

WHITTLESEY ROADS UPDATE No.21

Tuesday 21st January 9am

There has been no public update by Cambridgeshire County Council on the situation at the Ralph Butcher Causeway since 18th December - more than a month. I appreciate that that period included Christmas and New Year, but I've told Officers that there needs to be more frequent official communication by CCC with the public, or else residents will not have confidence that CCC is actually doing anything to progress resolution of the issues at the bridge. CCC have (again!) promised to improve the frequency of the public communications they put out. In the meantime I'll try to update everyone whenever anything happens to give an update on.

A few things have happened in the last month. As I'd requested, the portaloos were reinstated at the bridge for the lights operator to use, rather than him having to go to the local garage whenever he needed to go to the toilet. Jones Brothers have confirmed that the portaloos will remain as long as the temporary traffic lights remain.

CCC Officers have been having meetings with Jones Brothers to improve the working of the temporary traffic lights, including exploring how this can work better, including how the traffic operative on the bridge can access and use the available real-time queueing data. I emphasised to Officers that we need to have a much more comprehensive plan in place for the next time that the B1040 and/or North Bank are closed because of the threat of flooding. Previous arrangements have led to massive queues, especially at rush hour. We need better diversion routes published and publicised, but must also discourage inappropriate and frankly dangerous attempts by motorists who don't know the backroads but who try to use various routes to find a way around the queues. I've asked to be copied in on these discussions so that I can provide some local feedback about any proposed improvements, but I've yet to get a reply to that request.

The main development that has occurred, as I reported last month, is that the members' and CCC Officers' working group on the bridge has been resuscitated to consider what's happening there and how the issues there will be solved. The first meeting of the reconstituted working group took place on Friday, with plenty of information provided.

As I pessimistically (but accurately) forecast last month, the promised Jones Brothers' technical report of the bridge problems and the preferred solution(s) didn't materialise "early in January", despite the promise that was made. I'm now told that the report is expected by the end of this month. But what surprised me is that Jones Brothers have substantially progressed their remedial options work, without yet having all of the test and analysis results from the laboratory and from Jones Brothers' specialist advisors. The preferred option will not be put forward by Jones Brothers to CCC until all the test results are received and analysed, to ensure that the proposed remedial work is consistent with all of the evidence. I'll go into some detail about what the currently expected solution is in my next update later this morning, with the proviso that this is not yet the final official line being taken by Jones Brothers. Jones Brothers' report, and their expert's analysis, will be fully cross-checked by CCC's own independent experts, contracted in to ensure that everything is correctly analysed before the remedial work is commenced.

The important point is that, as things currently stand, it is not expected that any full closure of the bridge will be needed whilst these remedial works are undertaken (apart from the resurfacing of the road surface on the bridge, which should be done with minimal possible disruption, at least six months after the actual remedial work is completed). The temporary traffic lights are expected to be retained as currently whilst the remedial works are being carried out and they will be removed on

conclusion of the remedial works, but before the six month gap prior to the road surface being resurfaced.

For the first time, CCC has created a provisional timetable for all of the expected remedial works. Whilst they have shared it with me, they've asked that it be kept private until they have confirmation from Jones Brothers that the currently expected preferred solution is the one which Jones Brothers recommends when their report is finally presented, supposedly in the next 10 days. After so many disappointments, CCC don't want to promise a completion date for the works until Jones Brothers confirm the currently expected solution. CCC Officers don't want to overpromise and under-deliver, so when they announce the proposed completion timescale for the remedial works, they want to do so with confidence that those dates will be achieved.

I'll give details later this morning in my next update about the remedial works which it currently appears are likely to be undertaken at the bridge.

In addition to that, I'll address the challenge that we'll face next month with further necessary roadworks elsewhere on the A605, and how I'm trying to work with CCC Officers to minimise the disruption this will cause.

CHRIS BODEN 9am January 21st=