

Local Transport Today, 8th April 2011

Letters regarding the Milton Keynes grid roads

"Grid roads will lock Milton Keynes into car dependency"

From: Mike O' Sullivan, Milton Keynes Council cabinet member for environment, planning & transport, 1999-2002), Milton Keynes MK11

Your article 'Milton Keynes pledges to extend grid roads and revamp bus routes' (LTT 25 Mar) refers to Milton Keynes Council planning to continue to expand its grid road system.

Doing this for reasons of urban continuity and style is understandable but is not a good enough justification. I thought that the SACTRA (Standing Advisory Committee for Trunk Road Assessment) lesson of not providing more trunk-type roads, because this only encourages more traffic to magically appear to fill them up, had been understood. Seemingly not!

Milton Keynes' great growth challenge is to expand in a way that is as sustainable as possible. Thus, transport-wise, the way forward has to be for it to wind-down its excessive car-dependency. At the moment something like 95% of MK journey-to-work trips are undertaken by car and 5% by bus: the city urgently needs to adopt and implement a modal split that is basically the reverse.

However, the council's decision to promote urban road-building moves MK in the opposite direction and reflects a wish, as set out in its Local Development Framework and third Local Transport Plan, to stick with car-dependency for the next 20-30 years. This 'head-in-the-sand' forever approach ignores serious environmental and socio-economic considerations.

Environmentally, the implication is that by 2026 MK's expansion will result in a 26% population increase but deliver a 70% increase in transport-related carbon dioxide emissions due to population increase and expanded car ownership.

Socio-economically the situation is also bad. Two-thirds of MK's population over the age of ten, when independent travel should become possible, have a real problem getting about their city because they are too young to drive, too old to drive, or too poor to drive.

The city council seems to think that tacking on a few bus routes solves the problem but this is not so. It has not worked in the past 40 years and it will not work in the future because the issue of having a more people-friendly transport system is never addressed.

Time-after-time MK has 'ducked' establishing a modal split that would both address environmental enhancement and secure greater social equity. Something like a 50/50 car/bus split, to be reached as soon as possible, sounds about right.

Strangely, this just happens to be the target for 2011 that was set out 12 years ago in 'SITS', MK's current, but mostly ignored, transport strategy!

Thus Milton Keynes, famous for its built-in urban accessibility-deficit characteristics,

is now proposing to continue to substantially exclude - for ever - the majority of its citizens.

This is a city that has lost its way. One trusts that when the Local Development Framework Examination in Public comes around later this year, some light will be directed on this iniquitous example of seriously poor planning.

"Council is destroying what made Milton Keynes unique"

From: Ian Michie, Director Urban Eden, Milton Keynes MK3

I see in your article "Milton Keynes pledges to extend grid roads and revamp bus routes" that the council in Milton Keynes has once again proclaimed its support for the grid system and accompanying 'red ways' for pedestrians and cyclists in Milton Keynes.

Oddly, this seems to occur every time the people of MK are asked to vote for them. Their own commissioned studies, such as CAGoT (the Citizens Advisory Group on Transport), along with the Focus Group on Roads report which included two major ICM Polls, have revealed overwhelming support for grid roads, the safest, fastest and most efficient transport routes ever devised.

MK Council in recent years has willingly overseen the grid network's wholesale destruction in new areas such as Tattenhoe Park and Broughton Gate. Even in our city centre, bright, sun-lit underpasses have been removed in order to squeeze in the instant slum that is "The Hub". It is therefore reasonable to judge the council by its actions rather than its words and, given that its citizens are overwhelmingly in favour of the existing grid road systems with roundabouts, your quote from councillor Vanessa McPake denigrating Urban Eden (www.urbaneden.org), despite it enjoying tacit or actual support from the majority of Milton Keynes citizens, is to be lamented.

This is also the same council that has trashed the very idea of the use of roundabouts in MK, on many occasions advocating the use of traffic lights at each and every new junction.

I was present at the recent council transport strategy meeting, early in March 2011, where the very nature of the grid system was debated. The document then being proposed to go to the council's cabinet was effectively not supportive of the grid road expansion at that time. Last minute changes to the strategy document were agreed to enable grid road expansion on all new developments. Unfortunately that leaves the Western Expansion Area (an area with the population of Buckingham) as a serious barrier to MK's future expansion because recent plans show only "stub" grid roads and no real through routes within the development.

I hope you can see that MK Council has seriously misled the citizens of Milton Keynes. Those with no experience of this great new town would be well advised to visit MK before attacking our brilliant grid system. Citizens almost universally love it. It serves one and all, including the users of public transport which, when configured to run on the grid, does not meander through the narrow traffic-calmed estate roads in some new areas overseen by this administration.