**2G3S**

**Response to Greater Cambridge Partnership consultation on the: ‘Cambridge South East Transport: Better Public Transport Project’**

2G3S (Green Groups in the Shelfords, Stapleford and Sawston) is a non party-political group which promotes green activities and shares ideas in our local villages. We hold monthly meetings and organise walks, talks and events. There are around 130 people on our mailing list. See: <http://2g3s.staplefordvillage.org.uk/>

This response has been discussed with core supporters and sent to those on our mailing list.

**Introduction**

There is increasing evidence that we need to have a much more sustainable transport policy with both our local district Councils, Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire, having passed emergency resolutions on moving rapidly to reduce CO2 output. <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/news/2019/02/22/cambridge-city-council-declares-climate-emergency>

<https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=75404>

The Greater Cambridge Partnership through the City Centre Access project aims to reduce traffic by 10-15% on 2011 levels (that is 24% on today’s levels)

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

If these objectives are to be achieved, and they must be, then congestion on the main radials into Cambridge will be vastly reduced within a few years. It is now well recognised that the ‘half term effect’ where peak hour congestion into Cambridge is almost eliminated, results from only a 15% reduction in flows on the main radials. We can and must achieve such reductions even before 2025.

The present survey (Cambridge South East Transport – Better Public Transport Project) sets out a plan for ‘better public transport and sustainable options….improving journey times and linking communities and employment sites in the area south east of Cambridge and beyond’. In this response we argue, first, that one of the stated aims of the project, ‘to secure future economic growth and quality of life’, is flawed. The second section discusses problematic issues with the scheme currently proposed. Next we discuss an alternative and its benefits before finally looking at some suggested ameliorations should the plans be adopted.

**Section 1: Aims of project**

One of the stated aims is ‘to secure future economic growth and quality of life’. This is already a prosperous area of the country. Economic growth entails creating more industry and jobs in the area, which in turn attracts more people to live here. The result will be increasing demands for housing and workplaces and means of transport; more physical infrastructure such as roads, rail, broadband; and more services such as health, education, social care, retail, leisure and means of collecting and disposal of waste. This at a time when council and NHS resources are already stretched to their utmost and there is a growing threat to the natural environment, both in the greenbelt and elsewhere.

It is thus far from clear to us that securing economic growth will automatically result in a better quality of life as implied in the wording of this aim. Moreover this aim compromises the others: with economic growth there will be more public transport needed; more need for shared-use paths; more homes to be connected with more places of work or study; and more congestion and threats to air quality.

Far better to aim to improve the quality of life of the people already living in Cambridgeshire. Provide housing, services and jobs for those already here. Protect our green spaces. Attempt to reduce the growing inequality in income between richest and poorest and end the scandal of homelessness. Rather than hailing Cambridgeshire as a ‘growth area’ aiming to attract more businesses and people from outside the county, we should be supporting existing employers and looking to the needs of those already living here.

**Section 2: Huge issues with the proposed scheme**

Unwanted developments

There is strong local concern that this route simply provides unstoppable development opportunities. Building out to the route from Great Shelford, Stapleford and Sawston would enable several thousand dwellings to be constructed, and justified by the accessible transport. Wokingham (A329M) and Watchfield/Shrivenham (A420) are just two examples of developments that have ‘filled’ the original green space between a settlement and a new bypass.

Abstraction from existing bus services

The current Stagecoach Citi 7 bus service gives relatively good links between the centres of villages, with their shops, schools etc. The proposed route would be well over half a mile from these existing centres, and this means that the young and fit will use such improved services, but that will reduce the financial viability of the existing Citi 7 bus. Unless there is financial support for the existing buses it could be stopped, penalising the elderly and less able.

Unsustainability

This route will cut through our green belt with a concrete and tarmac strip approach 12m wide. The embedded carbon in the construction will be huge. A 1st order estimate suggests, at a very minimum, 5,000 tonnes of cement. To make a single tonne of cement produces one tonnes of CO2. That one tonne is about the same CO2 as typical car produces in a year of driving. Such a route of impervious surface will also require an extensive drainage system, or significant extra land for a SUDs system. A storm giving 50mm of rain would give some 60m3 of water per km. Going through an area of valuable chalk aquifer will require additional pollution control measures. By contrast, a conventional LRT (ballast with grass over) requires far less construction materials, and has little impact on local hydrology.

**Section 3: an alternative, and its benefits**

As discussed in Section 1, we do not support the aim of significant future growth in population and employment. In a somewhat circular argument, this projected growth is taken to justify huge expenditure with much pain and no gain for at least 5 years. But we require public transport solutions to reduce pollution and CO2 emissions within two years.

With a more modest rise in population and employment after 2025 an improved conventional bus service on the A1307 and A1301 corridors could provide an equivalent service with minimal capital expenditure. Such a service will better benefit those living or working in these corridors, as it can more directly service the centres of population.

We cannot separate cycling from public transport and must take seriously the cycle as a means of commuting in South Cambridgeshire, further developing existing infrastructure and existing plans such as those for Greenways. Granta Park to the Biomedical Campus is less than six miles as the crow flies - a perfect distance to commute by cycle. Six miles is a normal distance to cycle-commute in South Cambridgeshire for people who are confident travelling by cycle.

An achievable short-term plan

The two main bus routes, Citi 7 bus on the A1301, and Stagecoach 13 bus on the A1307, serve this area. These run at half hour or better frequencies during core hours and hourly until late, as well as having good Sunday services. This is far better than on some radial corridors, but both routes suffer from peak hour congestion caused by commuters in private cars on the fringes of Cambridge, although they are still currently considered commercially viable by Stagecoach.

The extended and unreliable journey time, together with the high perceived cost when compared with P&R, have led to many with ‘car available’ to desert local bus services for the P&R, hence increasing congestion for service buses yet further. Reducing the congestion and journey time for these existing buses, and adding in additional services to replace current ‘private coaches’ from Genome Campus, the Babraham Research Campus and Granta Park, as well as a more flexible ticketing system, would attract many from private cars. Such an improved service would give much additional benefit for the old, young, and poor, who currently have no car access, but who would be poorly served by these GCP proposals.

How to achieve these short-term improvements?

A general improvement which has wider applicability than the current project is to distinguish ‘County’ from ‘City’ buses, with County buses having limited stops within the city boundary. This would speed up rural bus services and encourage more widespread use of them.

More specific to this survey:

Citi 7 bus: If the proposed bus turning point adjacent to Addenbrooke’s Treatment Centre (ATC) were to be built, Citi 7 could go down Addenbrookes Road, over bridge, along Francis Crick Avenue, down the bus-only link road between Astra Zenica and Papworth Hospital and then drop off near ATC, which would be far closer to the main concourse and centre of employment than the Addenbrooke’s bus station. There is a free Addenbrooke’s patient courtesy bus which links ATC with various other parts of the hospital, including Outpatients. The Citi 7 could then return down the link road and join Cambridge Guided Busway to go non-stop to Cambridge station, saving some 5 minutes on the existing route (even if that were freer of congestion). This would be a huge benefit to the villages.

The stops on Hills Road would lose the Citi 7 service, but are well provided with other services.

For the No13 bus a short stretch of bus lane approaching Hinton Way roundabout within the existing highway boundary would enable buses to avoid car queues. The current ‘peak hour’ Wort’s Causeway (with restrictions) should be used by all buses. In addition, the introduction of extra Urban Traffic Control features to enable better priority for buses (including 'advanced GREEN for buses') could reduce bus delays to Addenbrooke's roundabout.

Accelerating buses past the queues of private cars is the key to modal shift, and these changes could be completed before major infrastructure has even an outline business case (OBC) or planning permission.

It will also be essential to complete the comprehensive plans for Greenways in advance of longer-term expensive works over the Green Belt.

Social benefits

Such changes, which should be achievable within two years, would be far better for improving the quality of life in our necklace villages. They achieve the primary objective of the proposed segregated route of giving frequent and reliable public transport from the City to Granta Park and beyond, but would give additional benefits for local people. This is because improvements to existing bus routes would give better connectivity within and between our necklace villages, enabling those without car access to reach existing schools, shops, health centres and friends, as well as Addenbrooke’s and Cambridge City Centre.

By providing much improved cycle facilities we will persuade many who are less confident to start to cycle, for the good of both their health, and that of our local and global environment.

These villages would also benefit from better community transport (see ‘Travel Hubs’ as proposed by Smarter Cambridge Transport) giving links to existing services, shops, health centres etc, for those with less mobility.

**Section 4: Possible ameliorations to the proposed route**

If the proposed route is to proceed, it is important that improvements are made to reduce its impact on the landscape and the environment and ensure bio-diversity net gain.

Sections of the route should be put in a cutting, particularly where it crosses the Haverhill Road from Stapleford and the important landscapes of the Magog Down. This cutting would minimise the disruption to traffic on the Haverhill Road, where there are currently no railway crossings, and retain direct access from Stapleford to the Downs on foot and bicycle via a bridge across the cutting. A strip of land either side of the cutting(s) should be planted with native tree species of local provenance as these will be better adapted to support a more biodiverse fauna, and will minimise the visual impact of the cutting.

**Final thoughts**

We note that the Citizens Assembly has said that the priority must be improving public transport. You don’t need to force people out of their cars, just ensure that viable alternatives exist, and ensure that those continuing to drive pay more of the congestion and pollution cost attributed to such peak hour car trips. That could include a pollution charge for trips in central Cambridge and reductions in availability of free parking at workplaces, on streets and in other locations. To be effective and get public support, significant improvements in public transport are needed in parallel with any restrictions on private car use. With will, all those could be in place even before proposed construction of this scheme starts.

We have argued that Cambridgeshire should not set out to become a beacon of economic enterprise. However, even if that ambition is modified it is clear that we shall need to accept some growth and densification.

But if we can create a modal shift (even a small amount) from private car to public transport, then public transport becomes more viable, cheaper, faster and more reliable (see Nottingham, Reading and Brighton & Hove, for example). It is the policy of the Draft Local Transport Plan to reduce car commuting into Cambridge by some 25% on current levels. If that were done by improving existing bus and rail services it would be unnecessary to build P&R sites on greenbelt land (at 10k per space) or additional strips of tarmac 10/15km out from the City fringes.

Is it irony or paradox that should this £155 million be spent and the service be as reliable as suggested, hence attracting current car drivers, and significantly reducing congestion, it will prove that it was not needed?

This is because bus services on the existing A1307 & A1301 would then be able to carry such large numbers without delays or difficulty that the new route could be returned to grass.

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