

Response by the Cambridge Green Party to the GCP consultation: Making Connections

December 2021

Summary

The Green Party would strongly support a goal of creating a low cost well-funded bus service with long running hours to provide a safe, efficient and fast public transport option for residents of Cambridge and Greater Cambridge. We recognise the complexity and challenges in achieving this and so request the GCP to use its resources to gather the necessary evidence, develop a sound series of options, and consult appropriately with all sectors, particularly those dependent on such a service for their basic needs.

As is now well-understood, transport is a major cause of the region's carbon emissions. The Green Party therefore supports initiatives that will genuinely seek to reduce these. We are very concerned that this consultation is based on figures for future jobs and housing that have been widely criticised and request that these are reviewed to ensure that the next stage of transport planning is based on a fully realistic set of scenarios for the next two decades. There is an urgent need to change the reliance on using a car, which currently many people have no choice but to use. A well organised, reliable and cheap bus network would provide a good alternative, and is likely to act as a disincentive especially if the cost is lower for key journeys currently being made. Equally, the creation of better active travel routes is an important tool to reduce traffic levels so should be prioritised.

The Green Party supports the concept of Travel Hubs, if these are interpreted as a location that would ensure an easy transition from private motor transport to public and active transport, and not as a Park 'n' Ride carpark – the latter does not lead to reduction in car use outside the city. We would like to see the rapid introduction of a Workplace Parking Levy. We consider that a congestion/emissions charge will be necessary but this should be developed based on further research to determine who will be most impacted by this, who should be exempt charges, options for timing that will have greatest reduction on air pollution etc.

The Green Party would like to see, for each transport proposal and particularly the congestion charge one, an income-based and/or job sector impact assessment, as well as a detailed impact assessment for all individuals with protected characteristics, including considering the cumulative impact of those with multiple protected characteristics. There is a statutory duty to do an Equalities Act assessment and we would like to see evidence that the GCP is doing this.

The "Making Connections" online survey with multiple-choice questions was an inadequate mechanism for seeking the views of many of those most affected by the current transport system, and is likely to lead to biased results and data.

1. Where and how often do you currently make journeys in the Greater Cambridge area?

N/A as response is from a group

2. What forms of transport do you use and how frequently in the Greater Cambridge area?

N/A as response is from a group

3. Many people have changed the way in which they travel during the Covid-19 pandemic. Do you expect your journeys to be different in the next 2 years?

The World Economic Forum¹ suggests that the Covid Pandemic may well last up to two more years, and so the question, as worded, would apply only to travel practice during the ongoing pandemic. We think that it is important to consider longer-term travel practices and potential changes. The following are what we (as the Green Party) understand to be general trends, compared to pre-Covid norms, and these may well have a longer-term impact than the 2 years of the question.

- Given the prevalent high levels of anxiety, many people want less stressful, safe and more reliable transport options;
- Given inflation and significant financial challenges facing so many, low cost travel is essential for many people;
- Recognising the urgent and existential threat of the climate and biodiversity crises, there is increasing urgency for transport that has as low an environmental impact as possible.
- If work patterns return to normal post-pandemic, people will seek efficient and fast transport between urban and residential areas for work, family and leisure reasons, particularly those with childcare and other similar responsibilities who have to make multiple short journeys in a given day;
- Even when the pandemic ends, there will be important health reasons requiring that transport has adequate space for passengers - crowded buses and carriages, with confined spaces, are no longer acceptable.

4. To what extent are you supportive or unsupportive of the aims for the Making Connections package?

The Green Party generally supports the aims of the package which are listed as:

- *Help more people access work, education, health services, green spaces and leisure;*
- *Improve air quality in the city and reduce poor health and deaths attributable to air pollution;*
- *Reduce carbon emissions from transport as part of meeting local net zero commitments;*
- *Free up road space for better walking and cycling infrastructure;*
- *Reduce the time car drivers and bus passengers spend stuck in traffic;*

¹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/coronavirus-pandemic-last-2-years/>

- *Improve public health by increasing walking and cycling and improving air quality;*
- *Create space for people to enjoy our city;*
- *Make Greater Cambridge a more pleasant place to live, work, travel or just be.*

In particular we are strongly supportive of the proposal's specific aim to create a low cost well-funded bus service with long running hours to provide a safe, efficient and fast public transport option for residents of Cambridge and Greater Cambridge.

However, we note that the aims of the Making Connections package are framed by the growth objectives that have been adopted by various local authorities. The Greater Cambridge Partnership for example, is anticipating an estimated 44,000 new jobs, and 33,500 new homes². These figures have been queried in many other recent consultations and discussions, and should be reconsidered in the next stage of the planning. In the next consultation would expect to see sound evidence for the growth projections being used as the framework for the GCP's transport planning.

We recognise that this consultation is specifically about particular aspects of transport, but we strongly feel that the future of transport must consider more broadly the need to improve connectivity and the protection and recovery of biodiversity, as well as enhance the good quality of life, and that therefore a fundamental requirement is to slow down or cease growth in Greater Cambridge and to seriously consider alternative models for the future of the city.

The aims of this package must be recognised as being interdependent rather than simply a list of solutions to specific problems. It is important that they do not become dissociated from the ultimate desired outcomes of:

- Improved health
- Improved quality of life – more access to core and high-quality experiences
- Improved social equality
- Leaving the area better than we found it for our descendants, in ecological, social and climate terms.

The many intrinsically valuable aims or outputs sought in the package (i.e. the reduction of car dependence, pollution, ease of population movement) need to have a meaningful set of targets and indicators of progress. Without clearly defined attributes, established targets and timeframes risk, there is no means for measuring progress towards achievement of the aims.

5. If you use a 'car/motorbike/other motor vehicle' for any of your journeys, what – if anything – would make you choose to take the bus or train, or to walk, cycle or scoot more often?

The way this question is framed may result in answers that give misleading information. Responses will be influenced by a numerous factors, such as age, location, type of journey.

² <https://www.greatercambridge.org.uk/>

People often make decisions on transport as part of an end-to-end assessment of a journey that may involve a number of modes.

When considering which mode of transport to choose, we feel points of transition are likely to be key, and these are not made clear in the consultation. Issues we see as important include:

- What the first and last mile of any journey are likely to be like?
- Where a travel hub would be located and what it would be like?
- The type of buses provided – what are in demand (e.g. large double deckers or smaller, short distance, more regular ones)?
- When should buses run, and rationale for this?
- How important are routes linking smaller settlements?

We note that there is some reference to ‘Travel Hubs’ but these have not been defined and there is currently considerable confusion as to whether these are the same or different to a Park and Ride. The Green Party supports the concept of Travel Hubs, if these are interpreted as a location that would ensure an easy transition from private motor transport to public and active transport, and not as a Park ‘n’ Ride carpark – the latter does not lead to reduction in car use outside the city.

We support Travel Hubs in the sense of Smarter Cambridge Transport’s description as locations that would be accessed by *“walking, cycling, local and demand-responsive buses, and pick-up/drop-off by community transport and private cars. Any car parking provided should be a local decision, based on local need. The travel hub might have spaces only for disabled drivers. If a larger car park is needed, perhaps because the travel hub serves a collection of villages, the space could also be used at weekends for a farmers’ market or craft fair, or by mobile services (e.g. public library, health screening, or drop-in advice sessions by the Police, Fire & Rescue Service or Citizens’ Advice Bureau).”*

We believe that it is essential to describe in detail what Travel Hubs are within this package and the role they would play in attaining the objectives. We explicitly disagree with any claim that a Park and Ride would meet the key requirements of this overall strategy (i.e. reduce car journeys and car ownership), as by definition their aim is to attract cars. There is an urgent need for a general strategy on Travel Hubs, to help identify appropriate locations (both within the city and outside) and their objectives – how they will accommodate EV charging points, and provide for parking of cycles and EV vehicles of all types including scooters.

6. To what extent are you supportive or unsupportive of the proposals for an expanded future bus network to improve services across the Greater Cambridge area?

We strongly support a public transport based future for travel in and around Cambridge. Given the lack of infrastructure available and the urgency of the climate crisis, we therefore strongly support the rapid creation of a bus-based public transport system that will provide real connectivity for communities, be reliable and run at times that we can rely on it.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to change the reliance on using a car, which currently many people have no choice but to use. A well organised, reliable and cheap bus network would provide a good alternative, and is likely to act as a disincentive especially if the cost is lower for key journeys currently being made. The required shift away from private cars to hybrid bus – Active Transport requires that the amount of road space dedicated to private motor vehicles be *reduced* in favour of buses and active transport. A policy based on expanding road capacity will not achieve the necessary modal shift. Until this is fleshed out the desirability or acceptability of the option is hard to give a clear opinion on.

We would like to be sure that the bus services being designed will allow everyone to reach all the services they need to. Some solutions are simple: is there a bus stop right next to every school, childcare facility and very close to each nursing home around the city and beyond. Others are more complex: is the transport system being designed so that it links people to their required destinations (such as Addenbrooke’s hospital for employees, schools for school age children) – this requires the GCP planning team to have good knowledge of where people needing to travel both live and need to travel to. We need to see more evidence for the connectivity between rural hubs and Cambridge City Centre, and detailed data on what journeys are currently taken by different groups of individuals (particularly those with protected characteristics under the Equalities Act).

7. If public transport, walking and cycling were improved, which of the following ideas should we prioritise to help fund and deliver this?

- Introducing a charge for driving within an area, potentially varied by time of day or day of week
- Increasing parking charges and introducing new parking charges, including a workplace parking levy
- Introducing a charge for driving within an area based on how polluting a vehicle is (emissions charge)
- Introducing a combination of the above

We accept that an enhanced bus network will require additional funding, although our position is that this should be a publicly owned and funded service.

We support a combination of all of the above options. We suggest that the ranking system used in the online survey is an inappropriate way to seek views. Allowing for respondents to state their support for each option individually as well as ranking preferences would have better captured the information information required.

Taking each option in turn:

1) Workplace Parking Levy

We strongly support the introduction of a Workplace Parking Levy (WPL) and consider this the highest priority. It could be introduced immediately, along with reducing total parking capacity within the City as recommended by Smarter Transport³, in order to provide a deterrent to car use. A WPL would charge large employers, providing parking spaces for

³ <https://www.smartertransport.uk/wheres-the-parking-strategy-for-cambridge/>

staff, through an annual levy for each parking space provided. This will simply and effectively provide a funding stream from some of the wealthiest businesses in the city who contribute minimally to social justice endeavours (compared to their huge profits which result from their connection to the city). The Nottingham WPL has enabled extension of new tram networks and investment in municipal buses, has contributed to a reduction in private car journeys and the city's carbon emissions, and had a positive effect on business and employment.

2 and 3) Congestion charge and / or Pollution charge:

We are supportive of the introduction of a congestion charge and/or pollution charge to reduce congestion and air and noise pollution. The accelerating shift to electric vehicles is very welcome but will not in itself reduce congestion. Currently the traffic rates in Cambridge are limiting the mobility and activities of bus users, preventing safe active transport options and causing lengthy journey times for many residents of Cambridge making short journeys. Congestion and emissions charges will take longer to implement than a WPL, which is why we think the WPL should be addressed first.

The implementation of a charge, and the exemptions applied need considerable further work, in order to assess the impact and potential benefits to different affected individuals. A graduated charge that factors in a range of concessions (trades/delivery vehicles, key-workers, etc) will be needed.

As part of this, car parks should not be located in the city centre: for example, the Lion Yard car park, currently a key Cambridge City Council revenue stream, could be transformed into a bus (minibuses) depot with electric charge points. The City council could then extract revenue from this new mode of transport, with minibuses operating from the centre outwards. Similarly the parking of tourist coaches on Queens Road should be halted, and arrangements made to extract revenue through a visitor fee, with parking in existing Park & Rides. Licensing of taxis also needs further consideration since these are essentially private vehicles.

Other options, used successfully in other places, are not discussed in the consultation and should be given more consideration. These include:

- A variable pollution charge – included in the online survey but not described in the brochure, noting that all vehicles create pollution from e.g. tyres, including electric vehicles.
- An increase in business tax: used to fund free public transport in the French city of Dunkirk, with very encouraging results.
- A tourist tax. Many European countries apply such a tax and it has been used to subsidise public transport, for example in Barcelona.
- Central government funding – this option should not be overlooked. Cambridge has strong potential to act as a trail for a national free public transport system (as has been introduced in Dunkirk, France).

In the long term, the Green Party would support a combination of methods based on the conditions as they evolve over time.

8. If funding was raised to invest in bus services, what would make you most likely to use the bus?

- Cheaper fares – cutting the cost by 25-50%
- Longer hours – services running from 5am to midnight
- More accessible buses for those with different mobility needs
- More frequent services – every 10 minutes in the city and from towns/larger villages, and every hour in rural areas
- More direct services to avoid changing in the city centre
- More express services to cut journey times
- Travelling on a zero emission bus
- Other (please specify)

Rather than obtaining the data needed from this survey, we propose the GCP does a detailed journeys survey, including different groups of people, to establish exactly which journeys they are taking, and what would make taking the bus the most efficient and desirable choice for them, including those with childcare and care responsibilities (disproportionately women), those from ethnic minorities, disabilities, healthcare problems, sole traders, etc. For each specific journey the factors will vary, but we believe this will enable a network design to meet the needs of Cambridge's diverse residents (a diversity that is not reflected in the current decision makers).

The selection of only three options as an answer to this question is inappropriate, as for many people, many or even all of these options will be equally important. Furthermore, the data gathered will be distorted according to the demographic of the respondent. For example, more frequent services (while desirable) will be of most value to most people if coupled with other improvements, such as cheaper fares. We would suggest the value of the recognition of a more complex picture of investment targets to make the optimal improvement of the network. For example, demand for a bus from Newnham to Addenbrooke's is likely to be less price sensitive than from Arbury to Cherry Hinton. An option of smart-ticketing should be included.

9. If funding is available to reduce the cost of taking the bus, what would be your priority?

- Lower fares for everyone – e.g. a reduction of 25% across the area
- Introducing low cost flat fares – for example, a £1-2 fare in the city
- Lower fares for families travelling together
- Lower fares for apprentices
- More flexible season ticket options
- Other (please specify)

We do not have a preferred option as the optimum will almost certainly vary across different services. We would want to see evidence-based decisions based on the desired outcomes of reducing the number of car journeys and redressing the disadvantages faced by households on lower incomes. As for question 8, the people responding to this consultation and their answers will not provide a representative sample of the local population.

10. If traffic levels were lower, there would be more opportunities to provide leisure space for people in areas that are currently traffic dominated (for example at Mitcham's Corner, in the Hills Road/Regent Street area, on East Road).

The Green Party strongly supports the reduction of traffic in the City. We also support the development of green spaces and development of greater leisure space. However, we consider this question to be very poorly worded, as there is no explanation as to how the GCP proposes to increase leisure space in currently traffic-dominated areas. Furthermore, there are many other traffic-dominated locations where leisure space is needed, such as Castle Hill/Mount Pleasant/Lady Margaret Road, and Queens Road/Fen Causeway. As residential roads are being closed to traffic, more vehicles are being displaced onto the main routes (e.g. Lady Margaret Road, Mount Pleasant, Castle Hill - has become a residential roundabout).

11. If traffic levels were lower, there would be more opportunities to create better routes for people walking and cycling.

The Green Party strongly supports the reduction of traffic in the City, and the creation of more contiguous active travel routes for walking and cycling. The creation of better active travel routes is an important tool to reduce traffic levels so should be prioritised.

12. If a charge was introduced, what hours should it operate?

We support a congestion charge which varies by the time of day. There is an urgent need to reduce traffic at peak times, but all traffic contributes to air pollution and so a peak time only charge would not be appropriate. A peak time charge would risk making the rush hour longer - simply spreading it out. Furthermore, people in flexible jobs would be more able to adjust their work patterns to avoid the charge while those tied to fixed working hours would be unable to do so.

The hours of operation for the charge should be such that the charge will result in the greatest reduction in pollution, while not disproportionately affecting the less well-off – it is essential first to determine who can be exempt from charges. Evidence from other cities (inside and outside the UK) where charges are already in place should be used.

13. If a charge was introduced, would you prefer a higher charge covering a smaller area of the city, or a lower charge covering a larger part of the city?

We fear that a higher charge around a central area would have the greatest risk of traffic displacement. We therefore support a lower charge covering a larger part of the city. The aim of the charge must be to reduce the total number of car journeys, and secondarily to keep the remaining traffic as far out of the city as possible. We would therefore argue against a charge that only covered a small area of the city. As mentioned above, there will be a need for a graded or banded charge, and locations should be considered as part of the research for this.

14. If a charge was introduced, alongside public transport, cycling and walking improvements, do you think you, or someone you care for, would need extra support?

Presenting this as a yes/no question with no space to elaborate is of limited use and we would be interested to know how the GCP proposes to use the data gathered (bearing in mind, as for previous questions, respondents will not be a representative sample).

A charge will only be socially just if there are viable alternatives in the form of high quality public transport and active travel networks. In the case of individuals for whom public and active travel are not options (for example because of disability or the nature of their work), there needs to be an exemption from the charge. As stated above, we propose the GCP undertakes a detailed study to capture the types of journeys taken by different groups of people, particularly those with protected characteristics (women, those with disabilities, ethnic minorities) and with a view to the intersectional nature of disadvantage, recognising that the decision makers in the GCP are not representative of the population (as well as not being elected specifically onto the GCP board). Exempting Blue Badge holders would be a start, but this is only as fair as the assessment process for Blue Badge eligibility, and a clear and detailed impact assessment and robust plan for exemptions to be awarded is essential.

15. If a charge was introduced, we would want to make buses a more accessible option for people with different accessibility needs. If this applies to you, please tell us what would make the bus more accessible for you?

We welcome the fact that the views of people with accessibility needs are being sought. We assume that as a starting point all buses will comply with Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations. We hope that the GCP is also working directly with relevant charities and other organisations and using the research that exists on barriers to use of public transport, rather than relying on a cross-section of people with accessibility needs to respond to this consultation question. The provision of travel information in accessible forms must be considered as well as the physical design of buses. As part of the ongoing transport planning work, the GCP must separate out pandemic and non-pandemic scenarios in recognition of the fact that many of those shielding are unable to use any form of public transport, a situation we hope will not in be place in 2 or 5 years time.

16. Which area or areas of proposals would you like to view and comment on? You can choose more than one area to comment on.

We assume that these site specific proposals are based on detailed assessment of journeys made and forecast for the future, and modelling of how the objective of reducing car journeys can best be met. As we do not have access to this data, we will not comment on the specific proposals.

We would draw GCP's attention to the 'lollipop' model proposed by Smarter Cambridge Transport, which we feel has potential to contribute to objectives such as creating more space for people in the city centre (<https://www.smartertransport.uk/could-lollipop-bus-routing-be-the-answer/>).

17. Please comment if you feel any of the proposals would either positively or negatively affect or impact on any such person/s or group/s.

The Green Party would like to see, for each transport proposal and particularly the congestion charge one, an income-based and/or job sector impact assessment, as well as a detailed impact assessment for all individuals with protected characteristics, including considering the cumulative impact of those with multiple protected characteristics. There is a statutory duty to do an Equalities Act assessment and we would like to see evidence that the GCP is doing this.

18. Do you have any other comments about our proposals for improving public transport, walking and cycling or the potential road or parking charges?

No additional comments