provide “nil detriment” in its effect on the trunk road network.

Near Girton Interchange the Girton accommodation bridge (public footpath) and its right of way continuation south and westward needs to be upgraded as a general NMU route linking to the North West Cambridge development and onwards to Coton and Madingley, linking with all other rights of way in this area. Reason: to restore access between neighbouring villages and to the wider countryside which since the construction of the A14 and M11 interchange has been severed. The NW Cambridge development is very large, and will need such access to the countryside, and for its employees who live in the villages. (Also see our mention of Cambridge Cycling Campaign in 12 above.)

**16 Other comments:**

1. Treatment of the detrunked A14: While we welcome the opportunity a southern bypass would give to improve the attractiveness of Huntingdon and Godmanchester (which the proposals should take up – see 9 above) we believe that the provision of a dual 3-lane road paralleled by a surviving detrunked dual carriageway as “local access road” would be excessive provision. We believe that if the bypass is provided as proposed the detrunked road should be singled and a high-quality NMU “greenway” provided in the remaining space, fully linked to existing NMU rights of way, as part of a wider, integrated multi-modal project for the A14 corridor. Reason: so as to discourage long-distance motor traffic between Swavesey Junction and points west and north of Huntingdon from “rat-running” along the detrunked local access road, through the centre of Huntingdon.

The north-side carriageway would be the more suitable for use as a greenway between Godmanchester and the approaches to Swavesey Junction. For one kilometre west of the junction, where a new dual carriageway construction is proposed, only a new single carriageway local access road would be needed, with NMU route to its north, as is proposed east of the junction. The existing rights of way to be given a sealed machine-laid surface to facilitate cycling between the greenway and nearby villages.

2. We think not enough consideration has been given to alternative routes for freight and passenger transportation in this important corridor (for example greater use of rail transport and public transport, and that there would be multiple benefits in terms of public health, the quality of the public realm and of reduced carbon dioxide emissions if improved alternatives were provided, reducing the demand on the A14 road. In particular we are concerned that the scheme if constructed would have major adverse impacts on
the quality of the public realm in Huntingdon and Godmanchester, and on people’s ability to use public rights of way where these run along or across the lines of the existing and proposed roads. We believe that space on the detrunked sections of road should be reallocated to non-motorised users (NMU) separated from motor traffic, including the singling of all detrunked dual carriageways to use one detrunked carriageway exclusively as a “greenway” for NMU use.

3. A personal, “historical” perspective on NMU opportunities in the A14 corridor: The writer recalls an afternoon cycle outing with undergraduate friends, from Cambridge to St Ives, in the period after exams in the first days of June in either 1968 or 1969. There was one route to take – the roads which are now the A14 and the A1096. They didn’t seem too busy or fast to us, though the long, straight “A14” was rather boring, and we were glad to reach our destination, over the medieval St Ives Bridge, in the company of all the motor traffic making for the same town. Of course all the lesser roads in the area were equally open to us, and probably more attractive. Most local people would have considered cycling them perfectly normal in those days. Many of them are pretty daunting today, and rural cycling levels are now very low.

4. An appeal: Given the historical perspective it is heartening to read, in Action for Roads: A network for the 21st century (Highways Agency 2013), the HA’s words in section 3.32: “As we begin the new programme of investment, we need to take advantage of the opportunity it presents to make even greater provision for cycling as a form of transport. We must start work to seek and correct historic problems, and retrofit the latest solutions and make sure that it is easy and safe for cyclists to use junctions.” The current proposals provide you with an opportunity to redress the balance in favour of Non-Motorised Users – we urge you to grasp it to the full!

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