

READERS of this column will recall that I have written previously about government plans to develop the already-funded East-West rail link, restoring the old Varsity Line between Oxford and Cambridge via Bletchley, and to build a new East West Expressway linking the cities by a fast, new, road designed for longer distance journeys, as opposed to hop-on, hop-off local traffics.

On balance, these have seemed a good thing. However a recent column in *New Civil Engineer*, based partly upon the government's National Infrastructure Commission's Annual Monitoring Report 2019 and its perhaps more revealing annex, appears to add some very serious doubts to the already niggling doubts cast elsewhere.

All this proposed expansion of road and rail links is predicated by this HM Treasury-dictated wish, expressed as the government's overwhelming desire to flood this region with a million new homes: "The government supports the National Infrastructure Commission's ambition to build up to one million high quality homes in the arc by 2050 to maximise its *economic potential* [my italics]."

Thus; "The government is accelerating development work, completing option selection and detailed design work on the 'missing link' elements of the Expressway between the M1 and Oxford, which would be open by 2030, subject to

necessary consents. On September 12 2018, the government announced that it had selected Corridor B - the central corridor following the route of East West Rail - as the area for the Expressway, with options passing to either the east or west of Oxford. A connectivity study to support this is being led by England's Economic Heartland. It will examine how communities not directly on the route of the new road will be able to benefit from it."

Oxford is a medieval city that has long set its Cotswold-stone heart against all engine-powered forms of the car and severely punishes all those who would dare to use one. On January 28, Oxford City Council voted unanimously to oppose the East West Expressway after substantial lobbying and briefing of its councillors by the luddite No Expressway Alliance.



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## Theo Chalmers

# Doubts are growing over East-West connectivity

Meanwhile the National Infrastructure Commission appears to want to blame the government before the whole scheme goes badly wrong.

"There have been no requirements made of local authorities to develop long-term transport strategies to complement strategic east-west connections and enable the development of the arc's towns and cities, nor has government moved to establish pipelines of long term infrastructure projects, conditional upon housing delivery milestones," it claims. "The commission would welcome a clearer timeline from both central government and local partners for the decisions required to develop more housing in the arc in combination with transport schemes."

Other local partners may well be holding out but Milton Keynes Council appears to have lost any sense

of propriety and respect for all that makes Milton Keynes different by proceeding with its Plan:MK and other crass and misjudged infill/demolish/densify/degreen initiatives.

While the western section of the East West Rail line between Oxford and Bedford is under construction, nothing appears to be moving over the severe problems expected at level crossings such as those at Woburn Sands and Bow Brickhill, which will never handle the increased rail traffic.

Others in positions of influence are beginning to issue warnings too. Martin Tugwell, programme director at England's Economic Heartland recently wrote: "The earliest that the proposed 'expressway' could open is some ten years after the next stage of East West Rail and some five years after we will see rail services over the

entire route between Oxford and Cambridge. So when it comes to investing in our road network, we need to ensure that it complements, rather than competes with, our investment in rail and digital connectivity.

"We urgently need to invest in our road network to look after our existing roads better and to invest in support of planned growth. And we need to invest in improved connections to/from the East West Rail services. What we need is an integrated and co-ordinated approach to identifying transport investment priorities, one that connects people and places with opportunities and services."

He does not mention that the East West Expressway has no reserved routes so developers are quickly filling every last plot - often on appeal. Nor that it is within the Highways' England thinking to make part of the Expressway route near Milton Keynes a single carriageway.

It is possible that they will attempt to rebrand parts of existing roads such as the A421 as the East West Expressway. Some Expressway that will be. This makes claims of shaving 40 minutes off the journey time between Oxford and Cambridge via Milton Keynes beyond unlikely.

Perhaps the current Brexit 'snafu' has awoken citizens to how utterly appalling and inefficient government can be and this is just more self-generated evidence. Cheerio.

## Ladies and gentlemen... There's a new Moo in town!

MEN'S MKMIDDAY MOO WALK  
22 June 2019

Guys, this brand new event is just for you! Show your swagger as you walk seven miles with us from Willen Hospice to the MK Rugby Club.

Dress up or come as you are.  
Open to all males over 14 years.



MKMIDNIGHT MOO WALK  
13 July 2019

NEW FOR THIS YEAR: Choose your route!  
Ladies, take on our 10 mile disco themed walk across Milton Keynes OR try our brand new 'Half-Moo'. Just over half the distance, but just as much fun!

