

## CTC-Cambridge AGM – 21 April 2024

### CYCLE CAMPAIGNING REPORT

**This report is mostly focussed on the work of the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) as they are responsible for most of the major bus and active travel projects. My overall “OffCUK” assessment from a cycling perspective is “Requires Improvement”. There are some good schemes, but there are too many poor quality elements, and their current plans will still leave us with a fragmented and incomplete cycle network.**

GCP has a wider remit than transport (also includes skills, housing and innovation). But the bulk of their income is spent on transport and this report is only concerned with that transport spend.

#### ***Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) – running out of time and money.***

The GCP appear to be running out of time and money to make the substantial changes to transport in this area that are needed. In my understanding they only have 6-10 [out of 15-20] years left and they will have insufficient funds to complete all their unfinished projects. As a reminder here is the official statement of their planned 15 year lifespan, which could be extended by another 5 years (albeit with no extra money):

*The Greater Cambridge Partnership, one of a number of ‘city deals’ signed by central government in 2014, is worth up to £500 million in funding to 2030 for infrastructure improvements to boost economic growth.*

Funding is being released in stages –£100 or £200 million of government funding every 5 years – and this is expected to be matched by an equivalent amount of local funding (mainly from developer section 106 contributions with some from council budgets). So far there have been 2 tranches of funding - £100m in 2015 followed by £200m in 2020. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and final tranche of £200m is due in 2025/6. The GCP currently predict a total budget of about £700 million, suggesting that the matched funding has fallen short.

#### ***Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) – a cycling perspective of their projects***

*NOTE: The budget figures quoted in this report are taken from the GCP public figures as presented at their March 2024 meeting. I understand that a significant increase in all the future project budgets is predicted, but these increases are not yet formally recognised in these figures.*

From a cycling perspective the GCP money has funded three groups of active travel projects:

- The Chisholm trail, excluding the Abbey-Chesterton bridge (which was funded separately by the County Council). GCP funded all the rest of Phase 1 and will fund Phase 2.
- New sections and improvements to parts of all 12 Greenways – rural cycling routes into Cambridge.
- A series of small “cross-city” improvements, with some more cross city improvements planned as part of the “Cycling Plus” project.

Cyclists have also benefitted from improvements to Histon Road and will benefit from significant improvements to Milton Road. There are also early stage plans for similar improvements to Madingley Road.

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I think there is a big gap between the implied ambition of their policy and strategy documents and the detailed design of these projects which contain too many poor quality sections. And overall there are too many missing links which will result in a fragmented and incomplete cycle network.

In terms of funding, the GCP continue to prioritise bus transport and expansion of the P&R sites, with most of the funding being reserved for a series of projects for new busways and new P&R sites:

- Cambourne to Cambridge (C2C) – a new busway from Grange Road to Cambourne via Coton, Hardwick and Bourn Airfield. This includes a new P&R site at Scotland Farm (Dry Drayton).
- Waterbeach to Cambridge (W2C) – a new busway from the existing northern busway to Waterbeach new town. This includes a new P&R site to the west of Waterbeach new town. The busway also connects to Milton P&R (which will remain).
- Cambridge South East Transport (CSET) – a new busway from Addenbrookes to a new P&R site on the A11 east of Babraham (located on the western side of the Abington footbridge).
- Cambridge Eastern Access – improvements to Newmarket Road from Elizabeth Way in the west to Airport Way in the east. This includes a new P&R site near the airport. The existing Newmarket Rd P&R is expected to be closed – replaced by the new P&R.

There has also been work to expand Babraham P&R and Trumpington P&R and there are plans for a second P&R site between Hauxton and Trumpington. Plans to create a new travel hub at Foxton have now been “paused” due to lack of funds and this scheme is unlikely to proceed.

All the new busways will also include a good quality cycle track alongside the busway road and this is a welcome element: these will all be useful cycle routes. But the busways are very expensive projects - especially the CSET and C2C busways which are estimated to cost between £100m and £200m each - and there is not enough money to do them all. Most recently the CSET busway and Foxton Hub projects have been paused. But the predicted overall budget is still higher than the available income and more “pauses” are likely. I think that W2C – which has a smaller budget of £52 million - might be the only one to be completed.

And lastly we should not forget the big failure of GCP with their “Making Connections” proposals. This was a proposal to introduce road charging as a way to fund bus improvements and also to fund more active travel improvements. For me, the main benefit for cycling would have been the reduced congestion because this would improve cycling conditions on all our city roads: fewer motor vehicles should reduce conflicts and queues and make the roads safer for cyclists. It would also create the space to allow some road space to be reallocated. This failure means that the congestion will continue to get worse because the rapid growth in employment and housing will continue. Cycling within the city will get worse, unless they manage to rescue or replace these proposals.

A key part of the “Making Connections” proposal was setting the road charges in way that would significantly reduce congestion in Cambridge City. This led them to propose a charge for all day time journeys (including both morning and afternoon peaks) anywhere inside the city. There were several exemptions for disabled drivers and others but most motor vehicles – both city residents and visitors – would have to pay. Despite a late change that introduced a shorter charge period and added many more exemptions, it failed to get political support and has been stalled. The messy endgame was a failure by our councillors but that failure was ultimately a failure of GCP. More on this below.

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### ***GCP Greenway projects –good in parts but too many compromises.***

All of the Greenways have all progressed to an initial consultation where GCP presented their outline design for the routes. In most cases, the plans are for modest improvements to the existing routes and many of the more expensive elements have been removed. Work has started on parts of several routes, generally improving short sections where the planned improvement is relatively easy to deliver (e.g. widening a path within the existing highway boundary).

The plans appear to be constrained by the decision to deliver all 12 Greenways with a total budget of £76 million. This gives an average budget of just over £6 million for each Greenway and this is why most of the expensive infrastructure elements (such as underpasses) cannot be included. For reference, the Abbey-Chesterton bridge alone is reported to have cost more than £7 million – which is comparable to the budget for each complete greenway. And Histon Road, which is just 2km in length and has no major infrastructure, had a budget of about £12 million.

There has been one welcome exception to this pattern: the GCP have recently agreed to add a new A505 cycle and pedestrian bridge to the plans for the Melbourn Greenway to complete the connection to Royston. This will be joint project with Herts CC. The plans are at an early stage, but the latest Greenway plans suggest that construction could start by 2026/27.

A similar constraint is their unstated policy of minimising land acquisition due to the costs and delays (especially for contested acquisitions) so the plans opt for pinch points and similar compromises in many places where there is too little space for the full LTN1/20 compliant width to be realised.

*[Local Transport Note 1/20 (LTN 1/20) provides detailed guidance on the design principles for high quality safe cycling infrastructure in the UK. The standards defined in LTN 1/20 are only recommendations and do not have any statutory backing and hence substandard designs can still be constructed.]*

### ***Chisholm Trail – a trail of two halves.***

Phase 1 of the Chisholm Trail (the first section) has now been completed. This includes a new river bridge (Abbey-Chesterton bridge) and a new underpass on Newmarket Road. The route has been delivered to a reasonably high standard with just a few poor elements. My main concern is that the route currently ends at Coldhams Lane with no good onward routes. Phase 1 has cost about £18 million – more than the original budget. This figure does not include the £7 million for the bridge (so about £25 million in total).

Phase 2 is intended to connect from Coldhams Lane to Cambridge station but the original vision for this route has now been badly compromised by recent developments. A particular disappointment is the possible loss of one or both of the planned routes under Mill Road bridge due to a failure to reach agreement with Network Rail. The original vision was for two routes - one on each side of the railway - but it looks like the eastern route through Petersfield may be abandoned and only the western route through Romsey will be built. The result is now likely to be a rather poor quality and incoherent route mostly using existing residential roads. The planned budget of £5 million for Phase 2 illustrates the lower level of ambition for this section.

### ***Making Connections – road charging is unpopular, but what is the alternative?***

It is hard to know where to start when discussing the failure of the Making Connections proposals. In the end it feels like an inevitable “Grand old Duke of York” event, riding up to the top of the hill and riding

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down again. The County Council have been looking at ways to manage the traffic congestion in the City for decades and the plans have always ended in retreat and failure to grasp the nettle of congestion. This time we hoped it would be different: this was presented as a well-designed proposal that would finally deliver a workable and deliverable plan.

In the event, there was a clear political failure as Councillors who offered conditional and lukewarm support during the consultation, rejected the scheme and even refused to consider the last minute compromise scheme proposed by GCP. I can only assume that they got spooked by the vocal opposition and started to fear for their council seats. Of course, a large element of blame should fall on the Conservative Government and the Conservative County Councillors who offered no support and offered no alternative. But it is disappointing that Labour and Lib Dem Councillors, who accepted the need for these proposals and strongly supported the bus improvements, also rejected this scheme without offering any alternative. In the end, the only party that supported the scheme while also suggesting improvements and alternatives was the Green Party.

For me, the wider disappointment was the way GCP chose to shape and present their plans. They opted to try and disguise the core requirement for road charging and instead focus on the bus improvements and to use the euphemistic title of “Making Connections”. The road-use charge was always going to be the headline sticking point so this should be centre stage. But their obscure approach also led to the absurd proposal that they would improve the busses before introducing the charge.

I call this “absurd” for two reasons. Firstly, because this is a logistical impossibility – you cannot operate an efficient and attractive bus service on congested roads. And there is also long standing evidence [from other places] that an improved bus service alone does not create a significant modal shift by drivers – you need the “stick” of a charge to encourage that modal shift. Secondly, it also creates a potentially catastrophic cash flow because you have a large early funding requirement [to fund those bus improvements] and if there is no road-charge income in the early years this creates a long tail of debt that slows any later improvements as income is diverted to repay that debt. And if the introduction of the road charging is delayed or opposed, if [when] for example those bus improvements fail to deliver on time, that debt rapidly spirals out of control.

I think London understood this all those years ago – they introduced the charge first with no preconditions, and the reduced congestion plus that extra income allowed them to improve both the busses and the cycling infrastructure over the following years.

### ***Cycling Plus – isolated schemes that will help but don't create a network.***

The “Cycling Plus” label refers to a report that identified 13 schemes for active travel improvement within Cambridge City based on analysis of where maximum benefit could be delivered. This total includes 5 schemes outside of the city such as improvements on Butt Lane Milton. I focus here on the 8 schemes that were proposed to improve the cycle lanes on major roads inside the city, mostly on the ring road.

Each scheme would individually improve an existing route, but collectively they would still just be isolated schemes and this will not result in a fully connected cycle network (“no more than the sum of the parts”).

Two of those schemes have been selected as the top priority to progress:

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- Active travel improvements for the A1134 North-South (Perne Road, Mowbray Road and Fendon Road), including considering how a scheme could improve provision for cyclists at the Addenbrookes roundabout;
- Active travel improvements for Hills Road from Hills Road Sixth Form College to the junction with Regent Street/Gonville Place/Lensfield Road.

There has been a first consultation on outline ideas for the Hills Road scheme and they are now progressing to more detailed designs. GCP claim to have allocated a budget of £20 million to deliver both these schemes, which suggests a rather low level of ambition. Both schemes are constrained by the limited road space and the requirement to maintain traffic capacity. And the limited budget will restrict the scope of junction redesigns that are possible.

More of these schemes were planned to be gradually funded using the Active Travel portion of the road charging income (i.e. they were included in the Making Connections proposals). It is not clear if any more of them can be funded without that extra income.