



80 Mile End Road, Colchester C04 5BY • 01206 854045

Chairman: Will Bramhill • Secretary: Steve Blay • Press Officer: Pam Nelson • Treasurer: Andrew Senter
www.colchester-cycling.net • ccc@bramhill.net

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Official objection to plans for a Colchester Park and Ride

Copied to the Department for Transport, various departments

Sent to the main ECC NE office and Colchester for logging as an official objection

Sent to individual councillors, council officers, the press and various individuals for information only.

Sent to Tendring Council and Babergh Council for them to note the potential impact of Colchester P&R on the viability of their shopping centres.

Dear Sir or Madam

Colchester Cycling Campaign would like to oppose the park-and-ride plans in their current form.

The joint aims of P&R are:

- :: to relieve town congestion by reducing traffic, and
- :: to support the town centre against other town centres, out-of-town shopping parks and regional shopping centres like Freeport, Braintree; Lakeside, Thurrock, and Bluewater, Greenhithe, Kent.

We believe that P&R installed by itself is an outmoded method of traffic control that has limited effect on traffic congestion and offers poor value for money.

Other traffic restrictions (and greater spending on cycling/bus infrastructure) would be more effective. P&R could play a part in such a scheme, but Colchester P&R is being introduced in isolation, as P&R schemes have been throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Traffic reduction? The argument that P&R reduces traffic is questionable. Taking 1,000 cars away at the town edge should mean 1,000 fewer cars in town. However, P&R simply creates more road space that, unless controlled by other methods, is quickly used by more

vehicles making extra journeys (The M25 effect). Colchester is, at least, removing some town centre car parking, but this will do nothing to avoid an increase in other cross-town journeys. We have tried unsuccessfully to obtain figures from Ipswich to see if its widespread P&R has reduced town traffic.

Supporting the town centre: P&R increases the perception that a town is accessible - which is why motorists like it. While there is no doubt that it can assist tourism and draw new shoppers to so-called regional centres, it can also increase the centralisation effect, taking trade away from satellites; in Colchester's case, these would include Manningtree, Harwich, Frinton, Walton, Clacton, Brightlingsea, Wivenhoe, Tiptree, Kelvedon, Witham, Braintree, Coggeshall and Sudbury. Accessibility of regional centres has already robbed such towns of the bulk of the trade they enjoyed in the 1950s-1970s. In some towns, this has meant value and choice has declined to the point that shoppers have little option but to travel to the regional centre for most items.

Commuting: ECC and CBC see P&R as having a role in helping commuters to access the town. However, this can be seen as an expensive way of subsidising those people who have chosen to make themselves daily-dependent on the car. It is questionable if public money should be used in this way.

Effect on public transport: Hearsay evidence from other centres suggests that P&R has had a negative effect on existing bus services, especially where everyday bus services do not benefit from P&R bus priority measures. There have been reports of people driving out of town to reach a P&R station where they travel back in at a cheaper rate; P&R is also seen to affect the viability of rural bus services (those who have cars but dislike town driving/parking are more likely to use P&R than a normal bus to access a town, plus the value-for-money factor compared with normal bus fares). CCC has tried to obtain facts/figures, but councils (who are proud of their P&Rs) and bus companies (wanting P&R business) have been reluctant to discuss the matter.

Value for money: The funding information provided in ECC's consultation document was far too simple. CCC requests more detail - and a projection for when P&R will break even. It is difficult for the layman to assess the overall cost when two councils and the DfT are involved. However the following information and formulas could be applied to the total cost to be borne by the taxpayer:

:: Start-up costs are £6 million which is equivalent to £10,000 per parking space (Initial Eight Ash Green scheme has 600 spaces). There will also be costs in preparing the bid, etc, to be met by ECC and CBC. These should be costed, and an estimation of the cost of officers' time over the past year would be appreciated.

:: Likely revenue cost is: Cost of bus and driver(s) per 12-hour day x number of buses needed over an eight-mile loop route + other staff costs
For argument's sake, that would be $£450 \times 6 + 900 = £3,600$

:: Likely income is: Number of spaces x vehicle occupancy x turnover x charge
For argument's sake, that would be $600 \times 1.6 \times 2.5 \times £1.50$

:: Variables: children bus in free, so the 1.6 average occupancy is misleading; we assume a turnover of 2.5 but this would be dependent on patronage (Patronage will depend on users' perception of value for money, plus the effectiveness of the scheme for accessing the town without jams), and a presumption towards space-hogging commuters over shoppers would also lower turnover.

On the sum above, ignoring the variables, a 600-space car park would just break even in revenue terms. However, there are so many variables that viability is by no means assured. Ipswich had extreme problems with getting the figures right and had to increase P&R charges to even begin to try to break even. It has increased the number of P&R sites which has diluted take-up and overall viability.

How P&R could work As mentioned previously, CCC believes P&R could work as part of a wider traffic control scheme - and this would mean congestion charging. We would recommend looking at the system being piloted in Stockholm which has a number of charging points, rather than a C-charge area as in London. Such a scheme could be applied to all Essex "regional" towns (ie Colchester, Chelmsford, Basildon, Southend, Grays, Harlow, Braintree) with one daily charge covering all towns. Thinking more widely, such a charge could apply regionally (ie East of England), or nationally. Park and ride would then be one element of a toolkit to reduce congestion and control traffic growth.

Specifics of the Colchester scheme CCC has various concerns about the Colchester scheme as presented to the DfT for funding:

:: It is regrettable that the P&R site at Eight As Green is green-field; brownfield sites, or those already earmarked for development, should be considered first, however, ECC must not follow Suffolk County Council's self-defeating move at Copdock in which it supported P&R with a deal which allowed more out-of-town stores.

:: The case of value-for-money to ECC and CBC is not proven. If this scheme goes ahead, strict criteria must be applied to measure the following: overall profit or loss (capital and revenue), patronage, reduction in traffic, effect on general bus use, effect on trade in neighbouring towns. There must be transparency on the effectiveness and overall tax cost of P&R with an annual report given by way of a Public Notice (rather than tucked away in a committee report) annually for at least the first ten years.

:: The viability of the Colchester scheme is not assured. CCC urges the DfT to draw comparisons with current schemes where the overall run is an eight-mile loop on a 7am-7pm basis, and how the charging structure is applied.

:: Bus priority measures are too few, or not enough detail is given (though we note that ECC/CBC promise more detail once the application is determined).

a) With the exception of the lane reduction on the approach to the Spring Lane roundabout, and an extra lane on the approach to the Avenue of Remembrance/Westway roundabout, the ECC/CBC public consultation exhibition and document does not specify bus priority measures closer to the town centre. The Spring Lane bus lane is to be commended for removing capacity for other vehicles (in line with DfT guidance) which may have an effect on limiting traffic growth, but the Cymbeline Way bus lane will be of limited value at peak times. CCC is also concerned at the introduction of a second fast-exit off the Avenue of Remembrance/Westway roundabout and its effect on the existing east-west cycle route*. CCC would hope to see details at the NE Essex Cycling Forum (convened by ECC) but the short consultation period has meant this is not possible.

b) Both morning and evening congestion is especially bad along Westway and North Station Road, yet there is no detail on how this is to be addressed. There seem to be no measures applied to assist a return journey. A vague reference is made to bus telematics, and short bus lanes exist at Middleborough (the lights here, however, appear to work on normal light phasing and do not yet give buses priority). It is vital that, if P&R goes ahead,

bus priority measures are installed closer to the town centre that can be used by P&R, service buses and pedal cycles.

c) CCC would prefer P&R buses to access the town centre via the North Station bus stops to the north of the Essex Hall roundabout. We have, for some time, urged bus priority measures in this area (Station roundabout, Essex Hall roundabout and Albert roundabout) and feel this would be a preferred option for a "major spending" bid to the DfT. Bus routes here would help public transport reliability and improve cycle access to the station (cycle access is notoriously difficult at present, and ECC proposals involve marginalisation rather than inclusion of cyclists on the transport network). It should be noted that the bus fare from the railway station is £1.80 return for a two-mile loop; we would hope that an introduction of P&R would lead to a reduction of bus fares in the town centre core.

Conclusion The case for P&R as presented by ECC/CBC is far from sound. More detail on viability and bus priorities is needed before the DfT allows a grant. P&R bus priority provision should be improved closer to the town centre to help buses in general, as well as cycles.

* The East-West cycle route runs the length of the Avenue of Remembrance (St Andrew's Avenue, Cowdray Avenue, Colne Bank Avenue and Cymbeline Way) and was installed in the early 1990s to allow access to major housing estates, industrial areas, town centre links, and North Station. Its effectiveness was hugely reduced when ECC placed a fast lane on the Avenue of Remembrance/Westway roundabout which made crossing at this junction extremely hazardous. we understand there was no specific cycle audit before this scheme went ahead; CCC was not consulted despite being the town's cycling lobby group since 1990. We are concerned about proposals for a second fast exit.

About CCC Colchester Cycling Campaign was formed in January 1990 and has taken part in Government consultations since then. We have also contributed to the local government process, with our latest reports being "Jams Tomorrow" a response to CBC's transport policy, and "Pedalling Nowhere" a critique of Essex's LTP2 bid. Both are available from the Colchester Cycling website at www.colchester-cycling.org.uk. You can e-mail CCC at colchester.cycling@mac.com. Chairman William Bramhill can be contacted by telephone on 01206 854045.