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More grid roads are the last thing city's bus users need

The decision by Milton Keynes Council to scrap the 'city streets' concept for new urban expansion areas could be bad news for bus travel (*ibid*).

The inherited grid road system forms a structural hindrance to sustainable transport, and the layout could hardly be worse for bus service provision. Overturning ten years of attempts to rectify these faults in the expansion areas would be a backward step for the city.

The main problem is that the grid is too large (about 1km between the main grid roads). This means that bus routes are always too far away from a large proportion of residents. Whether the buses run on the main grid roads, or along the distributor roads within the grid squares, about 40% of residents are inevitably more than 300 metres walk from a bus stop. (The usual planning standard is 400 metres, but in a car-based city such as Milton Keynes, the bus is less able to compete at this distance.)

In an attempt to bring buses closer to people, routes divert from the grid roads and onto internal roads, which are often tortuous and illegible. The resulting routes make for slow journeys, again hampering the ability of buses to compete with the car. Compare the clarity of the MK road map with the tangled spaghetti-like map of the city's bus routes! Some bus routes now run on the main grid roads to give faster speeds, but this leaves housing areas with poorer access to stops. Grid road layouts can be effective for bus transport, but if the grid is too big, it creates a stark choice between accessibility

to stops and journey speeds.

In the new urban extensions, the 'city street' (or public transport corridor) concept has a lot of potential and should not be abandoned without very good reason. There are other options worth exploring too, such as modifying the grid concept to enable more efficient and attractive bus services. This might involve the grid squares being reduced in size from 1,000 metres to around 600-700 metres to enable all households to be within 300 metres of a bus stop on the perimeter road. One of the original masterplan ideas was to provide streets with buses directly through the grid squares, serving neighbourhood centres. With a smaller grid, this also could be workable.

Milton Keynes was not conceived for public transport, and its structure hampers all modes except the car. All these issues were explored in studies for the city undertaken by consultant FaberMaunsell in 2003-2004. Some important recommendations have borne fruit, including a simpler pattern of cross-town routes, higher frequency services, and the public transport corridor concept for the Western Expansion Area.

The next phases of city expansion also offer the chance to provide a more efficient and workable urban structure. This will not be achieved by extending the over-sized grid of the 1970 masterplan.

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Cyclists pose a tiny threat to pedestrians' safety

Paul Biggs complains about the "air of superiority" of cyclists (*Letters LTT 25 Feb*).

Each life lost on the roads is a tragedy; perhaps he