



Transport & Infrastructure Committee

4 November 2024

Title: Public Questions

Public Report: Yes

Question 1 – Mr Antony Carpen, Resident

To: Transport & Infrastructure Committee

Question:

Item 13 - Appendix A - p7 ([here](#)) states:

“The Greater Cambridge Partnership’s (GCP) Making Connections programme was a potential solution to this with the aim of reducing traffic volumes within the city by 15% on a 2017 base, but this is not now progressing. This creates a significant gap, given its potential to alleviate congestion in and around Cambridge and contribute to a significant improvement of the public transport network. The CPCA is leading work with the local authorities and GCP to explore solutions to this via the emerging Greater Cambridge Transport Strategy”

Please can the CPCA initiate discussions with ministers about building a light rail for Greater Cambridge as envisioned by Connect Cambridge for the years after the GCP funding comes to an end.

Response:

It’s really important to make sure we have the best possible transport offer in our region. For too many people, the car is the only option, and we all share that commitment to ensuring our residents, our visitors and people who work here are not faced with the choice of ‘drive or stay at home’. Recognising this, the Combined Authority, alongside partners including Greater Cambridge Planning Service, Cambridgeshire County Council and the GGP, are collaborating to progress strategic work in a timely and effective manner. Together, we are actively working to develop alternative solutions through the emerging Greater Cambridge Transport Strategy or GCTS. This new approach will focus on reducing congestion and enhancing the efficiency, accessibility, and sustainability of public transport across the region.

As part of the GCTS, we are committed to exploring all viable options to meet the Greater Cambridge’s evolving transport needs. This absolutely includes considering forward-looking solutions such as light rail alongside other cutting-edge technologies. Our approach is driven by the desire to develop the most effective and integrated transport network possible - one that tackles congestion, aligns with the city’s growth ambitions, and supports a more sustainable future for Cambridge and the surrounding areas.

Question 2 – Mr Russel Beal on behalf of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum

To Transport & Infrastructure Committee

Question:

I wanted to highlight to the committee that the core business case for the reopening of the Wisbech rail line is inextricably linked to the concept of a Wisbech Garden town (WGT), effectively a regenerated and economically progressive town.

As a long-term sustainable investment, you cannot separate the two. This joining together is the only way to answer Network Rail's question of "where are the high and growing numbers of commuters going to come from to make this new service ultimately profitable?" Unless there is a major regeneration, aligned to new affordable housing (the original WGT proposal was for 14,000 new homes), it is unlikely that the investment in any public transport system will succeed.

My point is that the investment in Wisbech needs to be 'transformational' on a number of fronts. You need a shift in the reason for people to buy homes and set up new businesses in the town and fundamentally reverse the current economic decline. For example - well designed and affordable housing, maybe a new country park, environmental enhancement on the back of the new £2billion reservoir proposals, preservation of the towns rich history and architectural heritage - all supported by a fast and efficient rail system that commuters actually want and need. This is the only way to make this all economically viable. The potential as a phased masterplan is considerable and sets a course for the towns long-term role with the county. People want a new station and service they are proud of.

The original business case identified heavy rail and a hourly direct service into Cambridge with a 40min journey time as offering the best value for a new public transport system that supports the ambitious WGT. In previously recorded minutes the CPCA saw the WGT as the 'game-changer' for the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR).

In addition, I would also point to the new governments considerable ambition for 1.5 million new homes across the country during the next five years and would suggest this presents the perfect opportunity to see the above put forward and considered. I understand a government Taskforce is now looking for potential locations.

Can I therefore request an explanation as to why the CPCA has departed from the original joined-up business case that delivered on the Network Rail question and offered a transformational vision for North Cambridgeshire?

Response:

In reference to the recent Network Rail Options Appraisal Report – an item scheduled for further discussion in this committee – it is recognised that there is an opportunity to potentially enhance the benefit-cost ratio (BCR) for various track-based options considered in the study. Improving the BCR would be critical if we were to deliver the scheme, as it directly influences the attractiveness of these options for future funding allocations. One effective approach to raising the BCR lies in increasing projected patronage, essentially by forecasting higher passenger numbers and more frequent journeys along the route.

In all of this, it is vital that we hear the voice of the people who live and work in Fenland. Our commitment in the Combined Authority to the Mayors 3 Cs of compassion, community and, crucially here, co-operation. You ask particularly whether demand could be boosted through a new garden town or other strategic development in the area. Of course, in that, the local planning process, undertaken by Fenland District Council, is essential, because it reflects the growth aspiration and development strategies of the council, and I would not, in my role as chair of this committee, wish to speak for them in that.

Question 3 – Peter Wakefield, Vice-Chair Railfuture East Anglia Resident

To Transport & Infrastructure Committee

Question:

“Wisbech, within Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, has a population of nearly 40,000.

It is the only major town in Cambridgeshire without a railway station. Towns approaching its size, St Neots, Huntingdon, Ely, all have railway stations that are used by thousands of their residents each day for journeys long and short. Wisbech by contrast is in urgent need of this quality infrastructure to begin to make it thrive once again and enable its residents to simply enjoy the mobility their fellow county residents take for granted.

On July 16th 2013, Cambridgeshire County Council accepted a petition from Wisbech residents calling for the restoration of their railway. Since then we have had 11 years of procrastination by consultation after consultation, during which time all the economic and social indicators of the town show it is being left behind by its neighbours.

Today, will the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority stop the procrastination and commit to building the railway back to Wisbech, to enable a scalable heavy rail service of two trains an hour to March until the Ely Junctions are sorted. After that, seek to provide a train service of at least once an hour direct to Cambridge and eventually, to Peterborough to enable sustainable growth in Wisbech in the form of the proposed Wisbech new town suburb, that will also be to the benefit of economic growth in Peterborough and Cambridge? From your previous business case assessment, the though service has a strong Benefit to Cost ratio of up to 3:1, it is only the interim shuttle service which shows a weak case but this is just a temporary phase.

Response:

The Combined Authority remains firmly committed to establishing a much-needed connection between March and Wisbech, recognising the benefits this link could bring to local connectivity, economic growth, and community accessibility. However, for this project to move forward, it is essential to secure the support and commitment of Network Rail, which oversees the rail infrastructure and will likely serve as a primary funding partner. Something I find myself saying a lot is that we are a transport authority with direct control over 12% of the buses and none of the trains. At present, therefore, the Combined Authority has neither the power, nor the funding, to initiate a rail project such as this.

We fully recognise the situation of Wisbech as a major town in Cambridgeshire without a railway station, and we understand the significant impact that improving connectivity could have on local mobility, economic growth, and social inclusion. The comparison with other similar towns with functioning stations highlights the genuine need for quality infrastructure to support Wisbech’s long-term development and resilience.

Since the initial petition in 2013, the project has undergone a number of consultations, each serving as a necessary step in navigating the complex regulatory and funding landscape associated with major infrastructure projects. While these processes can be lengthy, they are essential to secure the support, funding, and regulatory approval that allow us to push this project forward.

In the light of the latest report, more work is needed to demonstrate the deliverability, viability, and economic justification of the March-Wisbech link to Network Rail (Eastern Region) and other stakeholders. We must continue the work to make a compelling case for investment and partnership, ensuring that the project aligns with both the strategic interests of Network Rail and the transport needs of our region.

Therefore, the next steps will require us to follow established due process, which ensures that all factors – financial, environmental, and logistical – are thoroughly considered. This includes working closely with partners to address issues such as the Ely Junction bottleneck and exploring scalable solutions, which could enable progress toward a more permanent solution.

As we work through these processes, we remain committed to advocating for Wisbech’s connectivity needs and building a robust case for improvements that will position the town for sustainable growth, including through direct connections to Cambridge and Peterborough.

Question 4 – Sophie Corcoran, Resident

To Transport & Infrastructure Committee

Question:

I would like to ask a question to the transport committee at their next meeting regarding the government's decision to raise the £2 bus fare cap to £3 and whether the combined authority could subsidise bus travel in order to keep the cap at £2 for all bus use in order to stop low wage workers in places like Peterborough being left to pay £520 extra per year to get to and from work.

Response:

Thank you for your question about the recent decision by the national government to extend the bus fare cap beyond December of this year, which is when the previous government had scheduled the cap to be ended.

The Mayor and the Combined Authority are resolute in a commitment to delivering meaningful improvements in passenger transport for the people of Peterborough and Cambridgeshire. Under the mayor's leadership, we are working tirelessly to expand and improve the region's bus services, making them accessible, reliable, and affordable for everyone.

Our initiatives continue to reflect this dedication – most notably through the introduction of new and expanded bus routes that better connect our communities, enabling greater access to education, work, and essential services. In addition, the Tiger Pass has been a substantial success, with over 30,000 under 25s signing up to enjoy subsidised bus fares at just £1, a critical step toward ensuring affordable travel options for our young people. And our recent decision to fund concessionary travel at peak times will mean that elderly and disabled people in our authority area can travel for free in Peterborough and Cambridgeshire at any time.

Also, please do note that the ability to set fares locally is part of a franchised system so please do make sure that you have contributed your thoughts on fares as part of a submission to the current consultation on bus reform.

Question 5 – Simon Martin, Resident

To Transport & Infrastructure Committee

Question:

Question for Agenda Item 7, "Bus Network Update" at CPCA Transport and Infrastructure meeting 4th November 2024:

On 20th of March 2024, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Board, Page 165 of the Agenda pack, Item 10, 2.7 stated: "In order to maximise the benefits of bus reform as early as possible, whilst progressing franchising and the audit process, in the interests of effective management, we are preparing an approach for an Interim Enhanced Partnership"

2.8 then gave a nine-step list of "The outline steps to achieve an Interim Enhanced Partnership" as set out by DfT.

Separately, Minutes from the March 2024 TIC meeting noted (11.2, h) "The IEP model was being advanced as a steppingstone towards delivering the maximum amount of benefit at the earliest opportunity whilst progressing the longer-term vision of bus franchising"

Please can the Combined Authority provide an update today, as to which stages officers have completed in that nine-step process for an Interim Enhanced Partnership, in the seven-and-a-bit months that have passed since?

	<p>Response:</p> <p>The Interim Enhanced Partnership (IEP) comprises two key components: the Plan and the Scheme. The Plan builds upon the principles outlined in the Bus Strategy and Bus Service Improvement Plan, providing a strategic foundation for bus service enhancement, while the Scheme outlines the specific commitments, requirements, and standards to which all parties will adhere in implementing the EP.</p> <p>At present, we are engaged in a comprehensive consultation on bus reform, which is gathering critical insights from a wide range of stakeholders. This timing creates constraints on a commentary on the development of the IEP documentation or providing other detailed information at this stage, as doing so could inadvertently influence or prejudice the consultation's outcome. Once the consultation process concludes, the Combined Authority will be well-positioned to offer a more comprehensive update on the status of an IEP.</p>
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Question 6– Andrew Jones, Resident

To	Transport & Infrastructure Committee
	<p>Question:</p> <p><i>VIX, the Real Time Passenger Information System, which displays bus arrival times on bus stops and in travel apps was originally purchased by Cambridgeshire County Council but is now managed by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. It routinely displays incorrect bus arrival information which misinforms potential passengers and greatly undermines trust in buses and public transport generally.</i></p> <p><i>The DfT's BODS system is fundamental for tracking the real-time location of buses every 10 seconds and is a requirement of the bus operators license but operational problems (eg lack of 3G mobile signal, swapping equipment between buses, using different buses) and user errors by staff result in the data feed being highly unreliable.</i></p> <p><i>This unreliable data from the bus operator forms the input to VIX which essentially amplifies the unreliability causing the passenger information to vary erratically.</i></p> <p><i>Bus operators routinely fail to cancel non-running buses on VIX which results in the bus stop signs showing the scheduled running time rather than the fact the bus was <u>cancelled</u> and is not running. Sometimes the route cancellation doesn't happen until after the bus should have departed. Imagine the frustration of passengers who see the bus is scheduled to arrive shortly, but it never arrives! Not just the frustration but the safety implications for passengers having to hang about at a filthy bus stop for 3 or 4 hours for the next bus to eventually turn up.</i></p> <p><i>How can we trust Cambridgeshire and Peterborough CA to run a franchised bus network when there is little, if any, care taken over aspects of the network they already have full responsibility for?</i></p>
	<p>Response:</p> <p>The Combined Authority is aware of this ongoing issue, and this is being actively monitoring. As you are probably aware, the Combined Authority only run 12% of routes across the region and unfortunately, it appears that your concerns stem from the operators' failure to cancel journeys they have either partially or entirely missed, resulting in inaccurate data being presented to passengers. Despite sustained efforts and engagement, we have been unsuccessful in securing operators' commitment to address this issue, reflecting a disappointing lack of accountability.</p> <p>While the Combined Authority currently lacks the formal powers to compel the operator to adopt more customer-centric practices, we are committed to pursuing this matter. To that end, we may need to escalate these concerns to the Traffic Commissioner, requesting their involvement to determine whether the operator is prepared to invest the necessary resources to not only improve the reliability of services but also ensure accurate, real-time information at bus stops for passengers.</p>

Question 7 – Clive Freeman, on behalf of Bramley Line Heritage Railway

To Transport & Infrastructure Committee

Question:

Our question relates to the reports that were released with the agenda for this meeting, suggesting that more investigation and therefore expense was needed into the feasibility of the rail link between March and Wisbech being reinstated and if it would be viable to go ahead with it in the foreseeable future. In the costing report it was suggesting a date of Q2 2029 as an operational start date with work starting Q2 2027 as calculation points, but this is in the latest Network Rail finance period where funding has already been allocated. We feel that nothing will happen until the 2030 finance period and £239 million mentioned for heavy rail will be under-calculated by then and be nearer the £300 million, plus crossing the A47 as an extra add on. Also, dependant on the £500 million being allocated by Network Rail for Ely North Junction upgrade also playing a part in any decisions being made, Bramley Line Heritage Railway (BLHR) would like to pose the following question:

If the CPCA are not going to proceed with the line reopening/reconstruction, using any of the four options in the next 5 years, would it be possible for at least some of the £5.3 million from the Wisbech Rail Line allocation in the finance period of 2024/25 being utilised to enable vegetation clearing of the line between Waldersea and Coldham, to then repair the 1.1 mile of track to a standard and then run heritage trains between the two sites to bring in tourism into the area?

BLHR would also work with the Coldham Residence Association Group (CRAG) to set up a heritage centre at Coldham on the site of the former Signal Box and Station House, to pass on the history of the line and its workings to the local area, visitors and schools. It would also include a village community room where local people could meet up.

Response:

Thank you for your question. As a historian and former history teacher, I'm particularly excited by heritage railways, and I know that as a Combined Authority we all share your sense of the part that heritage railways place.

The Combined Authority remains fully committed to investigating improvements to connectivity in and between Wisbech and March, as this aligns with our broader goals of enhancing mobility and supporting economic growth. In the first instance, the funding allocated for this project needs to be used to deliver the objectives of this scheme. Should any potential funding need to be redirected, this would need to be rigorously evaluated through the Single Assurance Framework. This process would ensure that financial allocations and workstreams align closely with our strategic objectives, as set out in the Corporate Strategy and Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.

There may be potential value in interim uses for the existing rail corridor, such as the heritage railway proposal as suggested, as it offers both for tourism and community benefit. However, any proposal for the reallocation of funding would need to undergo thorough scrutiny within the Single Assurance Framework. Given the limited capital funds available, what would in effect be seen as a new funding application would also need to compete against other essential schemes and initiatives across the region. I wouldn't therefore be able to make any promises today about decisions that would be made by the investment committee in that situation.

Thank you again for your thoughtful question and for your dedication to preserving and enhancing the region's transport heritage.

Question 8 – Sarah Hughes, Cambridgeshire Sustainable Travel Alliance

To Transport & Infrastructure Committee

Question:

The question relates to agenda items 13 'Infrastructure Delivery Framework' and 11 'Greater Cambridge Transport Strategy'.

The Infrastructure Delivery Framework states what we have heard many times before: transport connectivity is already a barrier in our region and will continue to be so until infrastructure is improved and measures to reduce congestion are in place. The report centres on obstacles to growth, however please remember that poor transport options also limit life opportunities for those who do not have access to a car or cannot drive.

We would like to highlight these issues from the report:

- First, the report states eight times that the failure to proceed with the Making Connections road charging proposals is highly problematic: “There is a significant gap in Greater Cambridge left by Making Connections not progressing...Alternative solutions are urgently required, with the Greater Cambridge Transport Strategy an opportunity to explore those solutions.” Please heed this and understand that the falling away of Making Connections leaves two voids. Not only would the scheme have reduced congestion in Cambridge, it would also have generated locally controlled funds for sustainable transport every year into the future, which could have been spent across Cambridgeshire.*
- This leads to my second point. The IDF underscores the importance of moving to bus franchising but reminds us that “there are significant funding implications that need to be considered to provide long term certainty”. Franchising alone will not give us the bus network we need; more investment is required. This will be highly worthwhile - investment in buses can generate returns of over £4.50 for every £1 invested.*
- Third, the report appears to devalue rural active travel, implying that car use is an unavoidable consequence of rural living, while at the same time seeking closer links between rural areas through a transport network with health at its core. This is contradictory. Where high quality infrastructure is in place, for example the Busway, people will cycle and walk more. E-bikes also increase people’s willingness to cycle and the distances travelled. The report should call for better active travel routes from rural to urban areas, which will improve health and reduce congestion.*
- Lastly, the report states that “completion of all the GCP’s travel projects ... would provide a comprehensive active travel and public transport network across the Cambridge area”. We challenge this statement. The GCP’s projects will improve sustainable transport, but not complete the job. Consider the quality of infrastructure for walking and wheeling in central Cambridge, for example, or transport links from rural South Cambs to colleges in Cambridge.*

This brings me to my question. What steps will this committee take to ensure that the Greater Cambridge Transport Strategy brings about a series of alternative schemes to reduce congestion, raise long-term, locally-controlled revenue for sustainable transport and encourage people to make the switch away from driving?

	<p>Response:</p> <p>The Combined Authority is deeply committed to advancing sustainable transport across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and our leadership in this area is evident through both local initiatives and through the national recognition we have received. We recently hosted an Active Travel England (ATE) conference, a significant event that brought together partners and organisations to share insights, best practices, and innovative approaches to active travel. By facilitating this collaborative forum, the Combined Authority provided a valuable learning opportunity, solidifying our role as a leader in sustainable transport. Our dedication is further validated by ATE's recent rating of 3 – the joint highest in the country – recognising our area's commitment to active travel infrastructure, and the reduction of carbon emissions. This accolade underscores our proactive approach to making sustainable transport a reality, and we remain committed to furthering these achievements to improve the quality of life for our communities.</p> <p>As I touched on in a previous question, the Combined Authority and its partners are committed to a comprehensive approach that considers all potential options that align with the “shift-avoid-improve” framework as outlined in the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP). This framework will be central to the strategy as we move forward, guiding us as we prioritise to improve the transport offer to better serve our community.</p> <p>In developing the Greater Cambridge Transport Strategy, we will assess a range of alternative schemes that support these goals. This includes exploring innovative solutions for a truly integrated network – one that facilitates seamless travel across modes, reduces congestion, and enhances accessibility.</p>
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Question 9 – James Bull, Resident	
To	Transport & Infrastructure Committee
	<p>Question:</p> <p><i>How many Tiger passes have been issued in each of East and South Cambs and what other bus service improvements are in the pipeline in these areas for residents to look forward to?</i></p>
	<p>Response:</p> <p>I am pleased to report a significant milestone reached by the Tiger Bus Pass initiative, launched earlier this year to enhance transport affordability and accessibility for young residents across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. As of this month, over 30,000 young people have applied for the Tiger Pass, highlighting both the demand and the success of this targeted fare scheme.</p> <p>Specifically in relation to East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire. As of 30th October, has been:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • East Cambridgeshire: 1,294 passes • South Cambridgeshire: 15,932 passes <p>It's worth noting that East Cambs has a lower population and a lower number of younger residents, but nonetheless, I'd like to take this opportunity to offer East Cambs the support of the Combined Authority team in helping it to reach out to its younger residents so that they can take advantage of this scheme.</p>

Question 10 – James Littlewood - Chief Executive, Cambridge Past, Present & Future.

To Transport & Infrastructure Committee

Question:

In relation to agenda item 11 Greater Cambridge Transport Strategy:

The Greater Cambridge Local Plan has a thorough community engagement process that enables the public and a wide range of stakeholders to input into the creation of the plan at several stages in the process, including at very early stages. This is good practice and enables the community to see how their views and aspirations help inform the plan, it helps to avoid the discredited approach of ‘plan and defend’. So, it is incredibly disappointing and depressing to see at paras 2.9 and 2.10 that the proposed public engagement for the Greater Cambridge Local Transport Plan offers no opportunity for the public and stakeholders to engage at an early stage in the process and help to shape the strategy. Instead, we will be consulted on a draft strategy drawn up by officers and elected officials. Please will you mirror the Local Plan process and offer an opportunity for earlier engagement and input?

Response:

Community involvement is essential to creating an effective and responsive strategy.

We are still at an early planning stage, but to ensure we are aligned with best practice, I can confirm that the GCTS will be closely aligned with the Local Plan process. As a former leader of Cambridge City Council, I know how much work lead members and officers alike put into shaping a trailblazing approach to consultation.

So as lead member for transport, I absolutely recognise the importance of engagement. We are committed to a consultation approach that offers the community and stakeholders the opportunity to provide input at formative stages. We will not only echo the excellent approach to the local plan consultation, but we will also be able to learn much from the submissions already made. This alignment will enable a comprehensive strategy that not only considers, but also reflects, the values and aspirations of our community.

Our aim is to develop a robust, consultative process that coincides with the Greater Cambridge Local Plan’s engagement approach – allowing the public and stakeholders to contribute meaningfully. We are working to establish consultation stages that will ensure diverse perspectives shape the plan, helping us avoid that “plan and defend” approach you rightly warn against.