

Bus Franchising Consultation Report 2025

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Chapter 1: The context and need to consult

Background

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA or Combined Authority) believes that the way local buses are run needs to change to improve bus service in the region. The Combined Authority recognises the important role buses play in growing the local economy, enabling people to get to work, training, college, school and medical appointments as well as supporting communities and reducing social isolation.

There are long standing issues with the deregulated bus services in the region, in particular relatively low service satisfaction and declining usage. Up to now the Combined Authority has been limited in its ability to influence this, which is why it thinks changes to the way the bus network is run are necessary and that the introduction of franchising or an alternative Enhanced Partnership should be considered.

Across the Combined Authority area, over 24 million journeys are currently made by bus each year in total yet despite playing such a key role, the number of people travelling by bus is in long-term decline, with total bus trips falling from 33.7 million in 2009/10 to 30.3 million in 2018/19¹. Bus usage was further impacted during the Covid-19 pandemic, and while there has been some recovery the trend of decline remains. Alongside declining use, the bus network is getting smaller, with the number of miles operated falling over time.

This decline is despite the Combined Authority contributing more funds to the running of bus services. In 2019/20, total expenditure for public transport was £12.3 million. This rose to £15.6 million in 2023/24.

It was therefore agreed by the Combined Authority Board to launch a public consultation on August 14th for 14 weeks running to November 20th. This was a formal consultation as required by the 'Transport Act 2000' (as amended by the Bus Services Act 2017 ('the Act')) and has been prepared in accordance with the Act and the supporting 'Bus Services Act 2017: Franchising Scheme Guidance'.

The consultation was extended from 12 weeks to 14 weeks to acknowledge its start date over the summer when some people are on holiday. There was a technical IT issue in the final week of the consultation, so it was decided to extend the consultation period to Monday 25th November at 9am.

The consultation informs a decision by the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough on whether or not to introduce a Proposed Franchising Scheme.

¹ Department for Transport Bus Statistics (Passenger journeys on local bus services by local authority)

A Consultation Document was produced to summarise the Bus Reform Assessment and was prepared by the Combined Authority in accordance with both section 123B of the Act and the Gunning principles² for consultation.

The Document includes the Combined Authority's Proposed Franchising Scheme which is compared against an Enhanced Partnership proposal. The consultation also included formal questions about the Assessment and the contents of the Proposed Franchising Scheme itself.

Westco Ltd (Westco) was appointed by the CPCA to conduct an independent analysis of the responses to the consultation, as well as lead and report on qualitative research into the reform proposals. Westco were supported in this by Walnut Unlimited (formerly known as ICM, one of the leading market research companies in the UK) in terms of generating the code frame structure and content for the open -ended questions in the consultation form responses that were returned during the consultation period.

The work by Westco and Walnut Unlimited in this Consultation Report has been used as the foundation for the CPCA's Consultation Response report written by Jacobs, a planning consultancy, in conjunction with CPCA.

The consultation

The Combined Authority created a bus consultation landing page on its website which held all of the key documents needed to be read in order to be informed about the consultation.

The consultation itself was designed for three different audiences: key stakeholders, wider stakeholders and the general public.

Key stakeholders are those stakeholders designated to be engaged as part of the consultation in the 2017 Bus Services Act. Some of these are statutory authorities and some are not. Wider stakeholders are all organisations that are not part of the key stakeholder list but have an interest in public transport in the CPCA area. The responses from the general public are designated as members of the public who reside in the CPCA area.

The bus consultation provided these three audiences with two survey forms they could fill in – a short form survey aimed at the general public, and a longer form version intended for stakeholders, and CPCA residents who want to provide a more in-depth

² The Gunning Principles are explained in detail in Appendix A.

response. This said, some stakeholders, in particular, wider stakeholders, chose to respond through the short form as opposed to the long form survey.

The exact list of documents on the website are as follows:

- The Consultation Document, which explained why the Combined Authority recommends bus franchising as the preferred way forward based on its assessment of the Proposed Franchising Scheme;
- A Consultation Summary, which summarised the contents of the much longer Consultation Document;
- An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA), which undertook in-depth analysis of the impact of bus reform on those with Protected Characteristics;
- The Draft Franchising Scheme;
- The Full Assessment;
- An independent audit report, conducted by Grant Thornton, of the Franchising Scheme Assessment; and CPCA's response to the audit;
- A document listing the locations where people could view the documents;
- An FAQs to support participants with likely questions;
- Details of consultation engagement events, including stakeholder events, protected characteristic events, drop-in events and webinars held during the consultation period to give residents and other interested stakeholders the opportunity to hear more about the proposals.

It also included the two survey forms to be completed in conjunction with reading the Consultation Document:

1. A short survey form version, which comprised 10 core questions on the proposed changes to bus services which were set out in the companion Consultation Document and focused on key areas presented in the Consultation Document and asked about support or opposition to the proposed franchising scheme; and;
2. A long version of the survey form, which comprised a wider set of 31 questions set out throughout the Consultation Document and which was deemed more appropriate for participants who have a good level of knowledge and interest in the bus market and how it runs (it contains more questions, some of which are more complex in nature).

Both surveys also included supplementary questions for individual, as opposed to stakeholder responses, about bus usage and key demographic questions which covered many 'protected characteristics' including gender, age, disability, ethnicity and being a parent to young children.

A stakeholder letter explaining how to take part in the survey was sent to 421 stakeholders at the outset of the consultation. In addition, a reminder was sent to stakeholders four weeks from the end of the consultation, as well as a call round to find out which stakeholders planned to respond.

Participants had a wide range of ways they could respond to the consultation. Participants were able to respond to the short and long form surveys via a link on the consultation web site. Hard copy returns of both surveys were made available in a range of public sector venues including libraries. Finally, participants could also take part in the consultation by submitting a letter or email. This final option is described as a “written response” return.

All electronic form responses were held securely by Westco’s development team with server backup. These results were also automated to transfer into Westco’s secure MS Fabric site to join a Consultation Log which captured all the surveys and presented key results in a live dashboard.

The written responses were sent by email to the CPCA consultation email or were received by post. The CPCA Executive support team input any postal surveys and sent any electronic responses through to Westco. All the survey responses received by CPCA were collected and securely transferred to Westco at regular intervals for analysis.

Scope of the consultation

The consultation asked a number of questions to enable participants to give their view on the detail contained within the Consultation Document. Both the short and long questionnaire contained a set of core questions linked to the key chapters in the Consultation Document, specifically, the 5 Case Model:

- The Strategic Case;
- The Economic Case;
- The Commercial Case;
- The Financial Case; and
- The Management Case.

In addition, the long form survey had supplementary questions going into further detail on elements of the 5 Case Model. The survey then went on to ask for views on the draft Equality Impact Assessment before asking participants to what extent they support or oppose the introduction of the Proposed Franchising Scheme. Finally, it asked if any changes should be made to improve the Proposed Franchising Scheme before asking a series of optional demographic questions to understand who has responded to the consultation.

The long form questionnaire also included questions describing the Proposed Franchising Scheme but asked a range of additional questions around issues such as impact on neighbouring authorities, exempted bus services, implementation timetable, the lotting of contracts, engaging small and medium sized operators, impact on employees, depots, affordability, and funding, as well as the approach to transitioning to and managing the Proposed Franchising Scheme.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research was commissioned to explore the range of attitudes and opinions from residents underrepresented in the Consultation survey and to capture the experiences of those from protected characteristic groups. The communities of interest identified by CPCA were as follows:

- frequent bus users
 - > Students
 - > Commuters
 - > Young people (under 25)
 - > Older people (over 65)
 - > People in areas of deprivation
 - > People in rural communities
 - > People in minority ethnic communities
- infrequent bus users
- former bus users
- potential public transport users, disabled people parents of young
- other road users, including drivers (private and taxis), cyclists and pedestrians
- council taxpayers
- owners of small and medium-sized businesses
- people who are

Many of these communities of interest overlap for example students might also be cyclists. This knowledge was borne in mind in developing the groups where individuals could represent more than one community of interest group.

Westco conducted eight focus groups to deliver the qualitative research programme. They were as follows:

- Under 16s group – 11th October 2024, 10.30 am – 12:00 am;
- Disabilities group – 5th November 2024, 10:00 am – 12:00 am;
- Under 18s group – 6th November 2024, 12:30pm – 2:30pm;
- Minority Ethnic Women’s group – 6th November 2024, 7:15 pm – 9:15pm;
- Businesses group – 7th November 2024, 10:00am – 12:00am;
- Students & Taxi Drivers group – 7th November 2024, 3:30 pm – 5:30pm;
- Lower income group – 12th November 2024, 7:00pm – 9:00pm;
- Parents & no/low bus usage – 13th November 2024, 7:00pm – 9:00pm.

Ten participants were recruited for each focus group for a total of 80. Overall, 54 participants attended the focus groups. Feedback was recorded anonymously.

The content of the group discussions focused on perceptions of the current bus service across the CPCA area, the 5 Case Model and support and opposition with respect to the Proposed Franchising Scheme.

Publicising the consultation

The Combined Authority and Westco developed a comprehensive Consultation Plan (See Appendix A) to raise awareness of and encourage participation in the consultation across a range of channels. This activity was designed to ensure that as many people as possible knew about the consultation, the reasons why CPCA were consulting on the Proposed Franchising Scheme and to create an understanding of the Proposed Franchising Scheme itself, how to participate in the consultation and where to obtain the information to do so. Considerable flexibility was built in to enable us to respond to requests and refocus our efforts on different groups of people to encourage better representation via the Consultation Log. A target of 1,200 consultation survey responses was set and was reached with a final total of 1,623.

Promotion of the consultation was tied to key milestones and activities such as the launch, a series of drop-in events, the 'halfway' mark, the 'few weeks left to go' mark and the 'two weeks to go' mark.

Messaging directed people to the website which also included that large print, paper as well as translated copies being available in community languages (Polish, Lithuanian, Portuguese and Urdu), these being the four most popular alternatives to English in the region.

Everyone was invited to participate and special mention was made of families with young children, students and older people which we identified as key bus user groups in our consultation plan. It was also stated that the consultation was not just for those who rely on the bus, but for those who could benefit from the bus in the future.

Collateral created and distribution through partners

A number of electronic and hard copy marketing collaterals were created which were shared across the region. These included posters and a Consultation Summary leaflet which were sent to 260 parish and town councils, GP surgeries across the region, Healthwatch, Family Hubs, libraries, buses and bus stations. Pull-up banners (including tailored QR codes) were taken to events.

Printed copies of the consultation document were available to view at the CPCA offices in Huntingdon and in the 32 libraries across the region as well as mobile libraries.

Raising awareness

We used a range of channels to reach residents including press releases, social media, email, letters, bus information panels, partner networks and events.

Press releases were sent out before and during and after the consultation at key milestone points in the consultation including about to launch, launch, midway point, two weeks before the end etc. The Deputy Mayor, Cllr Anna Smith, was identified as a key spokesperson and was invited to carry out several interviews to publicise the consultation. Our press releases were picked up by journalists across the region and beyond including trade press, regional media and national.

The digital campaign included paid for and earned media and reached over 1.2 million accounts in the Combined Authority area and beyond, ensuring we gave every resident of the region who is online an opportunity to take part over the course of the consultation. A radio advert ran for two weeks and gained 1.8 million impressions. Digital media was 'always on' with posts going out almost every day encouraging people to go to the website. Video clips of local people describing how and why they use the buses and what they think of the service were used to engage social media users.

We made good use of our constituent councillor networks to raise awareness to a wider audience. Meetings with constituent councils' Communications representatives and other partners took place prior to the launch. Press releases and marketing collateral were shared with constituent councils, parish councils and other partners throughout the consultation for amplification.

Events

Events commenced in the second week of September to ensure people were back from summer holidays. CPCA, supported by Westco, arranged 3 different kinds of events: invite only meetings for statutory stakeholders and wider regional stakeholders, meetings focussed on sharing information about the bus consultation with protected characteristic groups, and pop-up events in locations across the whole of Cambridgeshire to raise awareness with the wider general public.

Stakeholders

We held six events for 421 stakeholders inviting them to a detailed presentation by CPCA officers with an opportunity to ask questions. Each one was held in a different part of the region. Each event was attended by the senior team at the Combined Authority: Judith Barker, Executive Director of Place & Connectivity, Andrew Highfield, Assistant Director of Public Transport Services, Ed Colman, Head of Communications and Policy & Rob Emery, Assistant Director of Finance.

While stakeholders were encouraged to attend a stakeholder event in their area, they could also attend one of the other five.

A special meeting was also held with all of the bus operators to listen to any concerns and respond to questions.

The Combined Authority's business board was asked how the business community would like to be engaged with and requested email, so emails were sent out via their networks explaining the consultation and directing them to the online consultation.

Protected characteristics

We held seven events to engage people from protected characteristic groups that would be more likely to use the bus network or would be more likely to be impacted by any changes, as well as being potentially hard to reach through the broader consultation mechanisms. This included an event at a food bank, a child and family centre, the RNIB, the Deaf Association, a retirement village, an ethnic minority society and a disabled people's group.

These events were attended by at least one of the Combined Authority's senior team plus support from Westco Ltd and were tailored to the needs and requirements of each of the groups.

Drop-in events

Westco conducted 16 drop-in events at locations across the region, strategically chosen to ensure we spoke to bus users and potential bus users, as well as ensuring the public events took place in all the district council areas of the CPCA are. These were advertised in advance to ensure anyone could come along and ask questions or get help in filling out the short survey form. These included bus stations, train stations, town centres etc.

At the drop-ins, large numbers of summary leaflets were handed out while a small number of people were supported to complete survey forms.

Additional events

Several requests were made during the consultation for additional events. Following requests from the public, we were asked to attend the Parish Council Association Conference as well as organising additional drop-in events in Cambridge and St Neots and at Addenbrookes Hospital. We arranged an online meeting with staff from Cambridge University.

We also supported the Cambridge Care Association, providing materials so they could engage with looked-after children. The Combined Authority also organised two online

events which took place in the last two weeks to provide an opportunity for elected members only with any final questions about the consultation.

Officers were asked to follow up on a 1:1 basis with individuals as required and did so.

See Appendix B for a full list of the events and attendance.

Report structure

This report has been divided into 11 chapters plus appendices:

- The first three chapters provide the context, background and methodology to the consultation, including response rates;
- Chapter 4 summarises the overall support/opposition for the Proposed Franchising Scheme, why participants supported/opposed it and any changes they proposed to improve the Scheme;
- Chapter 5 summarises responses received in relation to the Strategic Case;
- Chapter 6 summarises responses received in relation to the Economic Case;
- Chapter 7 summarises responses received in relation to the Commercial Case;
- Chapter 8 summarises responses received in relation to the Financial Case;
- Chapter 9 summarises responses received in relation to the Management Case;
- Chapter 10 summarises responses received in relation to the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA); and
- Chapter 11 summarises the qualitative research.

There are also a series of appendices which also provide supporting information used during the consultation.

Reading the report

This summary report encapsulates feedback from the public and various stakeholders, gathered through consultations and qualitative research activities. The analysis explores prevalent themes identified in responses to specific survey questions, detailing insights from both the general public and distinct stakeholder groups, including key stakeholders.

The report organizes feedback by question, initially presenting key points from stakeholder groups, with key stakeholders reported first within each category then wider stakeholder feedback.

Subsequent sections detail themes from total participant responses, prioritising the most common and then addressing less frequent themes. This includes feedback both from stakeholders and members of the public.

Illustrative verbatim quotes are italicised and included to highlight particular points. Responses submitted via formats other than the online questionnaire are assigned to the appropriate survey questions based on explicit references made by the respondents, even if they might seem contextually misplaced.

If stakeholders did not address a specific question, their input is omitted from that section of the report. The large majority of stakeholder feedback is summarised; diverse perspectives range from broad issues concerning Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's bus systems to potentially inaccurate or inconsistent points.

It is important to highlight that any factual inaccuracies will remain: the main intention in this Consultation Report is to capture perspectives and opinions.

To give an account of the number of people or stakeholders holding a particular view from the code frame we put the number of mentions in brackets after the statement i.e. support franchising (10).

Equally, it is important to note that the whole of this Consultation Report, summaries included, represents the opinion of Westco on consultation response, and are not the views of the Combined Authority.

This summary is not exhaustive but focuses on the most salient themes within the feedback framework outlined in the accompanying code frame (refer to Appendix C and Appendix D for short and long form questions). This analytical tool records responses under thematic categories, supporting the structured presentation of findings in the report. More details on response analysis and interpretation are provided in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: The consultation process

This section provides information about responses to the consultation.

Consultation response channels

A number of response channels were set up so participants could provide feedback on the proposals. These response channels were:

- An online survey form, accessed via the Combined Authority's consultation platform. The long and short versions of the survey form were available to complete. The Combined Authority drafted the survey forms, which were reviewed and quality assured by The Consultation Institute. The content of the survey forms is shown in Appendix E for short and long form questionnaires;
- PDF versions of the questionnaires that could be downloaded from the consultation webpage. These could be printed out and sent as a hard-copy response through the post. A freepost address was provided in the consultation documents to enable members of the public and organisations to post their response, either as a completed questionnaire or a letter. These responses were then copied into the online questionnaire; and
- A dedicated consultation email address (consultations@cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk) was used to enable people to respond via this method if they preferred.

In addition, some responses to the consultation were sent through other channels (e.g. directly to officers employed by the Combined Authority). Where such correspondence was received during the advertised consultation period, it was forwarded by the Combined Authority to Westco. These responses were processed and included within the Consultation Log and included in the consultation analysis as a consultation response.

Number of responses to the consultation

In total 1,653 participants submitted a response to the consultation. The responses were received through multiple channels, as set out in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Responses received to the consultation by response channel and consultee type

Response channel		Members of the public	Stakeholder organisations	Overall total
Online Questionnaire	Short	1,496	49	1,545
	Long	58	20	78
Email		5	25	30
Total		1,559	94	1,653

Of those who responded to the consultation, 1,559 were from individual members of the public and 94 were from stakeholder organisations (including elected representatives).

These stakeholder organisations were also sub-categorised into two groups:

1. Those organisations classified as 'key stakeholders' in accordance with the 2017 Bus Services Act; and
2. All other organisations (or individuals responding in an official capacity) providing a response.

CPCA received 27 key stakeholder responses and 67 wider stakeholder responses.

A full list of organisations can be found in Appendix F of this report.

Campaigns and petitions

There were no major campaign groups responding en masse to the survey nor did CPCA receive any large-scale petitions on particular aspects of the proposed changes to the bus service. CPCA did receive several responses from campaign members and chairs responding to the survey like the Wittering, Wansford, Castor and Ailsworth Bus Campaign Group and the Marholm Bus Survey.

Late responses

Given that the consultation period was extended to 25th November, very few late responses were received. There were 14 postal survey responses from the public that arrived in the week commencing 25th November and a couple of written responses. All of these have been included as consultation responses.

Chapter 3: Consultation methodology

Receipt and handling of consultation responses

The handling of consultation responses was subject to a rigorous process of checking, logging and confirmation to ensure a full audit trail to the Consultation Log.

The Combined Authority securely transferred all electronic responses on a live basis, whilst paper versions of the questionnaire were inputted into the questionnaire template as and when received and included in the live transfers. Data was transferred and stored in line with requirements of the Data Protection Act (2018), and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

Analysis of consultation responses

The consultation questionnaire comprised predominantly open-ended questions, allowing participants to articulate their responses in their own words. None of the questions were mandatory, and they were structured to align with the Consultation Document. This setup facilitated targeted feedback on the 5 Case Model, particularly regarding opinions on the Proposed Franchising Scheme and the Enhanced Partnership model.

This point about respondents not necessarily completing all questions is especially important when we give accounts of favourable/ unfavourable perspectives on the main questions which appear both in the short and long form surveys. Not everyone will answer each question. Favourable and unfavourable responses are unalloyed and specifically not caveated. This way of presenting the data provides an overall balance of where responses are. The remainder will sometimes be qualified support for the Proposed Franchise model or discuss elements of the approach.

Responses gathered through the questionnaire were meticulously analysed according to the specific questions they addressed. For those who submitted their feedback via email or letter, their comments were carefully mapped to corresponding questions in the questionnaire. For example, any remarks about the Commercial Case submitted outside the questionnaire format were analysed in conjunction with responses to the related questionnaire item, especially for the thematic feedback. This said, written responses do not form part of the code frame.

The questionnaire also included a closed question to understand to what extent each participant supported or opposed the Proposed Franchising Scheme.

There were also a number of demographic questions which were included to capture data on protected characteristics and helped identify communities of interest that might

benefit from targeted engagement strategies. Participants had the flexibility to respond to as many or as few questions as they chose, and not every participant responded to every question.

Coding of open question and free text responses

The process of analysing the content of each survey response was based on thematically coding specific words or phrases. This was carried out by the Walnut Unlimited coding team.

The code frame was developed using a theme and sub-theme methodology aligned to each question. For example, under the Strategic Case, responses clustered around twelve different themes ranging from bus operators to safety with an additional 'Other' theme. Under each of these themes, there was a smaller or larger set of sub-themes responding to the points and sentiment of the consultation respondent's points. Sub-themes would come into existence where at least three participants made the same point. An exception is when a participant made a point which required a consultation response. In these cases, even if only one person made the point, it is included in the code frame to be identifiable to the consultation response team.

The Westco team leveraged the thematic outcomes from previous bus consultations along with specific tailored elements to encapsulate the distinctiveness of the CPCA bus consultation. This enabled us to develop an initial coding framework based on:

- Previous bus reform consultations outside the CPCA area
- The contents of the Consultation Document
- Each survey question
- Text responses to individual questions from first 500 survey responses

As experts in developing coding frameworks, the initial set of codes was meticulously crafted by identifying common themes and insights from the participant responses. As the consultation period progressed, the coding framework dynamically evolved to accommodate the growing diversity of responses. Participants often expressed similar sentiments using varied expressions, which necessitated nuanced adjustments to the coding structure.

Whenever recurring themes emerged in the responses, they were seamlessly integrated or "back-coded" into existing categories, ensuring that even subtle differences in phrasing were captured. This process allowed for the refinement of the coding categories to include slight nuances, ensuring that each response, while perhaps echoing a broader theme, retained its unique perspective and depth of detail. This process was supported by the state-of-the-art coding AI software Ascribe.

A dedicated team of coders reviewed all the responses as they were submitted. Prior to commencing their analysis, each coder underwent a comprehensive briefing to fully understand the consultation's objectives and scope. Additionally, it was imperative for all coders to familiarise themselves with the Consultation Document to ensure a well-informed and accurate analysis of the responses.

After the test framework was completed, specialist consultation advisers and Jacobs provided further feedback to improve the coding framework. These elements were then introduced into the structure. This was achieved through a process of validation by checking that the text statements mapped onto the appropriate codes in the code framework.

Once over a thousand responses had been analysed, colleagues again provided further feedback on the code frame and at this stage, Jacobs having completed their workshop analysis for the consultation response report, new codes were added to capture this additional dimension. With these included, all the survey responses were reprocessed and recoded where necessary for final input from Jacobs and the CPCA for final quality check and sign off.

Interpreting the consultation findings

It is important to recognise several distinct points, when interpreting the responses received in a consultation like this:

Participants in the consultation are typically self-selecting, driven primarily by personal stakes or concerns related to the issues at hand. As such, it is often those who feel most impacted, either positively or negatively, by the proposed changes who choose to respond. This dynamic can also spur local campaigns that either support or oppose the initiatives, reflecting a heightened level of engagement among those with a direct interest.

Due to the self-selecting nature of the participants, the responses collected during the consultation process cannot be considered representative of the broader population of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, unlike what might be achieved with a statistically representative sample survey. The feedback obtained, therefore, predominantly represents the views of those actively engaged in the consultation and should not be extrapolated as a comprehensive representation of wider public and organizational opinions across the region. This is perhaps most important to understand in the context of the closed question to gauge support or opposition to the Proposed Franchising Scheme.

Indeed, this approach does not capture the intensity or the nuanced perspectives of the general public, organizations, or elected representatives on specific issues. It is common

for participants to express general approval of the proposal while simultaneously providing critical feedback on specific aspects.

Therefore, the analysis is qualitative in nature, emphasizing the diversity and richness of the responses rather than quantifying support levels. The real value lies in the substance and thematic depth of the responses, which offer critical insights into the various perspectives and concerns of those engaged. This qualitative breadth ensures that even when participants do not fully articulate their views, the essence of their input is captured and considered, providing an illustrative understanding of public and stakeholder sentiment. And here, it is illustrative of the perceptions of those likely to engage in such a consultation. This said, we would expect the consultation to highlight many of the issues that are important to wider society: the areas of key focus are likely to be same.

While the analysis primarily adopts a qualitative approach, tracking the frequency of specific points raised is also instrumental. The occurrence of each theme, as detailed in the code frame (which is accessible separately), informs the structure of this report. Themes that surfaced more frequently are given prominence in the narrative. However, it is important to note that not every theme is elaborated upon in the main narrative, which concentrates on the most recurrent themes throughout the consultation. For a comprehensive understanding, this report should be read in conjunction with the code frame. This document serves as the foundational analytical record, cataloguing every theme mentioned across all responses.

While the chapters delineate variations among different audience segments, it is crucial to recognize that the responses are telling us different things. Participants engaged with varying degrees of technical understanding and information about the proposals, influencing the depth and perspective of their responses. Consequently, some participants provided responses based on a broader information set, reflecting diverse levels of interest and understanding of the subject matter. In analysing these responses, each has been regarded as equally valid, and given equal weight, and feedback should be understood in this wider context.

Organisational responses including key and wider stakeholders

The survey forms asked participants to indicate whether they were responding on behalf of an organisation or as an individual member of the public. Those who said they were responding on behalf of a group or organisation were classified as stakeholders.

The CPCA reviewed this list and sub-categorised participants into those which were classified as key stakeholders and wider stakeholders. The classification of statutory

consultees was based on of the guidance of the Bus Services Act 2017 which sets out the franchising assessment process, including consultation.

A full list of the organisations that took part, including those classified as statutory consultees can be found in Appendix F.

General public responses

Those who said they were providing their own response in the online or paper questionnaire was generally classified as 'members of the public'.

However, we did receive some responses which were from an individual working for an organisation or a councillor for an organisation, which were not an organisational, stakeholder response i.e. they were not providing a response representing the organisation. Elected representatives, in this category, such as District Councillors providing a response but not the organisational response from their Council are treated as wider stakeholders.

In conjunction with CPCA, it was determined which of these responses represented a general public response and which represented an organisational, a stakeholder response.

Organised campaign responses and petitions

There were no separate organised campaigns or petitions either for or against the proposed changes to bus services beyond those groups already discussed who have had their views channeled through the formal consultation process.

Presentation events

Westco, on behalf of the Combined Authority, organised six events, one in each of the constituent authority regions. The purpose of the events was to enable stakeholders to find out more about the proposals for bus reform in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, ask questions and seek clarification regarding the proposed options. Two further events were organised online towards the end of the consultation for any stakeholder to attend.

Each event was advertised on the online event management and ticketing website, Eventbrite. This enabled Westco and the Combined Authority to monitor expected attendance. The Combined Authority also advertised the events through the Constituent Councils' internal channels and directly to stakeholders.

Seven presentations were also carried out for different groups with protected characteristics to ensure a wide range of opinions from diverse groups were included in the research.

Full details concerning the event dates, locations and attendance are shown in the table below.

Table 3.1: Details of presentation events

Event	Location and duration	Engagement	Date
Events for stakeholders			
Bus Operators meeting	Pathfinder House, Huntingdon 10am-12	14 attendees	12.09
East Cambridgeshire Stakeholder meeting	The Maltings, Ely 3-5pm	14 attendees	12.09
Cambridge City Stakeholder meeting	University of Cambridge 6-8pm	9 attendees	16.09
Huntingdonshire Stakeholder meeting	Pathfinder House Huntingdon 6-8pm	20 attendees	19.9
Peterborough Stakeholder meeting	ARU Peterborough 6-8pm	16 attendees	03.9
South Cambridgeshire Stakeholder meeting	Imperial War Museum Duxford 6-8pm	14 attendees	10.9
Fenland Stakeholder meeting	Queen Mary Centre 6-8pm	3 attendees	
Protected Characteristic events			
Healthwatch	The Maple Centre, Huntingdon 2-4pm	Nine attendees Meeting with disabled people about a variety of bus related subjects	17.09
Rosyln Court Retirement Village	Lisle Lane, Ely 10.30am - 12.30	Nine attendees Meeting with detailed one-to-one discussions with residents with questions mostly centred around the consultation rather than local issues	18.09

Cambridge Deaf Association	City College Peterborough 12.15-2.15pm	13 attendees Questions based around problems faced by the deaf community when using the bus	25.09
Child & Family Centre	The Cabin, Northstowe 1-2pm	No attendees but we did speak to two mums after the meeting. This was attributed to very bad weather and lack of interest from the group. The meeting was well publicised beforehand and promoted by the group's own organisers.	1.10
The Rosmini Centre Foodbank	Queens Road Cambridge 11am-1pm	10 attendees from the Care Group and 66 attendees at the food bank	2.10
Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum	Arbury Court Wisbech 11am-12	10 attendees A meeting with lots of discussion afterwards: the attendees knew a lot about the subject and asked some useful/interesting questions.	5.10
<i>Faizan E Medina Mosque</i>	<i>Gladstone St Peterborough 2-4pm</i>	<i>This event was cancelled five days before because of flooding at the venue</i>	
RNIB	Northminster House Peterborough 11am-12	4 attendees Discussions were based on improving accessibility and communications interfaces on buses.	24.10
Online events			
Stakeholders	Online	11 attendees	12.11
Stakeholders	Online	16 attendees	14.11

Format of the presentation events

Presentations at the stakeholder and statutory stakeholder events were undertaken by the senior team at CPCA, Judith Barker, Executive Director of Place & Connectivity and

Andrew Highfield, Assistant Director of Public Transport Services along with the Assistant Director of Finance Rob Emery and the Head of Communications and Policy, Ed Colman.

The presentation itself started with an introduction then a detailed summary of the five cases Strategic, Commercial, Management, Economic and Financial. Ed Colman summarised the consultation process. The Combined Authority speakers then invited questions from those in attendance chaired by the Executive Director.

A summary of the key questions asked during the events is included in Chapter 11.

Focus groups

Westco Ltd designed, recruited and moderated eight focus groups to engage underrepresented groups in the Consultation survey responses, less heard voices and a broad account of protective characteristics. The groups were as follows:

- A focus group on the experiences of under 16s
- A focus group on the experiences of 17 and 18 year olds
- A focus group on the experiences of disabled people
- A focus group on the experiences of minority ethnic women
- A focus group on the experiences of students and taxi drivers
- A focus group on the experiences of businesses
- A focus group on the experiences of low-income residents of all ages
- A focus group on the experiences of mid-life parents with young children and no/low bus use

Recruitment

Participants were recruited by Westco Ltd in-house specialist recruiters using a screening questionnaire. A purposive sampling approach was adopted, with participants selected because they fell into one of the above groups. To ensure a good spread of participants, minimum quotas were set for key demographic criteria, including gender, age, ethnicity, disability, area of residence, and bus travel preferences. A breakdown of the participants can be found in Appendix G.

Topic Guide Development, Focus Group Length and Moderation

Given that 'intelligent consideration' is a key tenet of the Gunning principles, and it is acknowledged by CPCA that awareness of bus franchising models is likely to be low amongst the public, then information giving during the focus group sessions is central. The source of this information is primarily the Consultation Summary with support from the full Consultation Document. The Consultation Summary is written in accordance with the Gunning principles and provide some high-level insights into the 5 case model

elements identifying both the benefits and dis-benefits of the proposals set out by each of the five elements with some introductory context i.e. the status quo is not an option.

The topic guide developed in conjunction with CPCA and will contain a modular set of questions to deliver on the research objective questions which are as follows:

- gain current perceptions about bus services;
- understand how public transport users, road users, taxpayers and businesses think bus services could be improved and whether this would make them more likely to use public transport as a whole;
- present balanced arguments for and against franchising and an alternative enhanced partnership between operators and local authorities;
- examine views on franchising and enhanced partnership through the prism of the 5-case business model;
- understand specific concerns about franchising and enhanced partnership;
- and, examine opinions in support of and opposition to bus franchising for the CPCA area.

The questions were organised around the 5 Case Model as presented in the Consultation Summary with a supplementary set of questions tied specifically to communities of interest.

Even in summary, the information about bus franchising requires introduction and each element of the 5 Case Model requires explanation. Given that bus franchising is likely to be a subject that participants have little or no engagement with prior to the discussion, we needed to give a detailed, balanced account of the options fulfilling the Gunning principles before leading into the debate around each of the key research objective questions. For this reason, we adopted a face-to-face approach, and a normal one and a half hour focus group was supplemented by half an hour of presentation which was broken up into chunks to maintain engagement from the groups.

The groups were moderated by Russell Pask, Associate Director of Research at Westco. He is a trained qualitative researcher who has extensive experience of group moderation having run several hundred focus groups in his time working for Westco, The Research Unit, Ipsos-MORI as well as a range of local authorities.

A full copy of the discussion guide can be found in Appendix H, an analytical summary of the key findings of the focus groups are included in Chapter 11 with the full details available in qualitative focus group report.

Chapter 4: Overall opinion of the Proposed Franchising Scheme

Introduction

All participants responding to both the short and long form versions of the questionnaire were asked to what extent they supported or opposed the Proposed Franchising Scheme as set out in the Consultation Document. In both surveys, this question appeared in the latter part of the survey, once participants had the opportunity to answer questions about the current performance of the bus services and the 5 Case Model. Footnotes guide readers to the parts of the document used by respondents to complete the survey.

Q. To what extent do you support or oppose the introduction of the proposed Franchising Scheme?³

Participants were also asked if there were any changes that they thought would improve the Proposed Franchising Scheme.

Q. Are there any changes that you think would improve the proposed Franchising Scheme?⁴

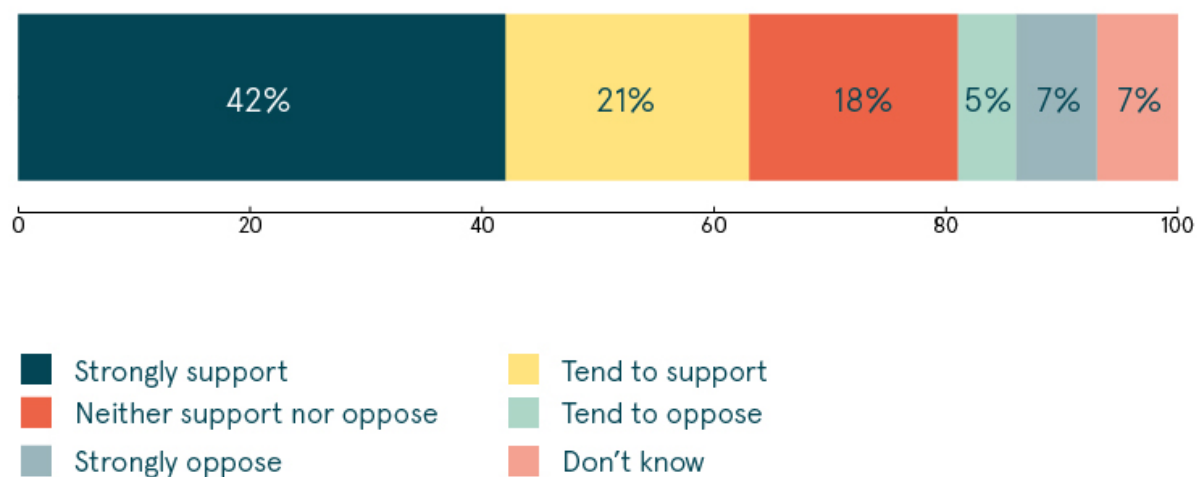
³ See Section 6 (paragraphs 6.27 – 6.30; 6.51 – 6.56; and 6.63 – 6.64) and Appendix 5 of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question. See Section 7 (paragraphs 7.322 – 7.330 and accompanying Tables) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

⁴ See Section 6 (paragraphs 6.27 – 6.30; 6.51 – 6.56; and 6.63 – 6.64) and 5 of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question. See whole of Section 7 and Appendix 5 of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

Overall support and opposition for the Proposed Franchising Scheme

A total of 1,468 participants, including key stakeholders, wider stakeholders and members of the public, provided a response to this question.

Support and opposition for proposed franchising scheme



Of the 1,468 respondents who answered the question, almost two-thirds 63% (915 respondents) expressed support for implementing the Proposed Franchising Scheme. Almost one in five people (18%, 266 respondents) were neutral; neither supporting nor opposing. And, about one in eight opposed (12%, 183 respondents) expressed opposition to the Proposed Franchising Scheme. Another seven percent (104 respondents) said they don't know whether or not they support or oppose the statement.

Taking just organisational responses (65 respondents), as opposed to total response, raw support was higher with 75% supporting the Proposed Franchising Scheme. Fifteen per cent were neutral and nine per cent opposed the scheme.

Reasons for support or opposition

After responding to the closed question, participants only in the long form version of the questionnaire were asked to explain why they chose their answers – fifty-five responded.

Long form respondents emphasised the potential benefits of franchising, including improved reliability, better coordination, and greater public control over services (5). Supporters highlighted the opportunity for franchising to address environmental concerns by reducing car dependency and cutting emissions (4). Some believed it could revolutionise bus travel, particularly in urban centres like Cambridge and Peterborough (4).

However, significant concerns were raised about financial risks and ongoing funding sustainability (4). Respondents stressed the importance of learning from other authorities' experiences to mitigate these risks (4). Others questioned whether a one-size-fits-all model was appropriate for such a diverse region (3).

Some suggested a lack of clarity in key areas, including funding strategies and operational frameworks (3). There was apprehension about the potential disruption to existing services during a transition phase and doubts about the ability of the Combined Authority to deliver the scheme effectively (3). Despite these reservations, there is broad agreement that the current system is not working, and significant change is required (5).

Improvements to proposed Franchising Scheme

Respondents in both the long and short form version of the questionnaire were asked about possible improvements to the Franchising Scheme. Overall, the respondents made over a hundred comments and highlighted about fifty different kinds of improvements they thought could be made to the proposed Franchising Scheme.

These improvements were wide-ranging and at a granular level. The majority of the improvement suggestions were complex: different people and different stakeholders advised a range of improvements. All the suggestions are captured within the code frame and Jacobs (on behalf of the CPCA) have reviewed all individual submissions for the CPCA Consultation Response report.

At a higher level, respondents were most likely to make comments about different aspects of franchising (36), bus services (24), commercial elements (9) and infrastructure (7).

The area where there was the most agreement was that the proposed Franchising Scheme would benefit from greater ongoing consultation with the public and other stakeholders (5). Respondents stressed the importance of integrating local knowledge and ensuring decisions reflect community needs, particularly regarding route planning and service adjustments.

Encouraging greater bus usage, promoting modal shifts away from car dependency, and improving overall sustainability (4) were all supported. Calls for more frequent routes and expanded coverage (4) highlighted the demand for greater access and convenience.

Preventing monopolies by fostering competition for routes (4) was also seen as essential for maintaining service quality and fairness. Additionally, respondents emphasised the importance of learning lessons from other regions and countries (4) to adopt best practices and avoid repeating past mistakes.

There were also repeated mentions to reduce congestion and traffic (3). Better service reliability (3), improved coordination with railway stations (3), and adequate depot provisions for all franchisees (3) were also underscored. Finally, respondents noted the need for more, ongoing information and clarification (3) regarding proposed changes and their impact.

The following issues received a couple of mentions in the code frame:

- Make it a public service / not for profit (2)
- Collaborative / team approach (2)
- Open communication with the public (about services / costs) (2)
- Award contracts based on best value, not on lowest price (2)
- Consider the timing of franchising dates to ensure we get enough interest from all parties (2)
- Cheap / affordable / capped fares (2)

Chapter 5: The Strategic Case

Introduction

This section covers questions on the Strategic Case, which sets out the reasons why bus reform is needed. It outlines the challenges with the way buses are currently run and assesses the Proposed Franchising Scheme and the Enhanced Partnership against bus reform objectives and whether the options will better deliver the ambitions set out in the Combined Authority's Bus Strategy.

The current arrangements highlight a number of challenges:

- Network improvements – bus routes do not always go where and when people need or want them to. Some bus services are not financially viable without public sector funding.
- Fares and ticketing – each bus operator sets its own fares and ticket products, resulting in an overall confusing situation and the inability to use the same ticket for travel on different operators' services.
- Bus fleets – the significant capital cost of low and zero emission buses is currently a barrier to fleet replacement, without public sector intervention.
- Customer experience – The user experience across the network varies and there is no single point of contact for customer information or feedback.
- Funding – the current focus is for services to be profitable

The Strategic Case highlights the need for change to achieve wider policy ambitions, including those set out in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Bus Strategy. In particular, there is a need for a step-change improvement in the bus network to help achieve targets to reduce car miles by 15% and to double bus use by 2030.

The objectives of bus reform are to:

- Maximise the ability of the Combined Authority to achieve a significantly enhanced and integrated bus network as quickly as possible.
- Maximise the contribution of bus services to the achievement of a range of wider economic, social and environmental policy objectives and goals.
- Maximise bus user benefits by coordinating services, integrated ticketing, service stability and how information is provided.
- Maximise the value for money

The Consultation Document evaluation is that an enhanced network with greater connectivity and availability could be achieved under either an Enhanced Partnership or Franchising. However, Franchising would provide the Combined Authority with greater

control and influence over the shape and stability of the network, and the ability to ensure service connections and integrated fares and ticketing.

Under an Enhanced Partnership, delivery of change would be dependent on negotiations with operators, which, for some of the more ambitious requirements, could take extended periods (and, in some cases, may not be achieved at all). However, changes could be phased in as and when they had been agreed, rather than all in one go as would be the case with Franchising. In the case of Franchising, the Combined Authority would be able to dictate timescales and ensure delivery, subject to sufficient resources being available.

Overall, the Strategic Case concludes that Franchising would offer advantages over an Enhanced Partnership.

There was one question on the Strategic Case included in the short form questionnaire. The same question was included in the long form questionnaire as well – a total of 1,183 participants responded to this question.

Q. The Strategic Case says that reforming the bus market is appropriate to address the challenges facing the local bus market. Do you have any comments on this?⁵

Table 5.1: The table below summarises the participants who provided a response to this question

	Number of participants who made favourable comments	Number of participants who made unfavourable comments
All who provide a response	1,183	
Key Stakeholders	5	2
Wider Stakeholders	23	0
Members of the public	474	14

There were four further Strategic Case questions asked in the long form survey. A smaller number of participants (between 74 to 63) chose to answer each of the Strategic questions in the long questionnaire.

⁵ See Section 6 (paragraphs 6.10 – 6.15) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.
See Section 7 (paragraphs 7.58 – 7.72) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

These questions went into more detail and asked about specific elements of the Strategic Case, such as whether reforming the market is the right thing to do, the Combined Authority's overall objectives, impacts on neighbouring authorities and the impacts of introducing either the proposed franchising scheme or EP?

Q. The Strategic Case has identified two options under which buses might run – an Enhanced Partnership or Franchising. Are there other options you would like to have seen considered?⁶

This is the summarised feedback on other options:

- Franchising is the better option (10)
- Should be a public service / publicly owned / municipal (9)
- Don't mind as long as service improves (9)
- A more holistic / integrated approach (5)
- There needs to be accountability / performance reviews (4)
- Unaware of any other options (4)
- Consider a more bespoke franchising model (3)
- An enhanced partnership would be more beneficial (3)
- Consider doing nothing / leaving as it is (2)
- Multiple / mixed models may be more appropriate across the area (2)
- Stagecoach's role should be minimised (2)
- Collaborative approach (2)

Q. Do you have any comments on the Combined Authority's overall objectives, as set out in the Strategic Case?⁷

This is the summarised feedback on overall objectives:

- Focus on improving the service (11)
- Good / sensible / support the objectives (11)
- Will increase bus usage and reduce car usage (11)
- Fares need to be affordable (8)
- Rural areas should receive the same level of service as urban areas (4)
- Should focus on other modes of public
- Will be a public service / not for profit (4)
- Focus on passenger safety (2)
- Focus on environmental issues (net zero targets) (2)

⁶ See Section 7 (paragraphs 7.76 – 7.84 and accompanying Tables) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

⁷ See Section 7 (paragraphs 7.85 – 7.86 and Figure 7-4) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

- Make people more aware of wider benefits of bus usage (2)
- More integrated / coordinated service (2)
- Need better links to train stations (2)
- An Enhanced Partnership would deliver benefits sooner (2)
- Objectives aren't backed up by data (2)
- Franchising will not improve journey times / reliability (2)
- Should be publicly owned (2)
- Operators should be used to provide expertise (2)
- Authority will have more control

Q. Have you any comments on the potential impacts of either Franchising or an Enhanced Partnership on the achievement of the objectives of neighbouring authorities?⁸

This is the summarised feedback on potential impact of reform on neighbouring authorities:

- Franchising would be better for neighbouring authorities (5)
- Engage with neighbouring authorities at an early stage (5)
- Level of service should be consistent across all areas (3)
- Plans shouldn't be affected by political change (3)
- Improvements will mean more people move to / stay in the area (4)
- Has potential to cause negative impact (3)
- Enhanced Partnership would ensure consistency with current service (3)
- Taxpayers shouldn't fund services outside of their region (2)
- A mixed approach would be better suited / not all areas suited to franchising (2)
- Need more information / clarification (2)
- Public needs should come first / not profits (2)
- Enhanced Partnership would not have any benefits (2)
- Both will have a similar impact (2)
- Enhanced Partnerships will

Q. Do you have any comments on the impacts of introducing the proposed Franchising Scheme or the alternative of an Enhanced Partnership?⁹

This is the summarised feedback on impacts of reform:

- Franchising allows for greater control (8)

⁸ See Section 7 (paragraph 7.107 and Table 7–8) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

⁹ See Section 7 (paragraphs 7.138 – 7.140 and Table 7–10) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

- Franchising offers better value (8)
- Franchising is better (7)
- Need more information / clarification (4)
- Sceptical of the estimated finances (4)
- Should not be run for profit (4)
- Enhanced Partnership would not be beneficial (4)
- Keep operators involved (3)
- Both offer similar benefits (2)
- Needs to be well managed / monitored (2)
- Will encourage modal shift (2)
- Franchising is risky / costly (2)
- Enhanced Partnership is better (2)
- Multiple / mixed models may be more appropriate across the area (2)

Summary of stakeholder responses

This section summarises the responses to the Strategic Case questions from organisations. It starts with a summary of responses received from the key stakeholders before summarising the wider stakeholder response.

Key Stakeholders

Bus Operators

Whippet

Whippet argues that the current bus system in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, dominated by private operators, is unsustainable and fails to serve passengers effectively. Profit-driven priorities have left gaps in service provision, with numerous contracts being handed back to the Combined Authority due to unviable business cases. Despite Whippet's efforts to support services during critical times, they contend that the status quo cannot continue.

A lack of centralised planning has resulted in fragmented network management, with private operators independently determining service changes that often fail to align with broader regional needs, such as rail connections or cross-operator consistency. Additionally, profitable routes remain in private hands, preventing reinvestment into the overall network, while funding for non-commercial services like rural, evening, and Sunday buses is limited.

Whippet advocates for a bespoke franchising model tailored to the local region. They believe franchising would better balance the risks and rewards between the public and

private sectors, creating a more integrated and sustainable network. Such a system would also increase local competition, encouraging innovative solutions from current operators and attracting new entrants to the market.

They emphasise the importance of public sector leadership in delivering network-wide improvements in infrastructure, such as bus stops, real-time information, and priority measures. Whippet sees franchising as the most viable pathway to achieve strategic reforms, arguing that it would provide the structure and accountability necessary for successful bus operations. This model, they claim, could harmonise public and private objectives to deliver meaningful and lasting improvements in service quality.

Stagecoach

Stagecoach supports the proposed reforms to the bus market, acknowledging their importance in addressing the challenges facing public transportation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The company highlights the critical need for collaboration with the Combined Authority (the Combined Authority) to overcome issues such as declining patronage, insufficient rural service provision, and the transition to zero-emission vehicles. Stagecoach recognises that achieving the ambitious goals set forth, including doubling bus patronage by 2030 and transitioning to greener fleets, will require significant public investment. To mitigate the impact of necessary but difficult decisions, such as reducing low-patronage routes, Stagecoach suggest exploring alternatives like subsidies, fare adjustments, and modified service frequencies, while underscoring the importance of sensitive implementation to minimise disruption for affected communities.

While Stagecoach expresses optimism about the potential for the Combined Authority's proposed plans, it also stresses the importance of clear communication regarding the specifics of these reforms. Clarity on how the plans will address rural service gaps, a pressing concern for many residents, is considered vital for ensuring fair access to transportation. Stagecoach also believes that immediate and sustained improvements will require thoughtful planning and potentially operating at a financial loss in the short term to pave the way for long-term gains. Effective communication of the rationale for investing in less profitable but essential services is seen as critical for securing public and governmental support.

The Strategic Case outlines two primary options for reform: Enhanced Partnerships (EPs) and Franchising. Stagecoach presents a balanced view of these approaches, highlighting the potential benefits and risks of each. It views Enhanced Partnerships as a cost-effective and faster-to-implement option that can deliver significant benefits, as demonstrated by successful models like the Lincolnshire Enhanced Partnership, which achieved substantial increases in passenger numbers. Stagecoach emphasises the

willingness of local operators, evidenced by the CP Bus Alliance, to collaborate with the Combined Authority to achieve shared goals under an Enhanced Partnership framework.

On the other hand, Stagecoach recognises that Franchising would grant the Combined Authority full control over the bus network, allowing for centralised planning and management. It warns of high costs, extensive risks, and long implementation timelines associated with this model. To address these challenges, Stagecoach proposes an alternative: interim contracts with existing operators during the transitional period. This approach could deliver immediate improvements in service quality, performance monitoring, ticketing systems and vehicle standards while minimising risks and financial pressures during the procurement process. By maintaining consistency and ensuring stability, this strategy would allow the Combined Authority to implement its objectives gradually without compromising service delivery.

Stagecoach expresses full support for the Combined Authority's objectives, including the ambitious goal of doubling bus usage by 2030. However, it raises concerns about the feasibility of these targets, especially given the projections outlined in the consultation documents. Without significant measures to make public transport more attractive than car travel, the growth needed to achieve this target may fall short. Stagecoach notes that even under the Franchising model, patronage is only projected to increase by 23% by 2040, with all scenarios showing declines in usage beyond that point. These figures underscore the need for long-term strategies that address not only the immediate challenges but also the sustainability of public transport in the decades ahead.

Stagecoach proposes several recommendations to support the Combined Authority's strategic goals while addressing potential challenges. It advocates for deepening collaboration between the Combined Authority and local operators, leveraging existing alliances like the CP Bus Alliance to build trust and lay the groundwork for successful reforms. It also encourages the Combined Authority to explore a phased approach to Franchising, using interim contracts to deliver early benefits while mitigating risks associated with a wholesale transition. Additionally, Stagecoach underscores the importance of increased public investment, particularly for maintaining essential but less profitable routes in rural areas and calls for transparent communication to justify these expenditures to stakeholders.

Stagecoach highlights the potential of Enhanced Partnerships to achieve many of the benefits of Franchising at a lower cost and within a shorter timeframe. By embedding ambitious targets and performance standards into EP agreements, the Combined Authority can achieve large-scale improvements while maintaining flexibility and limiting financial risks. The success of the Lincolnshire model demonstrates that this approach can deliver substantial increases in patronage and service quality when implemented collaboratively.

Overall, Stagecoach aligns itself with the Combined Authority's objectives, saying that reforming the bus market is both necessary and achievable. It advocates for a balanced and pragmatic approach that combines ambition with practical solutions to manage costs, risks, and timelines effectively. By leveraging Enhanced Partnerships, exploring interim solutions for Franchising, and increasing public investment, the Combined Authority can create a robust and inclusive public transport system that meets community needs and achieves long-term sustainability.

Stephensons

Stephensons highlights that the challenges facing the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough bus market—such as congestion, poorly managed roadworks, insufficient bus priority measures, cheap car parking, and inadequate passenger infrastructure—require targeted political action and infrastructure improvements, none of which franchising directly addresses. Instead, franchising introduces significant risks, including financial uncertainty, operational instability, and potential service disruptions, without evidence that the Combined Authority has the resources, expertise, or funding to implement such a complex transformation successfully.

Franchising may also harm efficiency and connectivity. Stephensons points to its Cambridge-Newmarket service as an example, where franchising would eliminate through journeys and fares, increase costs, and potentially result in service withdrawals. Separating interlinked services would require additional buses and drivers, creating financial strains that could threaten the sustainability of related routes, particularly for cross-boundary services.

Stephensons also raises concerns about the financial risks of franchising, proposing that higher labour costs in Cambridge exacerbating these pressures. Simplified ticketing under franchising might also lead to fare increases for some passengers, an issue overlooked in the consultation.

While supporting the Strategic Case's goals, Stephensons argues these objectives do not require franchising. Addressing infrastructure and planning issues through an EP offers a realistic and sustainable path forward for passengers, operators, and public resources.

Delaine Buses

Delaine Buses expresses disappointment at the Combined Authority's focus on franchising, noting the lack of meaningful engagement with operators about developing an Enhanced Partnership (EP) model. Despite the success of EPs in neighbouring regions and their ability to deliver rapid improvements, the Combined Authority has not proposed or allowed formal discussions on this approach. This lack of collaboration

overlooks the potential benefits of a partnership model that could address the region's diverse transportation needs.

The Combined Authority covers varied areas, from Cambridge's historic cityscape to Peterborough's post-war new town layout, alongside rural fenlands and market towns. Delaine Buses highlights that a one-size-fits-all approach, like franchising, is unsuitable for such diversity. Department for Transport guidance suggests multiple models may better serve different parts of a local transport authority, and Delaine argues that an EP could effectively meet the Combined Authority's aspirations in areas like Peterborough, which already has a thriving and well-connected network.

Franchising poses significant risks to SME operators like Delaine Buses. As a Lincolnshire-based operator, much of their network involves cross-boundary routes connecting rural communities to Peterborough. These services are critical for students and rural residents, yet franchising could render them unviable due to the higher operating costs of larger operators. This would threaten the sustainability of Delaine's operations and the communities they serve, potentially requiring public subsidies to replace lost services at a higher cost.

Delaine Buses advocates for a collaborative EP model that leverages the strengths of local SMEs to deliver improvements quickly and efficiently. By working together, the Combined Authority and operators could achieve regional transportation goals without the delays, risks, and costs associated with franchising, ensuring the sustainability of essential services and the local economy.

First Bus

First Bus acknowledges the need for action to reform the bus market to support economic growth and enhance social connectivity. They agree with the Combined Authority's ambitious objectives to double bus use by 2030 and reduce car kilometres by 15%. First Bus say that achieving these goals will require prioritising bus use and integrating various transport solutions tailored to local community needs, such as active travel and rail where appropriate.

First Bus supports devolved decision-making, allowing local authorities to choose the operating model that best serves their communities. They are open to collaborating with the Combined Authority, sharing their experiences, and providing ideas to enhance the chosen model, whether franchising or Enhanced Partnership (EP). While they do not see an alternative to these two models, First Bus highlights the importance of tailoring solutions to the specific connectivity needs of local communities to encourage greater public transport use and reduce reliance on cars.

Regarding cross-border services, First Bus suggest that sufficient protection through a permit regime, as outlined in the consultation would be beneficial. They believe that

neighboring authorities should benefit from any improvements brought about by franchising or EP models, such as better service specifications and higher vehicle standards.

First Bus is committed to making buses an attractive alternative to other modes of transport and supports a collaborative approach to achieving CPCA's goals while ensuring the needs of local communities and neighboring authorities are met.

Ron W Dew

Dew says they are dedicated to improving the local bus network and highlight their extensive experience operating Combined Authority-funded routes, which make up 75% of their services. Their remaining operations involve commercial routes introduced to address identified gaps, showcasing their proactive approach to enhancing connectivity. Drawing from this experience, Dew advocates for an Enhanced Partnership (EP) as a faster, collaborative, and effective alternative to franchising. They argue that EPs leverage the local knowledge and expertise of operators while securing necessary government funding, ensuring rapid and targeted improvements.

Franchising, as proposed, presents significant challenges. Dew raises concerns about its long rollout timeline and reliance on consultants who lack critical local insights. They cite examples, such as omitted peak commuter journeys and questionable financial assumptions in previous Combined Authority proposals, to highlight the franchising model's shortcomings, particularly in rural and urban contexts. Additionally, the proposed 500% increase in precepts, combined with significant capital and operational costs, risks being unsustainable and unpopular with constituents. Dew also warns that franchising could harm local economic growth by favoring external operators who may not invest in local facilities, staff, or communities.

Dew emphasises the need to address fundamental issues like congestion, roadworks planning, and bus priority measures, which significantly impact service reliability and user satisfaction. These factors, overlooked in the franchising model, are essential for attracting passengers. They also stress the importance of improving rural routes, tailored fleet solutions, and high-quality facilities for passengers and drivers, noting that operators are uniquely positioned to provide these insights.

Ultimately, Dew supports EPs, citing their success in neighboring regions like Suffolk and Hertfordshire, where they have significantly increased patronage. They argue that EPs, built on collaboration and local expertise, offer a more efficient and sustainable pathway to achieving CPCA's goals than franchising.

The Go-Ahead Group

The Go-Ahead Group supports the need for bus reform in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, recognising the region's unique challenges, including its vast and diverse geography, high population growth, and significant congestion. These issues, compounded by limited funding for commercially unviable routes and a fragmented network with multiple operators, hinder the ability to deliver a consistent, high-quality bus service. Go-Ahead believes reform is essential to address these challenges and enable the region to achieve its ambitious goals, such as doubling bus usage by 2030 and transitioning to a zero-emission fleet.

The group focus on strategic planning and investment in bus priority infrastructure, highlighting its importance in reducing congestion and improving journey times. Without such measures, the region's targets are unlikely to be met. They also note the importance of coordinated efforts to integrate planning for major development areas, ensuring public transport supports regional growth and sustainability.

While Go-Ahead sees merit in both Enhanced Partnerships (EPs) and franchising, they argue that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's complex network may benefit more from the greater control and unifying oversight offered by franchising. However, they stress the importance of fostering competition, lowering barriers for new operators, and ensuring procurement processes remain fair and balanced.

They advocate ongoing collaboration between the Combined Authority and operators, to address recruitment challenges, protect cross-boundary services, and tailor solutions to local contexts. Ultimately, Go-Ahead believes that sustained investment and a well-structured reform model are critical to achieving the region's economic, environmental, and societal objectives.

Transdev

Transdev supports the Combined Authority's goals for bus reform and highlights the importance of franchising in improving performance across key areas. They stress that franchising offers opportunities to set clear performance targets for reliability and punctuality, harmonise fares across the network, and ensure equitable access to employment and public services, particularly for poorer rural areas. Additionally, Transdev sees network redesign with a focus on patronage growth as a critical aspect of reform.

Transdev suggests refining the vision by incorporating the concept of "safety," both in terms of road safety and passengers' security, particularly for vulnerable groups like women. They believe this focus could enhance public confidence and encourage higher ridership. Furthermore, they propose customer service as a central component of the strategy, noting that improving elements such as bus presentation, driver uniforms, and

overall passenger experience at various touchpoints could significantly boost satisfaction and usage.

Transdev supports the current reform options, agreeing that they are appropriate for the region's needs. They also suggest expanding on the vision for high-quality passenger waiting facilities to include broader improvements in the passenger journey, aiming to create a more welcoming and professional service.

Overall, Transdev views franchising as an opportunity to address existing challenges and drive meaningful improvements in service quality, network accessibility, and customer experience, ultimately fostering greater public transport use.

Transport UK

Since the CA determined to commence an assessment of bus franchising (in 2019) it has become a requirement that local transport authorities either develop an Enhanced Partnership with bus operators or prepare a franchising business case: a 'do nothing' option is no longer available. As DfT guidance published on 9 September states, "the 'do nothing' option is no longer a deregulated market but rather an enhanced partnership'.

In principle, Transport UK favours introduction of bus franchising on the grounds that it provides a local authority with the degree of control over the network which is otherwise lacking in an enhanced partnership and the levers of control allow a local authority to react as necessary in the event that financial risks arise.

In practice, bus franchising may not be the correct solution for every local authority if, for example, the costs of managing bus franchising cannot be adequately funded or the proposed method of procuring franchising fails to achieve adequate competition. Transport UK has concerns in relation to the CA's proposed approach to the proposed lotting – i.e. the limited size of the opportunity – and the proposed approaches to vehicle assets, on-bus equipment and depots.

Community Transport Association

The Community Transport Association (CTA) expresses concern about the lack of consideration for how the proposed bus reform models—Enhanced Partnerships (EPs) or franchising—will impact community transport services. They highlight that as of 2021, the Combined Authority provided around £260,000 annually to community transport providers, with a significant portion of these operators (62%) relying heavily on local authority funding. The CTA questions whether community transport can maintain its influence and funding levels under a restructured system, potentially jeopardising the services they provide to vulnerable communities.

The CTA emphasizes the importance of ensuring community transport operators are not marginalised in the decision-making process. If an Enhanced Partnership model is adopted, they recommend granting community transport operators voting rights to safeguard their role within the system. For regions where the number of operators may be too large, the CTA suggests creating a community transport alliance, modelled on the VCSE alliances within NHS trusts, to represent their collective interests and provide feedback.

In summary, the CTA calls for greater attention to the specific needs and challenges of community transport providers in the reform process. It advocates for mechanisms to preserve their funding and influence, ensuring that these essential services, often relied upon by underserved and rural populations, are not adversely affected by the proposed changes. This inclusion is critical for maintaining equitable and comprehensive transportation networks across the region.

Bus passenger representatives and user groups

Cambridgeshire Families for Sustainable Travel

Cambridgeshire Families for Sustainable Travel highlights significant shortcomings in the region's bus services, which fail to meet the needs of families, students, and other vulnerable groups. Issues such as low frequency, limited operating hours, convoluted routes, and poor reliability due to congestion are common. These problems lead to overcrowded services, making buses inaccessible for families with prams, while students must plan hours ahead to secure a spot on a bus to college.

High costs, exacerbated by fragmented journeys and complex ticketing systems, further burden users. Many places lack sufficient bus services to provide an alternative to car ownership, isolating those who cannot drive—especially the young, the elderly, and people with disabilities. This isolation restricts independence, limits opportunities, and forces others into costly car ownership, contributing to congestion, air pollution, and climate change.

The inadequacies of the system directly impact life chances, particularly for young people. For example, one young adult was unable to pursue a nursing apprenticeship due to the lack of a bus service to Addenbrookes Hospital, affecting their future prospects and depriving the NHS of a potential nurse.

Cambridgeshire Families for Sustainable Travel argues that the current bus system stifles opportunity, independence, and community strength. They call for urgent reform to create a more reliable, accessible, and inclusive public transport network.

Campaign for Better Transport

Reforming the local bus market is crucial to addressing persistent challenges like service reliability and accessibility. The current deregulated system has created a fragmented network where private operators prioritise profitability over delivering comprehensive services. Transitioning to a franchised model would allow for coordinated planning that places community needs at the forefront, fostering a more effective and equitable bus network.

The urgency for reform is underscored by declining bus patronage, despite increased funding in recent years. Rural areas like Whittlesey in Cambridgeshire have faced significant challenges with infrequent and unreliable services. A franchising approach would enable the Combined Authority to address these gaps, ensuring that underserved areas receive the attention they need.

By shifting control to a central authority, franchising would provide the framework to redesign the network strategically, aligning resources with public demand and ensuring

services are accessible to all. This model has the potential to reverse declining usage, improve connectivity, and support broader community goals. Reforming the bus market is not just a matter of improving transport; it is a step towards fostering social inclusion and sustainable growth for the region.

Cambridgeshire Sustainable Travel Alliance

The CSTA said that buses in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are in long-term decline. A significant change in how they are managed is required to turn this around, together with increased investment. Both an enhanced partnership and franchising would bring benefits. Franchising would be the better option though, as unlike an enhanced partnership it would enable the Combined Authority to plan the entire bus network (ending sudden bus cuts and allowing it to establish a network that better meets communities' needs, if necessary by engaging new operators) and to control how public funds for bus services are invested locally (so money invested in buses is spent more effectively and efficiently). In contrast, the outcome of an enhanced partnership is not guaranteed; it is dependent on successful negotiations with the region's current bus operators.

Transport Focus

From Transport Focus's perspective the key challenge is whether the proposal reflects the needs and priorities of both existing and potential passengers. The closer that the specifications and targets reflect people's needs, the better the chance that they will deliver the type of services that people want and value and will draw in new users to grow the market. Transport Focus released some national research (published in 2020) on the priorities of bus services for bus users, information can be seen below (full report found on our website – here).

This is at a national level but when Transport Focus conducted similar research at a regional level, we found little variation between passengers' main priorities for improvement from one area to the next. As a result, we believe it to be useful indicator of likely user concerns within the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area.

The research showed most of all bus users want a frequent, reliable bus service traveling to a wide range of destinations. This is consistent with research completed in 2023 by CPCA, referenced in paragraph 7.39, showing users within CPCA want to see an increase in services along with quicker more reliable journey times. In addition, we note the CPCA research emphasises on the provision of more rural services and better integration – these were not criteria assessed in Transport Focus's research. These are the key factors Cambridgeshire and Peterborough should focus on when addressing both bus

satisfaction and bus usership across the combined authorities. If buses are dependable and timely, bus usership has a better chance of increasing.

Bus Users UK, The Light Rail Transit Association agree the with strategic case proposals and the Wittering, Wansford, Castor & Ailsworth Bus Campaign Group stated:

"We support any means that improves connective services throughout Peterborough and the neighbouring authorities."

Local government (Constituent Councils in the CPCA area)

East Cambridgeshire District Council

East Cambridgeshire District Council supports the evidence suggesting that the Proposed Franchising Scheme best aligns with the objectives of the CPCA and local authorities, particularly in addressing the needs of rural areas. The Council highlights the challenges faced by East Cambridgeshire, where low population density, reduced funding, and longer travel distances have resulted in infrequent and inadequate bus services. These issues have left many residents without reliable transport options that meet their needs for connectivity and accessibility.

The Council sees franchising as a mechanism to provide socially and economically necessary services, especially on routes that are not commercially viable but essential for maintaining connectivity. Likewise, they stress the importance of ensuring equitable service delivery across the region, so rural areas like East Cambridgeshire receive the same level of investment and quality as urban centers.

The Council also underscores the need for early engagement with neighbouring authorities to preserve and enhance cross-boundary services. They stress that any reforms should align with broader efforts to improve air quality, electrify the bus fleet, and support environmental goals, contributing to healthier and more sustainable communities.

While welcoming the potential positive impacts of franchising, the Council says that the financial implications for bus users and residents funding the scheme are not adequately addressed. They urge the Combined Authority to work closely with local councils and communities to design a network that meets the specific needs of East Cambridgeshire and ensures a fair and balanced approach to investment and service provision.

Peterborough City Council

Peterborough City Council supports reforming the bus market to optimise service routes based on residents' needs rather than solely on commercial viability. They suggest that franchising could introduce greater competition, reduce prices, and deliver multi-operator ticketing, a significant benefit for passengers. Such reforms are seen as essential to creating a fit-for-purpose, robust bus service that aligns with the Combined Authority's goals to improve environmental outcomes and reduce car use by 15%.

The Council highlights the importance of addressing frequent service failures, geographical coverage gaps, and inadequate evening services, which currently deter bus usage. They stress that achieving these improvements requires bus services to be accessible, affordable, and reliable, with optimised routes and ticket pricing that encourage residents to shift from cars to buses.

While acknowledging that an Enhanced Partnership offers more control than currently, the Council believes it does not allow authorities to set a resident-focused vision and push for significant service enhancements. Franchising, while promising in terms of control and improvement potential, raises concerns about funding, particularly how costs will be balanced between public precepts and affordable ticket prices for users.

Strategically, Peterborough City Council sees franchising as an opportunity to align bus services with the city's growth and climate goals. Bringing greater control under the Combined Authority is expected to increase patronage and connectivity, helping to overcome barriers to use and foster a shift toward sustainable public transport. They stress the importance of affordability and accessibility to ensure the reforms benefit all residents equitably.

Fenland District Council

Fenland District Council (FDC) highlights the declining state of bus services in their district, citing an 83.8% reduction in weekday trips per hour between 2003-2006 and 2023, the second worst in the country according to research by Friends of the Earth and the University of Leeds. Significant service withdrawals, particularly by Stagecoach in 2022, have left many parts of Fenland without bus coverage, forcing the district to increasingly rely on community transport to meet basic accessibility needs. This sector, however, is struggling to cope with growing demand, particularly for the 15.9% of households without access to a car.

FDC supports the EP option as the most viable solution to improve local bus services. They note that the EP offers a high Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR) of 2.38 and involves more realistic, achievable costs compared to other options, allowing for service improvements without incurring excessive risk. FDC views the EP as an opportunity to increase and

improve bus services while fostering stronger working relationships between the Combined Authority, local councils, and bus operators.

The Council believes the EP can facilitate meaningful collaboration with operators, driving the much-needed ongoing improvements for Fenland's bus network. They argue that this approach provides substantially less risk to the Combined Authority while addressing the urgent need for enhanced connectivity to support the district's regeneration and economic growth. Accessibility, they assert, is not optional but essential for Fenland's residents and future development. They also want to see better integration between bus and rail networks.

In the Fenland context, FDC has repeatedly had conversations with CPCA colleagues making clear that we would like to see the Fenland bus network fundamentally reformed. Our preferred approach being to work with the public and stakeholders to commence a new network from the start. The current approach does not work, and we believe a more proactive and significant rethink is required to reforming current provision. We would also like to see the approach supported by the introduction of a Community Bus Network. Like the Community Rail Partnership approach, this is a proven concept to increase local public transport patronage. We would like to discuss this matter with CPCA in more detail to establish and fund the approach as part of the bus reform process.

South Cambridgeshire District Council

The Council notes the importance of ensuring that bus services in the future realise the significant mode shift from private car use and optimise the use of our existing and future planned infrastructure to underpin sustainable growth; the Council wants the franchising decisions to drive economic growth in new settlements but also to underpin the transport strategy and our economic growth objectives in the widest sense.

The Council expects to see better bus services within South Cambridgeshire, and improved connections with other destinations such as Cambridge. Buses should be affordable and reliable. This is especially important for those most reliant on public transport. As a rural district, the Council suggests they have received inadequate bus services and expect this to improve significantly under a franchising arrangement.

Cambridge City Council

Cambridge City Council recognises the challenges presented by the current arrangements and welcomes proposals for a franchising scheme that would provide greater democratic and public control over bus services including routes and ticketing.

The Council particularly emphasises the necessity for enhanced bus provision within Cambridge, serving both those unable to maintain private vehicles and those opting for more sustainable transport methods.

The Council underscores the vital importance of consistent, dependable and economically viable connections to essential services, including education, healthcare, employment and recreational facilities. This proves especially crucial for demographics vulnerable to social isolation, including those on modest incomes, individuals with disabilities, young people requiring pre-9:30 travel, older people and families with young children.

Cambridge's neighbourhoods have experienced frequent service alterations, leaving certain areas feeling detached from city amenities and the broader region. The Council maintains that future services must ensure accessibility for disabled passengers whilst remaining affordable, alongside appropriate alternative arrangements for those whom conventional bus services may not suit.

Cambridge County Council

Cambridgeshire County Council is pleased to respond to this consultation and is supportive of the Mayor's aspirations to improve public transport and connectivity across the area.

Following the 2018 Strategic Bus Review, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) published a notice of its intention to investigate bus franchising in 2019. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority adopted its Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) and its Bus Strategy in 2023. A key element of the LTCP is to reduce the level of car journeys in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough with a target to reduce car miles by 15%. The Bus Strategy aims to double the number of bus journeys and will enable travel by bus to become an attractive and viable travel option to many people who live and work in Cambridgeshire.

The County Council declared a climate emergency in 2019. Improvements to bus services and active travel will help achieve the Independent Commission on Climate's recommended reduction in car miles driven by 15% by 2030 as well as the Council's ambition to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2045. The Council strongly supports improvements to the bus network to help achieve these targets and contribute to achieving the Council's Strategic Ambitions, particularly:

- Ambition 1: Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate change
- Ambition 2: Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable

- Ambition 6: Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised
- Ambition 7: Children and young people have opportunities

Local governments (Neighbouring transport authorities)

Lincolnshire County Council

Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) supports the objectives of the proposed schemes, noting they align with common goals among Local Transport Authorities (LTAs), including economic growth, green transport, safety, and improved quality of life. While endorsing the scheme's intent, the Council raises concerns about the implications of the franchising option, particularly regarding service permits and potential unintended consequences on cross-boundary and contracted routes.

The Council acknowledges the Combined Authority's plan to exempt services contracted by LCC, commercial routes primarily serving markets outside Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and services with over 90% of their mileage in neighboring areas. However, clarification is sought on specific conditions attached to service permits, as these could impact the viability of exempt routes. LCC requests a precise definition of "strategic bus links," particularly whether this term includes cross-boundary services.

Additionally, the Council seeks confirmation regarding the exemptions of two CallConnect services co-funded with the Combined Authority: CallConnect 4P (Stamford to Peterborough) and CallConnect 48 (Wittering to Peterborough). The former is jointly funded with the Combined Authority as the primary contributor, while the latter is entirely within the CA area but contracted by LCC.

Lincolnshire County Council values the neutral or minor impact assessment for neighboring authorities in the policy analysis and stresses the importance of preserving existing cross-boundary links and their frequency. They seek reassurances that collaborative services will remain unaffected by the proposed franchising approach to ensure continued connectivity and viability for regional transport networks.

Suffolk County Council

Suffolk County Council supports bus market reform, emphasizing the failure of competition among operators in rural areas, which has left many places without adequate service levels to make buses an attractive option. They view a "do nothing"

approach as unacceptable and note that creating a Combined Authority-owned operator to address unprofitable routes is prohibited by law, leaving franchising or Enhanced Partnerships as the only viable options.

As a neighbouring authority, Suffolk's primary concern is preserving existing cross-border routes and the journeys they enable, particularly town services in Haverhill and Newmarket. They stress that residents care more about reliable service than funding sources and often blame local authorities when routes are cut. Suffolk urges the Combined Authority to ensure that franchising does not jeopardise these critical connections.

Suffolk also highlights potential risks to their own services if operators secure long-term franchise contracts in Cambridgeshire, which may reduce their willingness to continue smaller-margin operations in Suffolk or bid for contracts with shorter durations. This could lead to gaps in service that are difficult to fill without significant investment in fleets and driver recruitment.

While Suffolk recognises limitations in Enhanced Partnerships, particularly in operators' capacity to deliver improvements, they acknowledge that substantial investment in their network might make the control afforded by franchising a preferable option. However, they stress the importance of maintaining influence over services in their region and retaining the ability to implement changes in cross-border routes as needed to improve local connectivity and service quality.

Other Key Stakeholders

Confederation of Passenger Transport

The Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) focusses on the operators' commitment to delivering high-quality services and highlights ongoing improvements through collaboration in the CP Bus Alliance. CPT advocates for a wider collaborative approach, suggesting that significant network enhancements could be achieved without waiting for a franchising model's implementation in 2027.

CPT supports the overall objectives set out in the Strategic Case, agreeing that reform is necessary to address current challenges. However, they stress the importance of bus priority measures, which are absent from the consultation but critical for reducing congestion, improving reliability, and increasing usage. Such measures would enable reinvestment into a continuously improving network.

While acknowledging the benefits of franchising in granting the Combined Authority greater control, CPT warns of the significant upfront costs and potential challenges in securing support for a 500% increase in the Mayoral Precept. They highlight concerns about rural service provision, noting that there is little mention of increasing mileage on

rural routes. Additionally, they caution that passenger numbers may drop more sharply than anticipated once the national fare cap ends.

CPT suggests exploring a stronger EP model, citing successes in other regions, such as Lincolnshire's EP Plus scheme, which increased patronage by 150,000. They argue this approach could deliver faster and more affordable benefits while leveraging operators' local expertise.

Ultimately, CPT urges the Combined Authority to engage more deeply with operators to develop collaborative solutions that align with passenger needs and achieve the Strategic Case's objectives more efficiently.

England's Economic Heartlands

England's Economic Heartlands (EEH) supports the Combined Authority's efforts to improve bus services and increase patronage, recognizing these actions as vital for the sustainability and viability of the local bus network. Drawing from their regional transport strategy and experience, EEH highlights that EPs, franchising, and municipal bus companies each present unique opportunities and challenges. They commend the Combined Authority's robust analysis in favouring franchising as the preferred operating model.

EEH emphasizes the importance of mitigating potential knock-on effects on neighbouring Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) like Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, and Luton. They caution that operators focusing on franchise services within CPCA could withdraw from cross-border or other LTA routes, potentially disrupting services and requiring careful management.

Their summary of operating models outlines that EPs are cost-effective and quicker to implement but lack enforceability and accountability. Franchising offers full control over services, enabling long-term quality improvements, multi-modal integration, and cross-subsidisation of routes. However, it involves higher costs, complex administration, and potential risks for smaller operators. Municipal bus ownership provides local control and reinvests profits but faces high capital requirements and is precluded under current legislation.

EEH recommends prioritizing integration across services regardless of the chosen model, advocating for single-ticketing systems, unified branding, and improved data sharing to simplify travel and enhance connectivity. They stress that any operating model should focus on collaboration, interoperability, and making public transport a convenient, accessible option for all users across the region and beyond.

Wider Stakeholders

Academic

Cambridge Biomedical Campus

Cambridge Biomedical Campus (CBC) proposes that reform to the bus market provides the opportunity for better bus route planning, which in turn allows for a more cohesive, reliable, and customer-focused network which can be tailored to meet the needs of people and businesses operating in and around Cambridge. However, reform can only achieve this if the bus network is designed to have a greater impact to tackling broader economic, social, and environmental objectives, such as reducing congestion, improving air quality, and promoting social inclusion. The CBC agrees with the strategic case that reforms to the bus market are needed to address the challenges faced within the CPCA and at the campus generally.

University of Cambridge

The University of Cambridge has expressed concern over the crisis in the region's public transport system, citing poor connectivity, reduced ridership, declining reliability, rising costs, and increased journey times. These challenges are harming productivity, well-being, and environmental quality, all while threatening the sustainability and economic viability of the region.

The University supports a shift away from the current system, as informal partnerships are insufficient to address the worsening issues. While an enhanced partnership model could offer incremental improvements, the University argues that true progress requires a franchised bus network that allows the region to take full control of public transport services.

Drawing from its own successful Universal service, which has achieved a 300% increase in passenger numbers over a decade through greater control, subsidised fares, and enhanced resources, the University wants to see transformational change. It sees franchising as essential to meeting regional sustainability goals and addressing the systemic failures of the current arrangement. The University thus endorses the franchising model as the most robust solution to restore and improve public transport in the region.

Inspire Education Group

Inspire Education Group suggests that fostering collaboration between key stakeholders, such as large employers and public transport providers, could address regional transport

issues more effectively than franchising. Tailored solutions, developed through identifying areas of greatest need, may avoid the high costs and complexities associated with franchising. While franchising might increase service coverage, it risks sidelining the expertise of current providers and could lead to increased tendering costs, particularly for less profitable routes.

Instead, Inspire advocates for an approach that enhances regulation on existing services, balancing oversight with flexibility and avoiding the significant administrative burdens of franchising. By granting local authorities greater control, this model could streamline improvements while maintaining providers' profitability. Incentives and zoning regulations could encourage service coverage in underserved areas, such as mandating a percentage of rural-to-city routes within specified timeframes. Financial incentives and phased implementation would further support this transition.

This strategy, inspired by automotive regulations, offers a more cost-effective and collaborative path toward improving public transport services without formal franchising.

Charity & Voluntary sector

Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce

The Chamber of Commerce state that regardless of the outcome of whether an enhanced partnership is pursued or franchising there needs to be adequate provision to connect people to places of education and work. Rural areas, with Fenland in particular, need increased connectivity to unlock growth and opportunities for people.

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

The CPRE response challenges the assumption that economic growth aligns with climate change mitigation, advocating instead for economic redistribution and environmental adjustment inspired by thinkers like Schumacher and Lovelock. It highlights the necessity of reducing vehicle emissions through minimized travel, fewer vehicles, and extended vehicle lifespans, positioning public transport, especially buses, as a key component in achieving these goals.

The privatisation of local authority-run bus services is criticised for undermining efficient, affordable systems that once successfully reduced car dependency. The response calls for a return to a publicly managed "corporation transport" model, requiring initial subsidies but yielding affordable fares and increased ridership over time, contrasting sharply with the current profit-driven system.

Examples like Nottingham City Transport and the Tyne and Wear Nexus showcase successful public or mixed models integrating bus and rail services. The response supports franchising as the most effective approach but suggests a mixed model to incorporate small rural operators for adaptive local services. It also emphasises cross-boundary travel improvements to meet practical needs and reduce car reliance.

While endorsing the Bus Strategy Vision and Goals, the response critiques the limited ambitions of the Bus Reform Objectives and the constrained powers under the Bus Services Act 2017, calling for broader public ownership and integration with rail hubs.

Elected Representatives

North West Cambridgeshire MP

The bus market is in severe, and significant need of reform – as is being considered – this provides an excellent way to address a number of fundamental issues.

Huntingdon MP

The MP for Huntingdon was open to the idea of franchising but emphasised it must deliver on the following points:

Rural and Under-served Areas: A key priority is ensuring equitable investment in rural areas currently excluded from public transport networks. Villages such as Brington, Bythorn, and Southoe lack any bus services, creating significant barriers to accessing employment, healthcare, and local economic hubs. Franchising must explicitly address these gaps to prevent further marginalization.

Reliability, Frequency, and Timeliness: Current bus services are unreliable and irregular, undermining public trust and causing missed opportunities for work, healthcare, and social engagements. Franchising should include strict Service-Level Agreements (SLAs) with clear benchmarks for performance, accompanied by enforceable penalties for non-compliance.

Accountability and Governance: Effective management of a franchised system requires robust oversight. An independent board, including MPs, council representatives, and residents, is recommended to ensure transparency, monitor performance, and maintain adherence to goals.

Fair Financial Contribution: Concerns over disproportionate funding allocation must be addressed. Transparent breakdowns of funding and demonstrable local benefits are essential to maintain public support.

Environmental Sustainability: Public transport improvements in rural areas are critical to achieving decarbonization goals and reducing road mileage as outlined in the CPCA's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.

Implementation Timeline and Contingency Planning: A clear, publicly available timeline with milestones and robust contingency plans is necessary to manage transition risks and ensure service continuity.

Regardless of the progressed option, market town areas such as Huntingdon need to see improved services, including intra-town connectivity and improved journey times to key destinations such as Cambridge and Peterborough.

District Councillor for Huntingdon East

Agree that "do nothing" is not an option, although the final option will need to be carefully selected.

District Councillor for Fenstanton

I agree that Bus Franchising is the best way forward in order to reform the bus market in something that is suitable and sustainable. We really need these reforms because the public are being let down by bus providers and local authorities not having enough funding to sustain routes.

Environment, Heritage, Amenity or Community Groups

ACORN Cambridge

ACORN Cambridge strongly supports the strategic case, which identifies Franchising as the best way to reform the bus market. Franchising will allow the Combined Authority to control all services (routes, frequencies, route numbers), to set standards for services/vehicles, to set fares and fare discounts, including possible fare capping, to introduce a single ticket system for the whole network, to ensure that profitable services cross-subsidise others, to hold operators to account for not meeting requirements and to integrate the planning and management of the network. These are all things that ACORN believe would significantly improve the bus network for our members and the public more broadly.

Carbon Neutral Cambridge

Carbon Neutral Cambridge emphasised that buses are crucial to a decarbonised future, but reversing their long-term decline requires significant management changes and increased investment. While both enhanced partnerships and franchising offer benefits, franchising is preferred. It allows the Combined Authority to plan the entire network, prevent sudden service cuts, and meet community needs by engaging new operators when necessary. Franchising also ensures better control over public funds, leading to more effective and efficient investment in bus services. In contrast, enhanced partnerships depend on successful negotiations with current operators, making outcomes less certain. Franchising offers a stronger framework for achieving sustainable and reliable bus services.

Trumpington Residents' Association

The Trumpington Residents' Association supports franchising as the appropriate model for improving bus services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, arguing that the Enhanced Partnership model is insufficient. They see that franchising provides the Combined Authority with the necessary control to plan routes, set fares, and enforce standards, ensuring the public interest is placed over private profitability.

The Enhanced Partnership model, it argues, lacks effective enforcement mechanisms, leaving key decisions in the hands of operators, which perpetuates the current system's failings. Franchising, in contrast, offers a centralised and collaborative approach, enabling the Combined Authority to address critical challenges like network improvements, affordability, and environmental goals.

The Association supports the Combined Authority's proposed collaborative franchising model, which balances central control with operator input, as more feasible given its current capacity. They stress the importance of integrating local expertise and addressing Trumpington-specific challenges, highlighted in previous consultations, within the implementation plan. This approach, it concludes, is essential for delivering a bus service that meets the region's social, economic, and environmental needs effectively.

Health organisations

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

From Cambridge University Hospitals, reforms to the bus market provides the option for 'decide and provide' bus route planning, which in turn allows for a more cohesive, reliable, and customer-focused network which can be tailored to meet the needs of people and businesses operating in and around Cambridge. However, reform can only be achieved if the bus network is designed to have a greater impact to tackling broader economic, social, and environmental objectives, such as reducing congestion, improving air quality, and promoting social inclusion. CUH agree with the strategic case that reforms to the bus market are needed to address the challenges faced within the Combined Authority and at the campus generally.

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough NHS

Bus services are essential for connecting communities, particularly in rural areas, to education, work, and healthcare. They enable patients to access vital health services and support healthcare staff in reaching their workplaces efficiently. The reduction or removal of rural bus services has previously had devastating impacts, isolating parts of communities and cutting off access to essential amenities. While these routes are often unprofitable, they are crucial for community well-being and must be safeguarded. A sustainable bus service model in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough must prioritise maintaining reliable rural connections to ensure continued access to health and care facilities for patients and staff.

Wellcome Genome Campus

The Wellcome Genome Campus said that the strategic case for bus franchising highlights its potential to provide long-term stability and improve service quality, despite higher initial costs. Franchising offers greater autonomy and continuity, aiming to boost patronage and address key challenges through enhanced accountability and control.

However, bus reform alone cannot resolve all issues; unreliable and indirect services require broader strategic transport interventions. The Wellcome Genome Campus advocate a comprehensive approach to infrastructure investment, collaborating with CPCA and the Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership. A holistic strategy is essential to unlock growth, support public transport, and realize the region's potential within the Local Growth Plan.

Town and Parish Councils in CPCA area

Bottisham Parish Council

Bottisham Parish Council supports bus franchising as a positive step but stresses the importance of additional measures, such as proactive road space management by the Combined Authority and Cambridgeshire County Council to prioritise buses. Co-ordination with neighbouring authorities, particularly Suffolk County Council, is crucial given the cross-boundary connections in the area, such as to Newmarket. Bottisham Parish Council also expresses concerns about the costs of implementing and maintaining franchising, emphasising that these must be carefully managed to prevent funds from being diverted away from supporting essential bus services. Collaboration and robust financial oversight are vital to ensure franchising delivers meaningful improvements while safeguarding service quality and coverage for the Bottisham community.

Girton Parish Council

Girton Parish Council respond saying that bus providers should be publicly accountable, which is achievable only through reform that places regulation and strategy within the public sector. They support the existing objectives but suggest adding goals to provide an effective alternative to private cars and ensure comprehensive service for those reliant on public transport. While either approach may positively impact neighbouring authorities, the Enhanced Partnership appears to offer fewer benefits relative to its risks. Franchising, despite higher overall risks, is viewed as a more promising option for delivering the necessary improvements to public bus services.

Haslingfield Parish Council

Haslingfield Parish Council emphasises the urgent need for bus service reform to address the village's connectivity issues. Residents require reliable links to nearby villages to access a variety of destinations beyond just Cambridge. The lack of later buses from Cambridge prevents many from using the service for commuting purposes. Current bus operations suffer from a lack of cohesion in route planning and service frequency,

which discourages use. The Council supports the introduction of a single coordinating body to improve service integration and reliability. Franchising is favoured over an Enhanced Partnership, as it offers a more effective means of organising and managing bus services to meet the village's needs.

Kingston Parish Council

Kingston Parish Council supports the Strategic Case conclusion that the Franchising model is better suited than the Enhanced Partnership (EP) model to achieve the specified objectives. Franchising's centralised control enables the creation of an integrated transport network and allows cross-subsidies from profitable services to support rural routes, critical for maintaining connectivity in areas with lower passenger numbers. The Council highlights the importance of the Combined Authority's ability under Franchising to determine and maintain essential bus routes, mitigating the anxiety caused by the risk of sudden route cancellations by commercial operators. They note with encouragement that both models are considered affordable and deliverable, as assessed and independently audited, but defer to specialists for detailed evaluation of forecasts and scenarios.

Whaddon Parish Council

Whaddon Parish Council highlights the need for bus reform to occur alongside increased bus priority measures, reliable services, and effective marketing. It criticises the current system's lack of innovation, with minimal initiatives in the commercial network and a focus on basic services, leading to the absence of evening and Sunday routes due to insufficient financial incentives. The dominance of a single bus operator (80% market share) stifles competition and innovation. To address climate change and encourage public transport use, significant changes are needed. While franchising offers potential, it is not a quick fix; collaboration between the Combined Authority (buses) and Cambridgeshire Highways (roads) is crucial, along with implementing bus priority measures.

Other Wider Stakeholders

Cambridge Ahead

Cambridge Ahead supports efforts to improve the quality and sustainability of the bus system, saying that franchising offers the greatest potential for strategic oversight, accountability, and long-term benefits. Franchising would provide the Combined Authority with increased flexibility to shape services, set tender rules, and create a more

integrated transport system. This approach is seen as future-proof, accommodating regional growth, new employment, and housing developments.

Key advantages include preventing sudden service cancellations that erode trust, moving towards a single ticketing system, enhancing interoperability, and fostering a unified public transport identity. Franchising is positioned as a vital step towards improving ridership and user experience.

Imperial War Museum Duxford

Imperial War Museum propose that the bus market needs to be reformed to achieve target mode shift from car to bus transport, as it is not currently meeting the requirements of its users sufficiently to enable it to do so. There are many communities which are not currently served by the bus market, and there is little flexibility in the existing model to improve or reinstate heavily subsidised services.

Theme 1: Challenges facing the CPCA bus market

The first theme of the Strategic Case feedback takes as its focus the first shared question in the short and long surveys:

Q. Do you have any comments generally on how well bus services are currently performing in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough?

A total of 1,541 participants made 5,976 comments in relation to this question. Almost a quarter (24%) of the feedback related to service quality. Out of all the feedback responses, 1,452 of the responses focussed on general service quality. Respondents were most likely to say that the service was generally poor or inadequate (284), poor or inadequate for commuters (163), for colleges / schools (152), and for rural areas (149).

I think the bus service is currently struggling, both in terms of reliability and coverage. There are many journeys that people might like to take that are not available.

Female, 35-44

The next most discussed issue was bus reliability. Feedback on bus reliability constituted 897 responses. Just three per cent of those commenting on reliability (25) said that the buses were reliable. Most said the service was unreliable (329), followed by the service did not run on time (300), and that there were too many cancellations (208).

I find that buses are very often late, cancelled or too busy to allow people on, especially during peak times.

Male, 18-24

The third most important issue with nine per cent of participant comments was bus frequency (532). The majority here (379) said the bus services were generally frequent enough, and some specifically highlighted frequency in rural areas (114).

The public also highlighted that journeys are too slow (192), overcrowding especially during rush hour (192) and no (late) evening services (164).

Additional Challenges to CPCA Bus Market Table

Challenges	Count
Poor timetabling (e.g. services do not connect)	129
No bus service in some (rural) areas	123
Not frequent enough in rural areas / outside towns/cities	114
Expensive / poor value	110
Services in some (rural) areas have been cut / are under threat	104
Traffic congestion (at rush hour) affects bus services	102
Poor bus service encourages more car usage (and traffic congestion)	99
No direct service / need to change buses	92
Live electronic timetable display / bus operator app inaccurate	91
Service is variable	86
Services do not run every day / on Sunday	77
Good service	76
Not enough routes	70
Services are not joined up (as different providers)	67
Poor service to hospitals	66
Poor service to train stations	65
Other	64
No / limited early morning services	58
Services are not reliable enough for medical appointments	57
Bus stops not convenient	55
Services do not fit the working day	53
Ok / adequate service	51
Poor service for elderly residents	48

Limited coverage / services	43
Timetabling / route / fare information not readily available	43
Getting buses is stressful / frustrating	41
Poor service for people with disabilities	38
Poor services for attending social events	37
Do not / rarely use buses	37
Use car instead of buses	37
Good service in towns/cities	36
Poor drivers	33
Regular service	32
Poor bus operator	32
Services run on time	31
Use taxi instead of buses	30
Guided busway services are poor	30
Good drivers	30
Poor service to supermarkets / shops	29
Other infrastructure comments	29
Poor / inadequate service in towns/cities	28
Limited service (e.g. restricted hours) at weekends	26
Like £2 cap on fares	26
Bus operators focus on profit-making (at the expense of service)	26
Frequent / unnecessary timetable changes	26
Too many buses arriving at the same / similar time	26
Reliable	25
Other route comments	24
Guided busway services are good	23
Good park and ride service	20
Roadworks have affected bus services	20
Unpleasant bus stops	20
Nothing / don't know	19

Dirty / smelly buses	19
Feel unsafe using buses	19
Buses too small to meet demand	18
Cycle instead of using buses	17
Too many under-used / empty services	17
Too many stops on route	17
Ok / adequate service in towns/cities	16
Service not sufficient for expanding population (e.g. new housing estates)	16
Use train instead of buses	15
Out of date buses	15
Like Tiger pass	14
Other bus operator comments	14
Need electronic displays at bus stops	14
Poorly advertised timetable changes	14
Buses too large	13
Good price / value	12
Other cost comments	12
Good bus operator	12
Needs to implement contactless payments	12
Should be a public service / publicly owned / not for profit	11
Other general service comments	11
No (late) evening services in rural areas	11
Other usage comments	11
Operators don't respond to queries / complaints	11
Not enough bus lanes	10
Lack of drivers	10
Other coverage by day / time of day comments	9
Do not want to subsidise bus services (through council tax)	9
Bus services should be franchised (under combined authority control)	9
Buses often break down	9

Operators have a monopoly on services	8
Uncomfortable buses	8
Live electronic timetable display / bus operator app is helpful	8
Clean buses	8
Buses should have two doors	8
Other staffing comments	7
Bus station not fit for purpose	7
Small buses are good	6
Good quality buses	6
Like £1 children's pass	5
Not clear what buses stop at a particular bus stop	5
Need electric / zero emission buses	5
Good service in (some) rural areas	4
No late evening services to park and ride	4
Journeys are quick	4
Other reliability comments	4
Services do not run regularly on Sunday	4
Other timetabling comments	4
Services run until late evening	3
Other frequency comments	3
Other traffic management comments	3
Too much time allowed at / between stops	3
Other area coverage comments	2
Buses do not use bus lanes	2
Commercial bus services / competition not appropriate for rural areas	2
Good service for commuters	1
Good service during working hours	1
Free buses in towns / cities	1
£2 cap on fares has encouraged bus usage	1
Bus lanes not wide enough	1

Theme 2: What if Franchising Fails

Across the consultation responses, 28 stakeholders expressed specific concerns about the potential failure or challenges of franchising implementation, with 19 comments from members of the public and 9 from organisations. While most respondents supported franchising in principle, there were significant concerns about its practical implementation.

The concern that franchising might fail highlighted under the Strategic Case is much more characteristic of stakeholder response (8) than public response (19).

Members of the public primarily focused on operational concerns and service delivery.

Franchising alone will not solve the problem we all face. You will need to address the level of public spend for public service.

Male, 75-84

I am not sure franchising is entirely the correct route to reform the bus market. The sheer amount of money it will cost the authority in the first place is concerning me.

Male, 45-54

Organisational responses tended to focus on strategic and systemic issues:

There is certainly ambition in choosing to take on the Franchising solution to Bus Services, however there are some concerns that are not allayed in the details provided." Cambridge Ahead emphasised sustainability concerns, stating the need to "ensure the continued viability and sustainability of the bus system.

Cottenham Parish Council

Key differences emerged in the nature of concerns: public respondents often focused on immediate service impacts and costs, while organisations highlighted longer-term strategic challenges. Public concerns frequently centred on management competency and service reliability, while organisational responses emphasised systemic issues and strategic implementation challenges.

Both stakeholders and the public shared concerns about the authority's capacity to deliver, though they approached this from different angles.

Theme 3: Bus Reform Options

A total of 1,227 participants made comments in relation to bus reform options. A quarter (25%) of the feedback related to service quality. Out of all the feedback responses, 466 of the responses focussed on bus reform in general. Eighty-four per cent of this group said that they either agreed with reform or that it was worth trying (391). Five per cent did not agree with bus reform or did not think it would make a difference (25).

Reform is definitely needed. The increased development that has happened around Cambridge makes it even more urgent. Smaller buses more frequent and covering wider areas are essential.

Female, 65-74

Two hundred and seven responses focussed on franchising as part of bus reform, and of those, thirty-seven per cent spontaneously said that they would like franchising as opposed to four per cent who spontaneously said they were opposed. In the rest of the response, the public highlighted the things they perceived franchising could do better such as bring better accountability (44), better service (33), and more/better routes (16).

Transport is a public service, and I would welcome some accountability in this area.

Female, 55-64

By comparison, participants had much less to say about enhanced partnership, a few agreed with it (3), but more were against it (11) and one response said that reforms could be delivered quicker and cheaper by enhanced partnership.

The most common response outside these was that the bus service should not be run for profit or not focus on profit-making routes (135). Some said that the bus service should be in public ownership (39) and that bus operators should not be monopoly providers (41).

Some form of commercial competition would possibly help as Stagecoach has a virtual monopoly.

Male, 55-64

There are twenty-six responses asking questions about adopting a model of reform akin to London or Manchester instead of what is proposed. Three responses suggested that there should be different reform options in different localities.

Theme 4: Issues with bus priority & highways management

Like in the opening question about the current performance of the bus network, at a strategic level, the public and stakeholders emphasise or re-emphasise what they perceived as the key priorities that bus reform should bring about.

In this group of comments, one in eight wants to see more punctual, reliable buses (105) and more buses at peak hours (97). This is followed by improvements to rural and village services (89).

Given the current poor service due to cancellations, issues with punctuality and capacity problems, change is needed.

Female, 45-54

Participants also say that services need to be more joined up (65), the CPCA area needs more bus routes (55) and a better service for commuters (44).

Reform is clearly needed if we are to have a joined-up approach to traffic management.

Male, 35-44

In terms of the interaction between reform and highways management, there are 186 responses. In seventy per cent of these, the public, support reform to encourage more bus usage and fewer cars which would also help the environment (130).

When fares were set at £2 each way, I tried very hard to use the bus. It is good for the environment, but it has been challenging. Buses cancelled or delayed. I've given up & gone home for the car on more than one occasion!

Female, 25-34

In this group of responses, one in five advance the opinion that traffic congestion and traffic issues like roadworks need addressing (41). As part of this, some highlight the need for more bus lanes (13). Also, someone said do not penalise the motorist (1) and another member of the public questioned whether bus reform or franchising could deal with congestion.

Participant Priorities Lower Count Table

Priorities	Count
Need to prevent cuts to services (at short notice)	32
Should vary bus sizes according to need	29
Need better services to schools / colleges	28
Need more services at unsocial times (e.g. early morning / evening)	25
Bus journeys should be quicker	24
Need to improve accessibility	22
Services should meet the needs of a growing population	22
Need better services to hospitals	16

Need up to date information / live tracking of bus services	16
Need fewer cancellations (at short notice)	15
Need more direct routes / fewer stops on routes	15
Need better services to railway stations	11
Need more bus drivers	11
Introduce energy efficient / electric buses	11
Need more services at weekends	9
There should be fewer empty buses	7
Need fewer timetable changes	6
Introduce on demand services	6
More comfortable buses	2

Theme 5: Fares and ticketing

There were eighty-six responses about fares and ticketing. Over half of these said that fares should be reasonable or reduced.

The ability to buy a monthly or annual ticket would enable passengers to get on the bus much faster, as they could simply show the driver their ticket and get on.

Female, 25-34

I agree we need to re-regulate the bus network to be able to approve reliability, regulate fares and deliver and integrated network.

Female, 45-54

Yes - CPCA control over timetables, fares, and standards of service to be run in passengers' favour is essential, and franchising is a better way than enhanced partnership to achieve this.

Male, 55-64

Participants also wanted tickets that worked across multiple operators (25) and other said fares should be consistent across the bus services.

It will also be necessary to have multi-ticketing as people will usually need to connect with other routes and to keep fares low, especially for young people using the bus for school and sixth form colleges.

Female, 25-34

Theme 6: Bus Network

From a strategic perspective, there are a number of aspirations that participants have through reform relating to the bus network. They hope that reform will lead to a better service (160), with more routes (55) especially in rural areas (89).

Yes, I think we need serious reforms to improve frequency and reliability of service.

Female, 75-84

I agree that reform is required to provide service on routes which are not currently offered by private operators. Additional expenditure by CPCA may initially be required to run services with few passengers until people's default choice of travel mode starts to change.

Male, 45-54

Most importantly, participants want a more reliable bus network with more frequent buses especially in peak hours (97). The reforms are seen as a way that makes buses become more punctual (105) and that puts the needs of the public first (119).

I believe that reforming the bus market (especially if the Franchising option is taken) should allow for a focus on providing the best service possible for users rather than a focus on profit at the expense of users (both literally and figuratively).

Prefer not to say, 35-44

Theme 7: Environment and Sustainability

There are 149 responses that relate to environment and sustainability. As has already been identified, reform is seen as a way of increasing bus usage and decreasing car usage which is seen as being better for the environment (41) and others promote the environmental context for the strategy while not indicating that it is a result specifically of the reform.

Drastic action is needed to enhance confidence and deliver a transport solution fit for a greener future. Currently without reform the foreseeable future encourages car travel due to lack of reliability and confidence in delivery.

Male, 35-44

Some talk about economic sustainability (26) in relation to making the service financially viable for the everyday effectiveness of the service balancing profitability and service provision.

I believe that reforming the bus market is essential for the growth of Cambridgeshire. It has the potential to improve economic opportunities, support environmental sustainability, enhance social inclusion, and create a more reliable and future-proof transportation system. By addressing these challenges, the county can ensure that its infrastructure and public services meet the needs of its growing population.

Female, 55-64

There are also further mentions of general environmental concerns and environment impact and green initiatives like electric buses (22). Others talk about service sustainability in terms of having reforms that will maintain bus services in the future and for the horizon described in the Consultation Plan (16).

Bus networks need reforming, but not on a commercial basis. Smaller, electric buses on wider adaptive routes integrated with technology. Local employers/business parks should be encouraged to support routes and buses by offering free bus travel for employees at times that suit employees' patterns. Offering this as an employee benefit. The same goes for shopping centres.

Female, 65-74

Chapter 6: The Economic Case

Introduction

This section covers questions on the Economic Case, which considers the wider economic and social benefits of each option, and whether they offer value for money. The Economic Case considers the benefits for passengers, bus operators, the Combined Authority and wider society across the EP and the Proposed Franchising Scheme, alongside the costs to the public sector. The economic model assesses the relative benefits and costs of the two bus reform options over a 30-year appraisal period.

It concludes that Franchising offers the Combined Authority advantages over an Enhanced Partnership. Results suggest that, at each level of investment, Franchising performs slightly better in terms of economic benefits. The Franchising approach in the medium level investment scenario provides the best Net Present Value and Benefit to Cost Ratio

There is one shared question on the Economic Case included in both the short form and long form questionnaire – a total of 1,185 participants responded to this question. Seventeen key stakeholders, forty-six wider stakeholders and 1,112 members of the public responded to it.

Q. The Economic Case says that Franchising offers better value for money to the Combined Authority than an Enhanced Partnership. Do you have any comments on this?¹⁰

¹⁰ See Section 6 (paragraphs 6.16 – 6.23) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

See Section 7 (paragraphs 7.139 – 7.143 and Tables 7–10 and 7–11) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

Table 6.1: The table below counts the participants who provided a response to this question:

	Number of participants who made favourable comments	Number of participants who made unfavourable comments
All who provide a response	1,185	
Key Stakeholders	12	5
Wider Stakeholders	29	2
Members of the public	409	152

In the long form questionnaire, there was the following additional question about the Economic Case. It was answered by 63 participants including 19 stakeholders.

Q. Do you have any comments on the impacts of introducing the proposed Franchising Scheme or the alternative of an Enhanced Partnership?¹¹

The response was as follows:

- Franchising is better (7)
- Franchising allows for greater control (7)
- Franchising offers better value (7)
- Sceptical of the estimated finances (4)
- Should not be run for profit (4)
- The proposals don't address the financial impact (4)
- Franchising would not be beneficial (3)
- Operators should have minimal involvement (3)
- Both offer similar benefits (2)
- Needs to be well managed/monitored (2)
- Will encourage modal shift (2)
- Franchising is risky/costly (2)
- Enhanced Partnership is better (2)
- Operators can provide

¹¹ See Section 7 (paragraphs 7.138 – 7.140 and Table 7–10) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

Summary of stakeholder responses

This section outlines the responses to the Economic Case questions from organisations. It starts with a summary of responses received from the key stakeholders before summarising the wider stakeholder response.

Key Stakeholders

Bus Operators

Whippet

Whippet provided a nuanced perspective on the bus reform proposals, highlighting the need for a balanced approach that addresses both urban and rural transportation challenges. They acknowledged the potential benefits of franchising, including centralised planning and the ability to align services with broader strategic objectives.

The organisation emphasised the importance of sustaining services in rural areas, which often face significant operational and financial challenges. They noted that franchising could provide the structural support needed to maintain essential but less profitable routes, ensuring equitable access for all communities. However, they cautioned that the financial and administrative demands of franchising might strain resources, potentially leading to unintended consequences such as service cuts or higher costs.

Whippet advocated for a reform model that balances the benefits of franchising with the flexibility and cost-effectiveness of Enhanced Partnerships. They stressed the importance of collaboration between public and private stakeholders to develop a sustainable and user-focused network. Their response highlighted the need for careful planning and targeted investment to achieve long-term improvements in public transport.

Stagecoach

Stagecoach provided extensive feedback on the economic case for franchising, highlighting several concerns and proposing alternatives that could achieve many of the same goals at lower costs. They highlighted that the projected growth in bus patronage appears primarily tied to population growth rather than service improvements, raising questions about the sustainability of the proposed franchising model.

Stagecoach acknowledged that shorter journey times could attract more users but argued that this would require significant investments in bus priority measures and infrastructure. They point out CPCA's historical lack of investment in bus priority and

contended that Enhanced Partnerships, with proper funding and collaboration, could achieve similar outcomes without the extensive costs and risks associated with franchising. Examples of successful Enhanced Partnership initiatives in other regions, such as Lincolnshire and Leicester, were cited to illustrate their potential effectiveness.

The organisation also raised practical concerns about the implementation and long-term sustainability of franchising. They highlighted underestimated costs, such as higher-than-anticipated operational expenses and the challenges of building EV-ready bus depots. Drawing from Greater Manchester's franchising experience, they cautioned that managing and operating bus services requires more time and resources than authorities typically anticipate.

While Stagecoach recognised the benefits of franchising, such as greater network control and potential service improvements for rural communities, they questioned the validity of these assumptions for a largely rural region like Cambridgeshire. Though an option not covered in the Assessment and therefore has not been scrutinised or validated, Stagecoach proposed an Enhanced Partnership Plus as a more flexible and cost-effective solution, capable of delivering many of the same benefits through targeted investment and collaboration.

In conclusion, Stagecoach advocated for greater transparency in cost assessments and a more detailed examination of the benefits attributed to franchising. They warned that without addressing underlying issues like road congestion and infrastructure investment, neither franchising nor an Enhanced Partnership would fully realise the Combined Authority's goals.

Stephensons

Stephensons of Essex Ltd offered a critical perspective on franchising, focusing on its potential risks and challenges. While they acknowledged the need for reform in the bus network, they expressed strong reservations about the financial and operational impacts of franchising. Stephensons argued that franchising introduces significant risks, including increased costs, potential service disruptions, and a loss of efficiency. They were particularly concerned about the viability of cross-boundary and rural services under a franchising model, as these routes often rely on flexible, cost-effective arrangements that might be lost in a centralized system.

The company advocated for Enhanced Partnerships as a more practical and sustainable alternative to franchising. They highlighted the success of similar models in other regions, where collaboration between operators and local authorities has led to improvements in service quality and passenger numbers. Stephensons stressed that Enhanced Partnerships offer a lower-risk approach, enabling targeted investment and

incremental changes without the high financial and administrative burdens of franchising.

Their response stresses the importance of addressing systemic issues like congestion, road planning, and passenger infrastructure, which they felt franchising alone could not resolve. Stephenson's concluded that while reform is necessary, it should be flexibility, collaboration, and cost-effectiveness to achieve sustainable improvements.

Delaine Buses

Delaine Buses present a critical view of transferring financial risk to the Combined Authority through the franchising model. Their argument centres on the vulnerability of public sector funding during economic downturns, when health and education can take funding priority over transport. They express particular concern about the network's stability during difficult economic periods, noting how external factors such as oil market volatility could impact service delivery when public funding is constrained.

Delaine favour an enhanced partnership model, where operators retain financial risk whilst maintaining the flexibility to adapt to market conditions. They argue that private operators can deploy entrepreneurial skills to grow markets more swiftly than public bodies, which often become entangled in political processes and bureaucratic procedures. The core of their argument suggests that private operators are fundamentally better equipped to manage economic risks and respond dynamically to market changes compared to public bodies hampered by political and administrative constraints.

First Bus

First Bus provided a balanced perspective on the proposed bus reforms, supporting the overarching goals of improving accessibility, reliability, and sustainability. They acknowledged the advantages of franchising in providing centralised control and accountability, which could drive significant improvements in service quality and network integration. However, they also stressed the importance of flexibility in the chosen reform model to address the diverse needs of local communities effectively.

First Bus highlighted the potential of franchising to create a more cohesive and user-focused system, particularly through measures like integrated ticketing, harmonized service standards, and expanded coverage. However, they cautioned that franchising requires substantial investment and carries significant risks, including long implementation timelines and potential disruptions during the transition.

The company advocated for a collaborative approach, suggesting that Enhanced Partnerships could deliver many of the same benefits more quickly and with fewer

financial risks. They would like to see tailored solutions that consider local conditions, such as rural connectivity challenges and cross-boundary travel needs. First Bus concluded that while franchising offers significant opportunities, it must be implemented with careful planning and stakeholder engagement to achieve its intended outcomes.

Ron W Dew

Ron W Dew & Son Ltd expressed cautious support for the Combined Authority's vision to improve bus services through reform but voiced concerns about its implications for rural communities. They acknowledged that franchising offers a structured approach to managing bus networks and could potentially enhance service integration and long-term economic growth. However, they point out that the current plans for franchising lack a thorough understanding of the unique challenges faced by rural operators and passengers.

The organisation highlighted the difficulty of maintaining viable services in areas with low passenger numbers, higher operational costs, and longer travel distances. They argued that the proposed economic framework does not adequately consider these factors, potentially leading to unintended consequences such as reduced connectivity for rural communities. Dews also pointed out that an effective reform model must strike a balance between economic efficiency and equitable service delivery, ensuring that rural routes are prioritized alongside urban improvements.

While they acknowledged the potential benefits of franchising, such as centralised planning and service reliability, they stressed that it would require significant public investment and careful oversight to avoid further marginalizing underserved areas. Their perspective underscores the importance of tailoring reforms to address both urban and rural needs effectively.

The Go-Ahead Group

The Go-Ahead Group expressed strong support for the franchising model, given its potential to address systemic issues in the region's bus network. They highlighted franchising's ability to centralize decision-making, allowing for more cohesive planning and better alignment with the Combined Authority's strategic goals. The group viewed franchising as a transformative approach capable of improving service reliability, enhancing network integration, and addressing gaps in rural and urban connectivity.

The Go-Ahead Group recognised the higher upfront costs associated with franchising but argued that its long-term benefits, such as greater accountability and efficiency, justify the investment. They noted that franchising would enable the Combined Authority

to design services that better meet public needs, rather than relying on the commercial imperatives of private operators.

Additionally, the group stressed the importance of aligning the franchising model with environmental and sustainability objectives, such as transitioning to zero-emission fleets and reducing reliance on private car travel. They advocated for clear communication and collaboration with existing operators to ensure a smooth transition and maintain service continuity. Their response reflected confidence in franchising as the best option for creating a robust, reliable, and inclusive public transport system.

Transport UK

Transport UK notes that the NPV and BCR for the franchising option both appear superior to the NPV and BCR for the Enhanced Partnership, based upon the wider economic benefits (including non-monetised benefits) which may be achieved through franchising.

To emphasise the importance of the wider economic benefits, seen only from the perspective of bus operating income and expenditure, table 5-13 in the full assessment shows that, cumulatively, over the 25-year assessment period up to 2054, the enhanced partnership option outperforms the franchising option by £234m (or, on average, nearly £10m p.a.).

Bus passenger representatives and user groups

Cambridgeshire

Cambridgeshire Families for Sustainable Travel highlighted the economic benefits of investing in public transportation, and that a robust bus network can drive economic growth by improving access to health, education, work, and services. They supported the argument that franchising offers better value for money, citing its potential to enable a more coordinated and equitable use of resources.

Campaign for Better Transport

The Campaign for Better Transport expressed agreement with the Economic Case for franchising, saying it provides better value for money compared to Enhanced Partnerships. They highlighted that franchising enables local authorities to take greater control over service planning, ensuring resources are allocated more effectively and equitably. They viewed franchising as a more strategic approach to achieving long-term improvements in public transport and supported its potential for fostering sustainable and inclusive customer growth.

Cambridgeshire Sustainable Travel Alliance

Cambridgeshire Sustainable Travel Alliance said research consistently shows that investing in buses supports jobs and helps grow local economies, as well as providing a host of wider benefits, such as improving health and quality of life, and reducing congestion. It is therefore no surprise that the economic case shows that transforming Cambridgeshire & Peterborough's bus services is excellent value for money. Investing in either franchising or an enhanced partnership would be excellent value for money, but franchising brings greater benefits in every category considered.

Bus Users UK, The Light Rail Transit Association

Bus Users UK, in partnership with The Light Rail Transit Association unequivocally agreed with the analysis that franchising offers better value for money compared to Enhanced Partnerships. They support the franchising model as a more effective and accountable framework for improving public transport. Their agreement reflects alignment with the Combined Authority's vision for achieving strategic improvements in the bus network while ensuring efficient allocation of resources.

Wittering, Wansford, Castor & Ailsworth Bus Campaign Group

The Wittering, Wansford, Castor & Ailsworth Bus Campaign Group expressed strong support for the franchising model based on the analysis presented in the Economic Case. They noted that the Combined Authority's thorough evaluation effectively demonstrated the value of franchising in achieving better cost-effectiveness and improved service delivery compared to Enhanced Partnerships. The group focussed on franchising in terms of addressing local transportation needs, particularly in ensuring reliable and accessible bus services for their communities. Their response reflected confidence in franchising as a transformative approach to overcoming existing gaps in the bus network while providing better long-term value for public investment.

Transport Focus

Transport Focus suggested that this consultation compares theoretical models of franchising versus enhanced partnership, with neither clearly defined in terms of deliverables or operational specifics. The outcomes are heavily dependent on mayoral priorities and funding body support levels, whilst bus operators' potential partnership offerings remain undefined, making a comprehensive value-for-money assessment challenging for both options. Their analysis highlights the fundamental uncertainty surrounding both models' implementation and practical outcomes. They emphasise that the consultation's success ultimately hinges on how effectively the CPCA's proposals align with both current and prospective passenger needs and priorities. Transport Focus suggests that service specifications and performance targets that closely match public requirements will be more likely to deliver valuable services, attract new users, and successfully grow the market share for public transport in the region.

Local government (Constituent Councils in the CPCA area)

East Cambridgeshire District Council

As stated in the consultation document, the value for money measures used all point towards the same conclusion that Franchising is the highest VfM option, and that it is costlier than the other two options. But it is vitally important that the CPCA undertakes further work to fully understand the residual risks and uncertainties within the OBC before a final decision regarding franchising is taken. The Council does not believe the decision should be taken before this work has been completed and published.

Peterborough City Council

Peterborough City Council strongly supported the franchising model, identifying its potential to address systemic challenges in the local bus network. They highlighted the importance of franchising in providing greater control over service planning, enabling the Combined Authority to align services with residents' needs and regional priorities. The council viewed franchising as a means to improve service reliability, expand coverage, and reduce reliance on private car travel, all of which align with their environmental and social goals.

The council noted that the current system, which relies on private operators, often puts profitability over public benefit, leading to gaps in service coverage and inconsistent quality. They argued that franchising would allow the Combined Authority to address these issues by creating a unified, transparent framework for managing bus services by setting routes, times and ticketing.

Fenland District Council

Fenland District Council (FDC) supports the Enhanced Partnership (EP) option as the most viable solution to improve local bus services. They note that the EP offers a high Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR) of 2.38 and involves more realistic, achievable costs compared to other options, allowing for service improvements without incurring excessive risk. FDC views the EP as an opportunity to increase and improve bus services while fostering stronger working relationships between the Combined Authority, local councils, and bus operators.

South Cambridgeshire District Council

The Council notes the importance of ensuring that bus services in the future realise the significant mode shift from private car use and optimise the use of our existing and future planned infrastructure to underpin sustainable growth; the Council wants the franchising decisions to drive economic growth in new settlements but also to underpin the transport strategy and our economic growth objectives of the CPCA

Economic growth includes skills in its widest sense. The availability of public transport to get children, young people and adults to places of education and training must also be a key consideration in any new model.

Local governments (Neighbouring transport authorities)

Lincolnshire County Council

Lincolnshire County Council supports the objectives of the proposed schemes, noting they align with common goals among Local Transport Authorities (LTAs), including economic growth, green transport, safety, and improved quality of life. While endorsing the scheme's intent, the Council raises concerns about the implications of the franchising option, particularly regarding service permits and potential unintended consequences on cross-boundary and contracted routes.

The Council acknowledges the Combined Authority's (CA) plan to exempt services contracted by LCC, commercial routes primarily serving markets outside Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (C&P), and services with over 90% of their mileage in neighbouring areas. However, clarification is sought on specific conditions attached to service permits, as these could impact the viability of exempt routes. LCC requests a precise definition of "strategic bus links," particularly whether this term includes cross-boundary services.

Additionally, the Council seeks confirmation regarding the exemptions of two CallConnect services co-funded with the CA: CallConnect 4P (Stamford to Peterborough) and CallConnect 48 (Wittering to Peterborough). The former is jointly funded with the CA as the primary contributor, while the latter is entirely within the CA area but contracted by LCC.

Lincolnshire County Council values the neutral or minor impact assessment for neighbouring authorities in the policy analysis and stresses the importance of preserving existing cross-boundary links and their frequency. They seek reassurances that collaborative services will remain unaffected by the proposed franchising approach to ensure continued connectivity and viability for regional transport networks.

Suffolk County Council

Suffolk County Council expressed concerns regarding the impact of franchising on cross-border routes and local bus services. Their primary focus is on preserving existing connections, particularly town services in Haverhill and Newmarket, as these routes are crucial for residents. Suffolk County Council suggested that passengers are indifferent to administrative boundaries but hold local authorities accountable for service cuts, making it essential to maintain current routes.

Suffolk County Council also raised concerns about the resourcing challenges that franchising could introduce. Operators with longer-term franchise contracts may deprioritise shorter, less lucrative contracts within Suffolk, potentially leading to gaps in service. They highlighted the potential strain caused by limited fleet sizes and driver shortages, suggesting that cross-border cooperation is necessary to mitigate these risks.

Additionally, Suffolk stressed the importance of maintaining influence over services that overlap county borders. They aim to improve services in towns like Newmarket and Haverhill and noted that franchising should not introduce obstacles that hinder local initiatives or investments.

Other Key Stakeholders

Confederation of Passenger Transport

The Enhanced Partnership modelled in the proposal is generic and does not acknowledge the full potential of what could be achieved. We would encourage the CPCA to engage with the CP bus alliance and determine the full extent of the benefits that can be achieved through an Enhanced Partnership that goes beyond the model in the document. Examples of initiatives that have been introduced and could continue to be delivered under an alternative model to the proposed include:

Increased frequencies on key routes with high demand which has seen an average increase in patronage by 42.5%

Introduced new services in response to passengers needs

Multi operator ticketing schemes

Partnership working to ensure the continuation of marginal services.

The CPCA has a high rural to urban ratio, which poses a risk to the financial case. In big metropolitan areas such as Manchester, where the mix is more balanced between rural and urban, the higher density of residents in urban areas means there is a way to support the provision of rural services through cross subsidisation. The initial upfront cost to set up franchising as well as maintaining the scheme is higher than establishing

an Enhanced Partnership, which we believe can deliver the same benefits to passengers, in a shorter time frame and at a more affordable price.

England's Economic Heartlands

Based on the individual economic case for CPCA included in the consultation documents, franchising seems to offer better value for money than an enhanced partnership, although the case for publicly owned bus company has not been fully reflected, England's Economic Heartland (EEH) stated. EEH also noted that the economic case does include government funding to support franchising, however, there remains little current information as to the long-term nature as to funding from Department for Transport.

CPCA's commitment to deliver bus priority measures to speed up journey times and improve customer experience is fully aligned with the regional transport strategy, without this both journey reliability and passengers' numbers will remain static or reduce. Research undertaken by Cambridge Ahead on bus viability in the Greater Cambridge region concludes that unless buses are removed from congestion, the cost of maintaining provision will increase year on year at the same time as quality reduces.

It is critical that funding and future investment in the CPCA bus network such as bus priority mechanisms, is protected. This has the potential to secure significant gains with estimates suggesting that spend on targeted interventions like bus priority measures can generate at least £5 in economic benefits for every £1 of public funding spent.

Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner

The Economic Case as presented on 19 September 2024 suggested that Franchising did offer better value for money to the Combined Authority. We are satisfied that an outline of the relationship between the costs and benefits was presented. The only further comment we wish to make is that it is essential that all public sector organisations achieve VFM.

Wider Stakeholders

Academic

Cambridge

The franchise model does carry more risk for the CPCA; however, Cambridge Biomedical Campus (CBC) believes this also provides greater reward and long-term benefits for people and businesses in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and in particular CBC through the opportunity to drive substantial improvements in service quality and network coverage.

University of Cambridge

The University of Cambridge has expressed concern over the crisis in the region's public transport system, citing poor connectivity, reduced ridership, declining reliability, rising costs, and increased journey times. These challenges are harming productivity, well-being, and environmental quality, all while threatening the sustainability and economic viability of the region.

The University supports a shift away from the current system, as informal partnerships are insufficient to address the worsening issues. While an enhanced partnership model could offer incremental improvements, the University argues that true progress requires a franchised bus network that allows the region to take full control of public transport services.

Drawing from its own successful Universal service, which has achieved a 300% increase in passenger numbers over a decade through greater control, subsidised fares, and enhanced resources, the University emphasizes the need for transformational change. It sees franchising as essential to meeting regional sustainability goals and addressing the systemic failures of the current arrangement. The University thus endorses the franchising model as the most robust solution to restore and improve public transport in the region.

Inspire Education Group

Inspire Education Group questioned the practical implications of the Economic Case for franchising, noting that while it may offer better value for money in theory, its implementation poses significant challenges. They stressed the importance of addressing these challenges to ensure that the economic benefits of franchising are realized.

Charity & Voluntary sector

Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce

The Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce approached the bus reform proposals from an economic development perspective, setting the critical role of public transport in supporting regional growth and connectivity. They noted that inadequate bus services, particularly in rural areas like Fenland, limit access to education, employment, and business opportunities. The Chamber argued that improving bus services is essential for unlocking economic potential across the region.

They supported both franchising and Enhanced Partnerships as viable options but highlighted the need, for whichever model is chosen, to promote service expansion in underserved areas. The Chamber stressed the importance of connecting rural residents to urban centers and key employment hubs, which they viewed as essential for fostering social mobility and reducing inequality.

While acknowledging the potential benefits of franchising, the Chamber expressed concerns about its financial implications, particularly for businesses and taxpayers. They advocated for a cost-effective approach that ensures investments in public transport deliver measurable economic and social returns. Their response underscored the importance of collaboration between the Combined Authority, local councils, and private operators to create a sustainable and inclusive transport network that meets the needs of businesses and residents alike.

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough framed their response within a broader vision for sustainable transport and environmental stewardship. They expressed strong support for franchising, viewing it as the most effective model for addressing long-term declines in bus usage while reducing car dependency. CPRE said that franchising allows the Combined Authority to take control of the entire network, preventing sudden route cancellations and enabling better planning to meet community needs.

They also highlighted the environmental benefits of franchising, such as the potential to modernise fleets and introduce more low-emission vehicles. CPRE viewed these improvements as critical for meeting regional climate goals and fostering sustainable growth. However, they noted that these outcomes depend on significant investment in infrastructure and operational upgrades, particularly for underserved rural areas.

CPRE was critical of the limitations of Enhanced Partnerships, arguing that their reliance on voluntary agreements with operators makes them less reliable and harder to enforce. They advocated for a franchising model that integrates rural and urban services while addressing cross-boundary connectivity. CPRE's response reflected a holistic

perspective, with a reform model that balances economic efficiency with social and environmental factors to create a resilient and inclusive public transport system.

Elected Representatives

North West Cambridgeshire MP

On individual impacts, the options appear comparable, however in the round, the benefit to cost ratio of franchising is stronger.

The MP for North West Cambridgeshire finds the rationale for the Economic Case clear and convincing.

District Councillor for Huntingdon East

Any chosen option needs to reflect value for public money. Currently in my view, based on the provided documents, it's not firm whether franchising or an EP would reflect better value for money (due to upfront cost and risk) and more information would be needed)

Environment, Heritage, Amenity or Community Groups

ACORN Cambridge

In terms of the Economic Case, ACORN Cambridge supports franchising over an Enhanced Partnership, citing its superior net present value (£188m vs. £123m) and additional economic benefits. They highlight franchising's ability to improve the system, manage uncertainty, and equitably distribute benefits, making it a stronger, more strategic choice for the Combined Authority's goals.

Trumpington Residents' Association

The Trumpington Residents Group supports the conclusions of the Economic Case, saying that reducing road congestion is essential for achieving greater impacts. They highlight that improved bus reliability and shorter journey times from congestion reduction would further encourage bus usage and help mitigate the negative effects of excessive private car reliance.

Health organisations

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Cambridge University Hospitals agree with the findings of the economic case that the franchising model is best suited to provide value for money, and this is supported as the franchising model has a higher Net Present Value (NPV) and Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR), particularly under medium investment scenarios, indicating a superior return on investment for the region.

Town and Parish Councils in CPCA area

Fenstanton Parish Council

Fenstanton Parish Council highlight the reduction in bus services, going from over 50 daily direct journeys to none. They support improvements, noting that modern buses could attract car users, increase passenger numbers, and potentially reduce costs, stressing the need for change to restore connectivity and encourage sustainable travel.

Haslingfield Parish Council

Haslingfield Parish Council supports the Franchising Scheme for better coordination of bus services, favouring it over an Enhanced Partnership. They focus on service organisation to meet diverse travel needs over purely cost-efficient operations. If franchising delivers better value for money while increasing accessibility and usability for more residents, they see it as a preferable approach.

Girton Parish Council

Girton Parish Council prioritises a passenger-focused bus service over shareholder profits, advocating for reinvestment to enhance the service. They stress the importance of accommodating the growing population, especially for commuters to hubs like the Biomedical Campus, which requires reliable, 24/7 transport for both staff and visitors. Whichever model—franchising or Enhanced Partnership—is chosen, it should deliver clean, timely, and comfortable buses with efficient connections to minimise wait times.

For passengers with demanding schedules, such as workers and administrators, dependable services are critical for ensuring timely commutes. The council highlights the need for practical improvements, such as rush hour frequency, to reduce reliance on cars and meet evolving local demands. Ultimately, their preference lies in an effective

and passenger-oriented system that provides accessibility and reliability while ensuring public benefit over private gain.

Great Shelford Parish Council

"The mere introduction of Franchising will not solve the problems overnight. It will take a good deal of work from all sides plus there still remains the issue of Combined Authority controlling buses and Cambs Highways controlling the roads. There is very little about bus priority measures in the consultation."

Whaddon Parish Council

Whaddon Parish Council highlights that franchising alone will not resolve issues immediately and requires collaboration between stakeholders. They highlight a perceived disconnect between the Combined Authority controlling buses and Cambridgeshire Highways managing roads, citing the need for bus priority measures, which they say are notably absent from the consultation, to improve service efficiency.

Other Wider Stakeholders

Cambridge Ahead

Cambridge Ahead broadly supports the economic case for franchising, recognising its better value for money compared to an Enhanced Partnership. However, they raise concerns about long-term funding, particularly given the reliance on time-limited Department for Transport resources. They highlight the importance of clarity on how the Combined Authority (CPCA) has accounted for these uncertainties.

Cambridge Ahead also notes that major employment sites in Greater Cambridge have implemented private bus services to address unmet needs, such as shift-based routes. They suggest these services could complement franchised networks through collaborative efforts, ultimately building an integrated transport system.

Their research identifies the critical role of bus priority measures, identifying congestion as a major barrier to reliability, punctuality, and passenger retention. Without removing buses from traffic congestion, costs will rise while service quality deteriorates.

Cambridge Ahead calls for protected funding and investment in bus priority mechanisms, citing significant economic returns from targeted interventions.

Imperial War Museum Duxford

Imperial War Museums Duxford supported the Economic Case for franchising, supporting the comprehensive analysis that demonstrated its superior value compared to Enhanced Partnerships. They highlighted the importance of franchising in creating a structured and coordinated transport network capable of addressing connectivity gaps. The museum also stressed the potential economic benefits of franchising, particularly in improving access to cultural and tourist destinations like theirs, which rely heavily on effective public transport. They expressed confidence that franchising, if implemented strategically, could enhance regional connectivity and support economic growth while addressing broader public needs.

Summary of participant responses

For the main question for the Economic Case, there were 1,185 public responses with 2,001 comments.

The most common comment was agreement that the franchising offered better value for money (378). Participants positively supported the Combined Authority receiving more control over routes, operations and infrastructure as captured through the Economic Case (93) and that the bus service should not be run for profit (68). Others suggested they support the proposals as long as it results in a better, more reliable bus service (63). In smaller numbers, some disagreed with the approach (30) and some thought franchising would not be effective and would lead to a worse service (28).

Theme 1: Assumptions used in the Economic Case

The financial assumptions generated mixed reactions in the consultation process. A substantial group (34) highlighted potential revenue increases and cost savings, whilst others demanded greater transparency in the projections. Many participants requested more detailed financial forecasts (17), with some expressing significant doubts about value-for-money calculations (20). The fundamental economic viability of the proposal emerged as a key discussion point.

Cost-effective travel should be available for all ages and easy access for bus travel for all.

Female, 65-74

The assumption of increased ridership faced particular scrutiny, as several individuals pointed to current declining trends in bus passengers. Real-world examples featured prominently in the assessment, with frequent references (24) to franchising models in London and Greater Manchester. These comparative analyses provided crucial context for evaluating the proposed economic framework.

The experience of London and now Manchester shows the undoubted benefits of franchising. An enhanced partnership might lead to some improvements but at some cost to the local community without clear overall benefits.

Male, 85+

The economic forecasts gained more backing from those who recognised broader community benefits (22) and opportunities for increased transport usage (28). Long-term economic sustainability featured prominently in these discussions, with particular focus on the potential for system-wide efficiency improvements. However, a significant portion of the feedback still questioned the fundamental economic premises, particularly regarding service sustainability in less profitable areas. The balance between commercial viability and social benefit emerged as a recurring theme, with many highlighting the need for robust economic modelling.

It's a community service more than a business

Male, 35-44

Theme 2: Risks and Uncertainties in the Economic Case

The examination of risks and uncertainties revealed a range of concerns, with operational challenges commanding the most attention. Workforce shortages (2) emerged as a tangible issue, whilst organisational economic vulnerabilities were an area of focus. Contributors identified specific risk areas, including the Combined Authority's exposure to industry pay disputes (1) and general liabilities (1). These operational risks highlighted the need for comprehensive contingency planning. Even though these comments are few in number, they warrant a response as these are querying the foundational basis of the Proposed Franchise model and so are being answered by the Consultation Response Report.

The main risks for the CPCA in franchising are capacity building - can you get a good skilled workforce in place (will it migrate from private companies when they no longer do the route planning etc?)

Female, 75-84

Market disruption concerns also surfaced, particularly regarding technological advancement such as Connected Autonomous Vehicle (CAV) uptake (1). The Combined Authority's risk burden was commented on (9), with questions about organisational capacity to manage these challenges (12). The interplay between different risk factors emerged as a crucial consideration in the overall risk assessment.

The future of rural services emerged as a critical issue (19), highlighting tensions between commercial viability and essential service provision of a wider bus network. Financial risk management drew intense scrutiny, with calls for robust contingency plans and clear accountability frameworks. The need for dynamic risk management strategies received particular attention, especially regarding the ability to respond to changing market conditions and evolving service requirements. The complexity of managing multiple risk factors simultaneously emerged as a key theme in the analysis.

Any economic model that is more efficient in my view can only go to help service users - I am tired of models in which users pay higher tickets prices to compensate for the financial mismanagement of essential services. I hope that Franchising could be an answer to this - at least at some level the bus operators can be held to account by the CA and the CA can in turn be held to account by the local electorate.

Female, 18-24

Theme 3: Fares and Ticketing

From the consultation feedback, maintaining affordable fares was the main issue (24). Participants were also interested in the possibility of reduced fares and discount offers (11); though this optimism was tempered by concerns from others over potential price increases (12).

Fully agree. The VFM will depend above all on whether the new system offers such a greatly improved, affordable service that large numbers of people switch from car to bus. Franchising requires more investment, but it enables that investment to be much more effective in delivering this step change.

Male, 65-74

Many highlighted positively innovative payment solutions, such as the £1 tiger pass concept (25). The relationship between fare structures and service accessibility emerged as a crucial consideration.

I use the tiger pass, but it would be nice if we were able to top up the card and pay a pound directly from that

Female, 18-24

Cross-subsidisation approaches were welcomed (13) as a mechanism for maintaining service affordability across the network. The integration of payment systems across services emerged as an important issue for the public (6), with some viewing this as essential for improving the travel experience. The technical aspects of implementing integrated ticketing systems generated some discussion.

Council tax implications featured prominently in discussions (19), with contributors interested in how fare structures would be balanced against broader funding considerations. The input suggests support for a comprehensive approach to fare management that ensures accessibility whilst maintaining financial viability. The interconnection between fare policies and broader social objectives received particular attention, with the twin aims of promoting fair access to transport services while ensuring system sustainability.

Theme 4: Other Impacts on Operators, Passengers and the Combined Authority

Service quality, a running theme throughout the consultation feedback, emerged as a crucial concern, with numerous individuals (63) underlining the necessity for improved reliability. The feedback demonstrates a clear focus on community interests, with many contributors (53) asserting that passenger requirements should take priority over business considerations.

When fares were set at £2, I saw an increase in passenger numbers. This was not sustained due to unreliability. If buses are regular, reliable & affordable people will use them instead of their car

Female, 55-64

My feeling is that franchising would give better reliability

Female, 75-84

Market dynamics was another key feature of public and stakeholder discussion with varied perspectives. While some advocated for increased market competition (12), others expressed concerns about monopolistic tendencies (11). Performance monitoring featured prominently, with calls for strict oversight (11).

I do think more competition is needed from other operators.

Female, 65-74

Environmental considerations factored significantly (25), with many linking service improvements to broader sustainability goals. Working conditions also emerged as a key point, with several contributions (5) highlighting the importance of maintaining appropriate employment standards for drivers and other personnel.

It is worth paying more for a better and greener service that is run as a service and not purely for profit.

Female, 65-74

Chapter 7: The Commercial Case

Introduction

This section covers questions on the Commercial Case. The Commercial Case sets out the commercial proposition of the Franchising and Enhanced Partnership options. The Combined Authority has established six commercial objectives for this Assessment:

- Public sector influence – the Combined Authority wishes to ensure that its investment will support its intended outcomes and ambitions. This will be achieved through a delivery model that provides sufficient influence over bus network outcomes to achieve desired policy objectives and user benefits.
- Best value – The delivery option should be able to demonstrate how it can achieve the best combination of cost and quality in delivering the desired bus network, and which will in turn contribute to passenger affordability.
- Competition between bus operators – The delivery option should be commercially viable for operators and encourage competition on a 'level playing field' basis between operators. The model should enable the participation of small and medium operators, as well as new entrants.
- Appropriate risk allocation – The delivery option should allocate risks to the public and private sectors in accordance with their capability of managing them. Risk allocation will be across several areas, including fare revenue risk, operating cost risk, service standards and asset provision.
- Ease of implementation – The delivery option must be practical to implement and sustainable over time.
- Recovery and flexibility

There is one shared question on the Commercial Case included in both the short form and long form questionnaire which focusses on the commercial objectives – a total of 1,040 participants responded to this question. Seventeen key stakeholders, forty-six wider stakeholders and 977 members of the public. Though this question is shared, the way it was answered by participants in the short and long questionnaires was quite different. To give the best account of feedback from both, two separate comment code frames have been developed for just this question.

Q. The Commercial Case says that the Combined Authority would be better able to meet its commercial objectives (success factors) through Franchising compared to an Enhanced Partnership. Do you have any comments on this?¹²

Table 7.1: The table below summarises the participants who provided a response to this question:

	Number of participants who made favourable comments	Number of participants who made unfavourable comments
All who provide a response	1,040	
Key Stakeholders	8	2
Wider Stakeholders	26	4
Members of the public	359	89

The Commercial Case has the most additional questions of any of the 5 Case Model elements. Consequently, the themes section focusses on the long form participant responses rather than having an additional questions section which is common to the other Case chapters.

¹² See Section 6 (paragraphs 6.24 – 6.33) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

See Section 7 (paragraph 7.146) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

Summary of stakeholder responses

This section covers the responses to the Commercial Case questions from organisations. It starts with a summary of responses received from the key stakeholders before summarising the wider stakeholder response.

Key Stakeholders

Bus Operators

Whippet

Whippet strongly supports the franchising approach, emphasising the need for a whole-network strategy that considers interactions with neighboring counties. They recommend multiple contract model for the CPCA area, supporting SME engagement and suggesting that revenues from urban franchises could cross-subsidise rural operations. Regarding contract duration, Whippet endorses the proposed 7-8 year terms, citing their successful Universal contract with the University of Cambridge as an example of how longer contracts enable significant investments in infrastructure and electric vehicles. They strongly support the Combined Authority's approach to depot provision, viewing it as essential for increasing market competition and driving up quality. However, they caution that franchise bidding processes must be carefully designed to avoid being overly onerous for SMEs, noting that some operators spent over £1m on bids in other regions. Whippet also focus on the importance of staff management during transition, suggesting a coordinated recruitment approach and highlighting potential TUPE complications when operators run both franchised and commercial services.

Stagecoach

Stagecoach support objectives of the Commerical Case. They agree that the six commercial objectives are a sensible basis for comparison but argue that passenger satisfaction and sustainable growth should also be key considerations.

Stagecoach said that any successful model—franchising or EP—ought to cover school services within the Combined Authority area. They highlighted that integrating school services into existing depots could reduce costs through operational synergies. However, they raised concerns about the management of cross-boundary routes and the impact on neighbouring areas such as Suffolk, Bedford, and Lincolnshire. They would like clarity on how routes will be allocated as included or excluded from the scope of the future service model.

On timescales, Stagecoach questioned the clarity in the proposed franchising timeline. They suggested that separating procurement stages could enhance bid quality and allow lessons learned from earlier stages to inform subsequent ones. They also noted that a longer mobilisation period might address issues like vehicle procurement and depot upgrades but warned of potential downsides, such as increased costs and risks of staff turnover.

Stagecoach highlighted the greater costs and risks associated with franchising, including the burden on operators to fund zero-emission vehicles over shorter contract terms. They argued that longer contracts would incentivise investment, particularly in greener technologies, but raised concerns about the lack of detail regarding cost-sharing for depot infrastructure and vehicle procurement.

Stagecoach advocated for an Enhanced Partnership Plus, citing its ability to deliver improvements faster and at lower cost. This said, Stagecoach provided little detail or comparison about what an Enhanced Partnership Plus would consist of or what commercial and legal duties would be, in comparison to the EP tested in the Outline Business Case. They give examples of successful EP initiatives, such as £1 fares for under-25s, increased frequencies, and multi-operator ticketing schemes. They argued that EP models can address key challenges, such as congestion and rural transport, without the extensive overhead of franchising.

While Stagecoach acknowledged that franchising offers greater control, they warned it could lead to higher costs, and delay implementation. They urged the Combined Authority to focus on bus priority measures and collaboration with operators to achieve rapid and meaningful improvements. Their experience with other EPs, such as in Lincolnshire and Norfolk, they suggest demonstrates the potential for transformative change without resorting to full franchising.

Stephensons

Stephensons provides detailed feedback on the commercial aspects of franchising, focusing particularly on contract management and operational considerations. They emphasise the importance of maintaining cross-boundary services and express concerns about the potential impact of franchising on interconnected routes. The company raises specific points about the proposed procurement approach, suggesting that the packaging of services needs careful consideration to ensure both operational efficiency and commercial viability. They highlight concerns about the financial implications of the transition period and stress the need for clear mechanisms to manage service quality and performance monitoring. Stephensons advocates for a balanced approach that considers both urban and rural service requirements, emphasising the need for flexibility in contract arrangements to accommodate different operating environments.

Delaine Buses

Delaine Buses emphasise that the Combined Authority covers a diverse area where a single approach may not suit all regions.

They express concerns about franchising's impact on small and medium-sized operators, noting how larger companies might acquire successful bidders, citing recent trends in coach business acquisitions. They highlight potential staffing challenges, suggesting that corporate practices might lead to staff departures, particularly given existing driver retention difficulties post-COVID.

They again express disappointment at the lack of meaningful discussion about an Enhanced Partnership approach, which they argue could achieve similar objectives more quickly. They challenge the emphasis on Combined Authority control, pointing out that key operational issues like punctuality often relate to highway conditions under local authority management. They argue that operators have been denied the opportunity to assess or propose alternatives that could meet the Authority's objectives whilst keeping financial risk away from the public sector.

First Bus

First Bus addresses the commercial aspects of franchising with a focus on operational efficiency and service delivery with clear performance metrics and accountability measures within the franchising framework. They support the proposed approach to depot management and vehicle specifications, while highlighting the need for careful consideration of cross-boundary services. First Bus stresses the importance of maintaining service quality during the transition period and advocates for clear communication channels between operators and the Combined Authority to ensure effective implementation of the franchising scheme.

Ron W Dew

Ron W Dew say there is no objective to review passenger growth and customer satisfaction. Ron W Dew want to see fair and thorough procurement processes, advocating for a minimum three-month bidding period to develop well-informed proposals. They express concerns about the significant impact on SMEs during the transition, particularly regarding vehicle and driver preparation, training, and branding costs. The company raises questions about depot facilities, seeking clarity on management, health and safety, and cost allocation. They stress the need for clear communication regarding TUPE arrangements and staff retention strategies, noting their successful trainee scheme and long-term team members. Regarding risk sharing, Dew suggests that the Combined Authority currently lacks internal expertise for franchising

and recommends considering Enhanced Partnership as a viable alternative. They highlight their success in network expansion and collaboration, particularly with the AW1 service development, suggesting that Enhanced Partnership could deliver desired outcomes faster and with less risk than franchising.

The Go-Ahead Group

The Go-Ahead Group provides comprehensive feedback on the commercial framework, emphasizing the need for balanced risk allocation and clear performance metrics. They support the proposed contract durations, noting that 7-8 year terms provide sufficient stability for investment while maintaining competitive tension. On depot management, they advocate for a flexible approach that allows operators to either use Authority-provided facilities or maintain their own where economically beneficial. The Group support careful staff transition planning, suggesting detailed TUPE arrangements be established early in the process. They support the proposed approach to vehicle specifications but recommend building in flexibility to accommodate technological advances over contract periods. The Go-Ahead Group value robust performance monitoring systems and suggests that the Combined Authority ensure adequate resources for contract management. They express support for the packaging approach but caution against over-fragmentation of the network. Regarding cross-boundary services, they recommend early engagement with neighboring authorities to ensure seamless integration. The Group also suggests incorporating incentive mechanisms within contracts to drive innovation and service improvements, while maintaining clear minimum standards for service quality and reliability.

Transdev

Transdev's commercial response focuses on the practical aspects of implementing franchising. They support the proposed contract durations and depot arrangements, while emphasizing the need for clear performance standards and monitoring frameworks. The company highlights the importance of maintaining service quality during transition periods and suggests that the Combined Authority's approach to risk allocation between operators and authority appears balanced. Transdev, like others, value careful consideration of staff transfer arrangements and suggests that the procurement process should be designed to encourage innovation while maintaining service stability. They support the Combined Authority's proposed approach to contract packaging but recommend ensuring sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing market conditions.

Transport UK

Although Transport UK has concerns about the ability of the CA to deliver adequate competition for franchises unless it addresses its proposed vehicle strategy (which puts bidders at risk of stranded assets at the end of a franchise); its vehicle acquisition strategy (which appears to rule out operators leasing vehicles co-terminus with franchise expiry dates) and the relatively small size of a 60-bus franchise, if these issues were addressed then Transport UK agrees that Franchising has a better prospect than an Enhanced Partnership of allowing the CA to meet its commercial objectives.

Community Transport Association

For the benefit of community transport providers, it is important to consider within contracting, a social value element. Community transports generally, offer immense social value to the communities they serve. They do this by supporting those with access needs, providing services to underserved communities, and assisting their local health services. When calculating social value, community transports specific benefits should be considered.

Research by Social Value Portal shows that taking into consideration social value, has led to a 20% value add relative to contract value. Councils across the UK consider social value when contracting, with councils generally applying 10% - 30% social value weighting.

Commonly social value is created by companies through a mix of actions such as providing apprenticeships or hiring unrepresented groups. We would suggest that for the benefit of community transport, social value explicitly encourages donation or cooperation with community transport. For example, a large provider could grant a community transport use of their depots, contribute to a community transport fund or donate older vehicles to the CTs.

We support the introduction of a range of lot sizes ranging from 1 to 60 buses as it allows community transport operators to engage. We also appreciate the limits on smaller contracts being given to larger providers, as it insures a protected market for smaller bus operators and community transport.

Community transport could also benefit from there being dedicated support to aid them with bidding, particularly those new to contracting. Community transport providers also have a significant challenge with their capacity to deal with administrative tasks. A low administrative burden will allow more community transport operators to engage with the franchising scheme.

Bus passenger representatives and user groups

Cambridgeshire

Cambridgeshire Families for Sustainable Travel strongly endorses the commercial case for franchising, highlighting its potential to address current service inadequacies affecting families and students. They see franchising enabling better coordination of services and more family-friendly scheduling. They also suggest that EP is a considerable risk in the long term because of the renegotiation of contracts. The organisation particularly focuses on the need for integrated ticketing and fare structures that better serve family groups. They stress that the current commercial model fails to meet the needs of families with young children, especially regarding service reliability and accessibility. The group supports the Combined Authority taking greater control through franchising, suggesting this would lead to more responsive service planning and better integration of school transport needs. They say that franchising would allow for more effective cross-subsidization of routes, ensuring better coverage for areas currently underserved by commercial operations. The organisation also highlights the importance of maintaining affordable fares for families while improving service quality and reliability.

Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport supports the commercial case for franchising, emphasising its potential to address systemic issues in the current deregulated system. They highlight that franchising would enable more effective network planning and resource allocation, particularly in addressing service gaps in rural areas. The organisation states that the current commercial model has created a fragmented network that prioritises profitability over comprehensive service provision. The Campaign stresses that franchising would allow for more effective cross-subsidization of routes and better integration of services across the region. They support the Combined Authority taking on greater control through franchising, suggesting this would enable more strategic planning and better alignment with broader community needs.

Cambridgeshire Sustainable Travel Alliance

Cambridge Sustainable Transport Alliance presents a perspective favouring bus franchising over an enhanced partnership for managing the local bus network. They argue that franchising would empower the Combined Authority with greater control, enabling it to foster competition among operators and thus, optimize the allocation of bus funding for the long-term benefit of local communities. While acknowledging that franchising introduces a higher commercial risk to the Combined Authority compared to an enhanced partnership, they note that the proposed 'Jersey-style' franchising model,

designed to balance risk and reward, would mitigate these concerns. This model aims to encourage bus companies to deliver high-quality services that attract and satisfy passengers, thereby aligning operator incentives with community needs.

Bus Users UK The Light Rail Transit Association

The Bus Users UK Association stated that they agreed with the Commercial Case proposals.

Wittering, Wansford, Castor & Ailsworth Bus Campaign Group

The Bus Campaign Group expresses cautious support for franchising while emphasising the need to protect and enhance existing services. Their primary commercial concern focuses on the potential impact of franchising on less profitable routes, highlighting the importance of maintaining and improving current service levels rather than allowing reductions based purely on commercial considerations. The Group stresses that the franchise model must prioritise service preservation and enhancement over purely financial metrics. Their response reflects a clear priority for maintaining comprehensive coverage while seeking improvements, suggesting that franchising's success should be measured by its ability to protect and enhance existing services rather than focusing solely on commercial performance.

Transport Focus

Transport Focus note that the assessment states that the Franchising model offers the Combined Authority advantages over an Enhanced Partnership. They also note that franchising will give the Combined Authority more control over the design and implementation of the bus network, ensuring that benefits from investment and enhancement target those who are likely to gain most. Whichever option is chosen Transport Focus would be interested to understand how CPCA plans to minimise any disruption to bus users whilst negotiations and changes to the network are being carried out. How would users be informed of any potential changes, and would they have the opportunity to be consulted on specific changes to routes and pricing?

Transport Focus note that rather than controlling and managing all aspects and assuming all risks, the Combined Authority will look to share responsibilities and risks with operators, working collaboratively to define and design provision and incentivising operators to increase usage and benefit from increasing revenue. This appears to be pragmatic, although presumably it will result in less control than would be the case if the model of franchising pursued by the other combined authorities had been adopted. We note that, under the proposal, operators would continue to be responsible for the

provision of buses and depots, with the Combined Authority providing some additional depot capacity. We hope that such an approach will encourage competition, will not present a barrier to entry for new market entrants and will thus present a challenge to the current market dominance of Stagecoach East.

Local government (Constituent Councils in the CPCA area)

East Cambridgeshire District Council

East Cambridgeshire District Council addresses commercial aspects with a focus on rural service provision and contract structuring. They would like to see contract packages that specifically address rural connectivity challenges, suggesting that franchise specifications include minimum service levels for less commercially viable routes. The Council recommends incorporating incentive mechanisms to encourage operators to invest in rural services and maintain high service standards across all areas. They support the proposed contract durations. The Council particularly stresses the need for clear performance metrics that consider the unique challenges of rural operations, suggesting that contract monitoring frameworks be tailored to different operating environments. They advocate for careful consideration of depot facilities to ensure efficient rural service delivery and recommend incorporating specific provisions for cross-subsidy from more profitable routes to support rural services.

There is no mention of any funding or financial risk in this assessment. There are huge risks to how the CPCA could manage the bus network around funding, resources and operators willing to bid and at a competitive price. Under franchising the risk will sit solely with the CPCA and options for the CPCA to raise additional funding are severely limited. The Council is concerned that additional funding requirements would fall on taxpayers through increases to the Mayoral precept. More work is required to understand the funding risks and requirements in the context of the CPCA's overall budget envelope and this information should be clearly presented to the public for consultation and feedback before a decision is taken.

The Council agrees with this assessment. Whilst an Enhanced Partnership would facilitate improvements, it falls short of being able to fully coordinate and manage the network. Operators are still free to introduce, amend and withdraw services, albeit within a framework of coordinated service change dates and potentially longer notice periods.

Peterborough City Council

Peterborough City Council provides detailed feedback on the commercial framework's ability to deliver improved services. They highlight the importance of contract specifications that support service reliability and frequency improvements. The Council supports the proposed approach to contract packaging but recommends ensuring sufficient flexibility to adapt to Peterborough's specific needs and to engage SMEs. Like others, the Council desires clear performance monitoring frameworks and suggests incorporating specific incentives for service improvements. Regarding depot arrangements, they recommend considering existing infrastructure and potential development opportunities within Peterborough. They support the proposed contract durations but recommend building in review mechanisms to ensure services remain aligned with the city's growth and development plans.

Fenland District Council

Fenland District Council (FDC) acknowledges the use of six objectives in the commercial case to evaluate the merits of franchising versus an enhanced partnership (EP). These objectives include public sector influence, best value, competition among bus operators, appropriate risk allocation, ease of implementation and recovery, and flexibility. FDC supports using these objectives to examine the financial implications of both options. However, they express disappointment over the lack of direct comparative data—such as tables, charts, or detailed commentary—in the report, which they believe hampers a clear and easy assessment of the options side by side.

Additionally, FDC highlights the ongoing importance of community transport within Fenland, particularly in its rural areas where it constitutes a significant part of the public transport network due to the absence of other provisions. The council points out the need for community transport services like dial-a-ride and car schemes, which are crucial given the growing demand. In this context, FDC advocates for a careful consideration of how the proposed bus reform scheme would interact with community transport. They argue that understanding this relationship is essential for developing a comprehensive and effective public transport network that meets the service levels needed in the area.

Cambridge City Council

Cambridge City Council is particularly keen to see a rapid transition of the bus fleet to low or zero carbon vehicles and understands that franchising is likely to offer the most rapid and certain route to that outcome, reducing pollution and contributing to climate change mitigation.

As identified in section 7.99 of the consultation document, it will be key that emission limits are integrated into the service specifications set out by the combined authority as part of the franchise contracts. This will enable the transition towards zero emission buses by 2030.

Cambridgeshire County Council

The County Council supports bus reform for Cambridgeshire to give greater control and influence over the shape and stability of the network, and the ability to ensure service connections and integrated fares and ticketing. A key focus for the County is the wider commercial elements.

The Council would like to highlight the following points:

- Initial consultation on the operation of the franchising scheme is expected within 24 months. The Council would like to be consulted as part of this process and to be fully engaged as part of the development of any further, more detailed proposals.
- The Council secures Section 106 contributions towards bus services from developers as part of planning agreements, where this is required to mitigate the impact of a new development. The Council would like clarity on how these arrangements would work under franchising.
- The Council recommends that the CPCA ensures it secures access to the required level of resource and expertise to complete the contractual requirements of franchising in a timely manner.
- The Council would like to understand the processes that would be in place for reviewing, monitoring and quality control of services that would operate under any proposed franchising arrangements.
- The consultation acknowledges that an enhanced bus network with greater connectivity and availability could be achieved under either an Enhanced Partnership or Franchising. We look forward to a preferred model being developed by the Combined Authority which will detail how the existing and future Busway / Park and Ride services and facilities are included in or integrated with a franchised network.
- Net zero and air quality - The Council strongly supports high environmental standards of buses, including support for electric vehicles, alternative fuels (where appropriate) and the move to a zero-emission fleet. The consultation states that it is likely that the provision of such vehicles will be included in the contract specifications. The Council believes this is of upmost importance to meet its net zero carbon target by 2045 as well as local air quality targets.
- Specification of buses – the Council agrees that high quality, modern vehicles should be specified. This should include the following on-bus equipment:
 - > CCTV (internal and external facing)
 - > Automatic vehicle location and the ability to supply the necessary feeds for real time information displays
 - > A form of direct communication with the driver
 - > On-bus audio-visual announcements
 - > USB charging points at all seats

- > Driver and vehicle monitoring equipment (to encourage good driving standards)
- Ticketing – the Council strongly supports the introduction of a multi-operator ticketing system as well as contactless payments across the bus network. This should include Busway and Park and Ride in any franchise or other model.
- Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) public transport schemes – the Council would like clarification on how franchising would impact on future GCP schemes such as Cambourne to Cambridge, and Waterbeach to Cambridge and would welcome a discussion at the appropriate time.
- Shared Transport / Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) / Community Transport – The Council would support the expansion of shared transport as part of the introduction of Franchising, including the investigation of taxi schemes and DRT.
- Young person’s bus passes (Tiger pass) -- the Council supports the continuation of the young person’s bus pass under the Franchising system.
- Rural bus services – The Council strongly believes that the introduction of franchising should be used as an opportunity to dramatically improve rural bus services in terms of geographical coverage, days of operation, frequency and timings of services.
- Bus stops/infrastructure – The Council supports the widespread improvement of bus stops across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, with the provision of covered seating/waiting areas, lighting, raised kerbs and real time information. The provision of £10m for bus infrastructure is welcomed. Consideration should also be given to future maintenance liability and how this is funded.
- The consultation document says the CPCA will provide two bus depots in Cambridge and one in Peterborough (in addition to those depots owned and/or used by bus operators). The Council looks forward to receiving more information on potential locations, highway and transport impacts, noise pollution and planning issues when available. The Council understands that these depots are to be delivered by the public sector and not by potential franchisees. Further discussion about how these are to be delivered would be welcomed at the appropriate time.

Local governments (Neighbouring transport authorities)

Lincolnshire County Council

Lincolnshire County Council's commercial response focuses primarily on cross-boundary implications and service integration. They say there is a need for clear arrangements regarding service permits and express concerns about potential impacts on existing cross-boundary routes. The Council specifically highlights two CallConnect services co-funded with the Combined Authority, seeking clarification on their treatment under the new framework. They recommend developing specific provisions within franchise contracts to protect and enhance cross-boundary services, suggesting mechanisms for coordination with neighboring authorities. The Council highlights the importance of maintaining existing service levels and frequencies on cross-boundary routes during and after the transition to franchising. They advocate for clear communication channels between authorities and operators to manage cross-boundary operations effectively and suggest establishing formal protocols for service changes affecting multiple jurisdictions.

Suffolk County Council

Suffolk County Council's commercial response centres on cross-boundary considerations and the potential impact on regional service integration. Their primary concern focuses on preserving existing cross-border routes, particularly town services in Haverhill and Newmarket. The Council expresses specific concerns about operator behavior if long-term franchise contracts in Cambridgeshire reduce willingness to maintain smaller-margin operations in Suffolk or bid for shorter-duration contracts. They say there is a need for careful coordination of service permits and contract specifications to maintain seamless cross-boundary operations. The Council advocates for mechanisms within the commercial framework to protect regional connectivity and suggests establishing clear protocols for managing service changes affecting multiple authorities. They recommend incorporating specific provisions in franchise contracts to ensure continued operation of cross-boundary services and maintain service quality standards across administrative boundaries.

Other Key Stakeholders

Confederation of Passenger Transport

The Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) has offered detailed feedback on the proposed franchising scheme covering the entire Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Combined Authority (CPCA) area. They support the six commercial objectives used to evaluate franchising versus an enhanced partnership but suggest adding an objective focused on passenger growth and satisfaction. They stress the need for consistency in the services included under the franchising model, advocating for the inclusion of all regular bus services within the CPCA, except those like tour buses. They also suggest extending the coverage to school services not currently considered, which would enhance flexibility and potential cost savings.

Regarding the draft franchising scheme, CPT recommends that the CPCA provide further clarity on how routes will be included or exempted and the rationale behind these decisions. They express concerns about the proposed franchise contract durations of 7 or 8 years, suggesting that longer contracts could better support investment in new buses, particularly zero-emission vehicles, due to their longer depreciation periods.

CPT agrees that dividing services into contract lots is a practical approach for procuring contracts, which could foster competition. However, they call for measures to ensure that small and medium-sized operators have access to these opportunities, advocating for a review of the potential impact on the SME market to maintain their participation in a sustainable and efficient bus network. They also highlight the need for careful planning in the procurement of bus depots and suggest that operators remain responsible for their fleets and on-board equipment, requiring clear specifications from the CPCA.

England's Economic Heartlands

The regional transport strategy advocates for sustainable and inclusive growth which supports high quality of life across the region. Therefore, we would encourage the use of success factors that are realistic and focus primarily on user experience, which is the foundation for increasing patronage in line with the CPCA's wider commercial objectives outlined in the consultation. Success factors should be regularly reviewed with consideration of any unintended consequences they may have on user experience.

Wider Stakeholders

Academic

Cambridge Biomedical Campus

Cambridge Biomedical Campus supports the findings of the commercial case, endorsing the view that franchising provides a better opportunity than an enhanced partnership for achieving the commercial objectives of the bus network. This preference is based on the increased control the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) would have over bus routes, ticketing, and service standards under a franchising model. However, they stress the importance of the CPCA engaging with stakeholders to ensure that both their needs and the council's transport policy goals are met.

While recognizing that franchising entails more risk compared to the existing or enhanced partnership models, Cambridge Biomedical Campus believes that the franchising approach will position the CPCA to deliver more consistent and reliable service outcomes. This, they note, is contingent on the allocation of appropriate funding and resources. Thus, their endorsement of franchising comes with a call for careful implementation and stakeholder engagement to truly harness the model's potential benefits.

University of Cambridge

Cambridge University acknowledges that while franchising entails significant operational changes and demands increased resources and risk management, it positions the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) to deliver more consistent and reliable service outcomes that align with community needs. The university supports the franchising model because it provides the CPCA with direct control over bus routes, fares, and service standards. This control, they believe, enhances the CPCA's ability to fulfill its public transport goals as outlined in the Bus Strategy and the broader Shared Ambition 2050, which was released earlier this year. Thus, despite the greater initial challenges, Cambridge University views franchising as a valuable approach to meeting long-term public transport objectives.

Inspire Education Group

Inspire raises concerns about the practicality of the franchising agreement, questioning its potential to enhance the CPCA's commercial objectives, particularly through increased competition from smaller providers. They argue that the current market conditions, including a limited workforce and high demand for HGV drivers, may undermine this assumption. Smaller providers could face challenges related to

economies of scale, staffing, and decarbonization, affecting their ability to compete effectively.

In addition, Inspire observes that the franchising model appears to focus on rural coverage and market control rather than financial efficiency. While addressing specific community needs, this approach could lead to financial strain from supporting unprofitable routes. They also caution against the environmental impact of using less efficient vehicles on sparsely populated routes, suggesting that sustainability should be a key consideration. Inspire calls for a thorough evaluation of the long-term environmental effects of transport decisions to align with broader sustainability objectives.

Charity & Voluntary sector

Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce

Cambridge Chambers of Commerce consider a franchising approach will require resources and carry risks for the CPCA, as noted in the consultation. To ensure success, proper resource allocation by the CPCA is essential. It would be beneficial to collaborate with partners to create a flourishing transport network.

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough focus their commercial response on environmental and sustainability considerations within the franchising framework. They underline the need for contract specifications that prioritise environmental performance and suggest incorporating specific requirements for low-emission vehicles. The organisation recommends including environmental performance metrics in contract monitoring frameworks and advocates for incentive mechanisms to encourage operators to exceed minimum environmental standards. They support longer contract durations to enable operator investment in green technologies but suggest building in requirements for periodic fleet upgrades. CPRE particularly wants to see that rural services are integrated effectively, recommending specific provisions within the commercial framework to ensure comprehensive coverage while minimizing environmental impact. They also suggest incorporating requirements for operators to report on environmental performance and carbon reduction achievements.

Elected Representatives

North West Cambridgeshire MP

The MP wholeheartedly supports the Commercial Case and raises several points regarding the proposed franchising agreement. They express concern about cross-border services, particularly those to Stamford, and the potential for boundary effects to disrupt continuity. Effective management is needed to avoid undermining the objectives of bus reform. The MP also highlights worries about Peterborough being included in a second wave of procurement, cautioning against delays in franchised services compared to Cambridge.

While generally supportive of the approach, the MP underscores the importance of capacity planning to avoid challenges when service contracts require simultaneous re-tendering. They support mechanisms for continual improvement, suggesting small-scale adjustments informed by community feedback and local politicians' input. Ensuring minor beneficial changes are not hindered by bureaucratic barriers is a key concern.

The MP finds the financial and risk management approach reasonable and agrees it safeguards public money. They support the benefits of public sector influence and best value, noting strong resident backing for franchising over Enhanced Partnerships (EPs). The MP criticizes EPs for their reliance on negotiation, a perceived weakness that could leave residents in the same position as under current deregulated arrangements. They affirm franchising as the stronger option to meet CPCA's objectives.

Huntingdon MP

The MP raises key concerns regarding the Commercial Case, highlighting the CPCA's commitment to reducing road mileage by 15% as unachievable without substantial public transport improvements, especially in rural areas. They stress the need for adequate service upgrades to support decarbonisation goals, particularly given the lack of active travel routes in the constituency, aside from The Busway.

The MP with respect to future consultation, notes that scheduling events in Huntingdon on a Tuesday excluded many residents reliant on public transport, undermining the inclusivity and validity of the process. They call for better consideration of accessibility in future consultations.

Concerns are also raised about the implementation timeline for franchising, stressing the need for clear milestones to reduce the risk of service disruption during the transition. A transparent, publicly available timeline is requested to help communities prepare for changes.

Additionally, the MP highlights the lack of contingency planning within the franchising model. They urge the CPCA to establish robust frameworks to address potential service shortfalls or financial pressures if franchising does not deliver its intended outcomes. These measures are seen as critical for ensuring the long-term success and resilience of the proposed system.

Councillor for Huntingdon East

While franchising may provide more flexibility and control for the CPCA, there needs to be a firm commitment that areas such as Huntingdon will see improvements and that control will be used to deliver this. An EP does also seem like a viable way to achieve most, if not all, of the CPCA's objectives.

Environment, Heritage, Amenity or Community Groups

ACORN Cambridge

ACORN Cambridge strongly supports franchising from a commercial perspective, arguing that it provides better certainty for achieving necessary improvements compared to an Enhanced Partnership. The current profit-driven operator model creates significant risks in achieving commercial objectives, with concerns about operators' ability to introduce, amend, and withdraw services at will. The organization highlights that the negotiation requirements under an EP would introduce unnecessary uncertainty and delay. ACORN stress the importance of removing profit-driven decision-making from service planning, suggesting that franchising would allow for more community-focused commercial objectives. They advocate for mechanisms to enforce service standards and recommend including strong conditions for bus drivers in franchising contracts.

Carbon Neutral Cambridge

Carbon Neutral Cambridge strongly supports the commercial case for franchising, emphasizing its crucial role in achieving decarbonization goals. The organisation highlights that franchising would provide better tools for implementing environmental standards and coordinating service improvements. They particularly focus on the need for integrated planning that considers environmental impacts alongside commercial viability. The group says that the current commercial model makes it difficult to implement comprehensive environmental improvements across the network. They stress that franchising would enable better alignment of commercial objectives with environmental goals, allowing for more effective implementation of green technologies

and sustainable practices. Carbon Neutral Cambridge supports the Combined Authority taking greater control through franchising, suggesting this would enable more strategic planning and better integration of environmental considerations into service delivery.

Trumpington Residents' Association

Trumpington Residents' Association (TRA) agrees with the Commercial Case conclusion, viewing the greater degree of change offered by franchising as a strength rather than a drawback compared to the Enhanced Partnership (EP) model. They argue that the EP approach retains the structural flaws of the current system, which has resulted in declining bus usage, reduced networks, and greater public expenditure without addressing the excessive reliance on private cars. TRA highlights the need for public control and accountability to drive meaningful improvements in bus services, which the EP model fails to provide, leaving operators in control and relying on courts for enforcement—a costly and inappropriate mechanism.

TRA supports the Combined Authority's six commercial objectives, particularly promoting competition on a fair basis and enabling participation by small and medium-sized operators. They point to monopolistic tendencies in parts of the current market, underscoring the importance of fostering competition. The Commercial Case's assumption that public sector influence and operator competition will ensure service provision for all routes, including less profitable ones, is noted as essential to addressing the needs of remote and underserved areas.

However, TRA raises concerns about the lack of a contingency plan should operators not bid for certain routes, especially those with low passenger numbers. They urge the Combined Authority to consider scenarios where financial incentives may not suffice and to develop robust contingency measures to ensure essential services are maintained. This planning would safeguard public interest and ensure access to affordable transport for all, particularly in remote areas.

Health organisations

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (CUH) supports the findings of the commercial case, agreeing that franchising offers a stronger opportunity to achieve the commercial objectives of the bus network compared to the Enhanced Partnership. They highlight that franchising allows the CPCA to take greater control over routes, ticketing, and service standards, which are essential for delivering a coherent and effective transport network. CUH stresses the importance of stakeholder engagement to ensure

that the network aligns with the needs of users and the council's broader transport policy goals.

While acknowledging the higher risks associated with franchising compared to the Enhanced Partnership, CUH notes that these risks can be mitigated through careful planning and allocation of appropriate resources. They believe that franchising positions the CPCA to deliver more consistent and reliable service outcomes, provided that skilled personnel and adequate resources are dedicated to the model's success. By adopting this approach, the CPCA can better meet the needs of the community while advancing sustainable and effective transport solutions.

Town and Parish Councils in CPCA area

Bottisham Parish Council

Bottisham Parish Council addresses commercial aspects with a particular focus on cost management and service delivery. They focus on careful financial planning to ensure that franchising costs don't divert resources from essential services. The Council supports the proposed contract packaging approach but stresses the need for provisions that protect local service levels. They would like to see more effective coordination with neighbouring authorities, especially Suffolk County Council, given their cross-boundary connections. The Council recommends incorporating specific requirements for service reliability and frequency within contract specifications, suggesting that performance monitoring frameworks include local feedback mechanisms. They support the proposed approach to depot management whilst considering local infrastructure requirements and maintenance standards.

Girton Parish Council

Girton Parish Council's commercial response stresses the need for strong public accountability within the franchising framework. They support the proposed contract durations and monitoring arrangements but state the importance of incorporating specific service quality requirements. The Council suggests that contract specifications should include clear provisions for service frequency and reliability, particularly during peak periods. They highlight maintaining local input into service planning and recommend establishing formal channels for parish-level feedback on operator performance. The Council particularly focuses on the need for clear mechanisms to address service quality issues and suggests incorporating specific requirements for operator responsiveness to local concerns. They support the proposed approach to depot management but recommend ensuring sufficient local facilities to maintain service efficiency.

Haslingfield Parish Council

Haslingfield Parish Council's commercial response focuses on ensuring reliable connectivity for village residents. Like others, they highlight the need for contract specifications that guarantee consistent service levels, particularly regarding evening services and connections to surrounding villages. The Council supports the proposed contract durations but recommends incorporating specific provisions for service frequency reviews and adjustments. They stress the importance of clear performance monitoring frameworks and suggest including mechanisms for local input into service planning. The Council are interested in the effective coordination of routes and timetables under the franchising framework, recommending specific requirements for service integration and reliability. They support the proposed approach to contract packaging but suggest ensuring sufficient flexibility to respond to changing local needs.

Kingston Parish Council

Kingston Parish Council strongly supports franchising as the preferred commercial model, particularly emphasizing its importance for rural communities. The Council highlights that franchising would give the Combined Authority decisive control over route planning, which they consider crucial for rural areas. They specifically note the current anxiety in rural communities about sudden route cancellations by commercial operators, which can severely impact residents' access to employment, education, and healthcare. The Council says that franchising would provide greater stability and certainty for rural services, enabling better planning and integration with broader transport networks. They particularly value the ability under franchising to maintain essential but potentially less profitable routes that serve rural communities, suggesting this would provide better security for their residents than the current commercial model.

Whaddon Parish Council

Whaddon Parish Council wants to see commercial arrangements that support improved bus priority measures and reliable services. They say it is important to incorporate innovation requirements within contract specifications, noting the current system's lack of development in the commercial network. The Council expresses concern about the dominance of single operators and recommends building specific provisions into the franchise framework to encourage competition and innovation. They state the importance of collaboration between the Combined Authority and Cambridgeshire Highways, suggesting that contract specifications include requirements for operator participation in infrastructure planning. The Council particularly stresses the need for evening and Sunday services, recommending specific incentive mechanisms within contracts to support extended operating hours.

Other Wider Stakeholders

Cambridge Ahead

Cambridge Ahead provides strong support for the commercial aspects of franchising, stating that its potential to enable strategic oversight and long-term planning. They particularly focus on the ability to prevent sudden service cancellations and implement unified ticketing systems. The organisation stresses that franchising would provide better tools for managing network growth and adapting to changing regional needs. They highlight the importance of maintaining service quality during transition periods and recommend incorporating specific performance metrics into franchise agreements. Cambridge Ahead also emphasises the need for clear communication channels between operators and the Combined Authority, suggesting regular review mechanisms to ensure commercial objectives are being met. The organisation supports the proposed approach to contract packaging but recommends ensuring sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing market conditions and regional growth patterns.

Imperial War Museum Duxford

The Imperial War Museum Duxford supports the Franchising model, recognising its potential to grant the Combined Authority greater control over the bus network while addressing key challenges. They view franchising as better aligned with the Authority's commercial objectives compared to the Enhanced Partnership, particularly in terms of network accountability and service delivery. While acknowledging the Enhanced Partnership's lower implementation demands, they believe this advantage is outweighed by the Franchising model's ability to deliver meaningful, long-term improvements to public transport.

Summary of participant responses

For the main question for the Commercial Case, there were 1,040 participant responses with 1,447 comments.

In the short form, the public were most likely to say that they supported the Commercial Case for franchising (210). From their perspective, the proposals in the Commercial Case give the Combined Authority more control and accountability (98), franchising was beneficial (79) and would lead to better, more reliable services (79). Some said make the bus service should be municipalised or focussed on public need (64).

In a smaller number of comments, respondents said that risks need to be mitigated (18), franchising could be costly (16), the Combined Authority was not competent to run the bus service (11), and taxpayers should not subsidise the bus service (11).

For those answering the equivalent question on the Commercial Case in the long questionnaire, there were 61 responses with 91 comments. The most common response was agreement and support for the Commercial Case for franchising (26) and that franchising was the better option (6) and that it would give the Combined Authority more control over the network (4).

Theme 1: Franchising model and inclusion of services

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority draft Franchising Scheme consultation shows broad support across stakeholders (17), demonstrating clear backing for reform alongside the proposed set of included services and proposed area geography. The volume of positive responses indicates a clear mandate for change, though the details of delivery prompted varied perspectives.

Education transport stands out as a central issue (9), focusing on integrating school, college and university services into the broader transport network. Respondents connected current educational transport gaps with increased private vehicle usage, noting that better integration could reduce school-run traffic. The consultation detailed concerns about sixth form college access in Cambridge and backed existing parent-funded services that have developed to address current gaps.

The scheme's potential to deliver coordinated and integrated services received substantial support (8), with respondents outlining opportunities for better connections between transport modes and areas. Rural connectivity emerged as a significant concern (5), with feedback pointing to current service gaps and calls to restore previously discontinued routes. The responses indicated that rural areas need different operational approaches from urban centres.

Several operational aspects each received consistent attention (3): the mechanisms for cross-subsidisation, approaches to collaboration, management of cross-boundary services, operator engagement, and the potential for mixed delivery models. The discussion of whether Peterborough and Cambridge require separate approaches (3) reflected their distinct transport patterns and infrastructure needs, with respondents noting fundamental differences in road layout, population distribution and travel behaviour between the two cities.

Theme 2: Franchise contracts, procurement and implementation

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority draft Franchising Scheme consultation reveals strong views about contract duration and procurement approaches, with clear preferences emerging from stakeholder feedback.

Regarding contract duration, the proposed 7-8 year term received strong endorsement, with performance accountability emerging as the dominant concern (25) alongside broad approval of the timeframe (24). The need for flexibility through change or termination clauses was frequently raised (15), accompanied by calls for regular review mechanisms (11). The duration was viewed positively for enabling asset investment (10) and operational stability (9), with respondents noting it would support return on investment (8). Performance-based contract extensions received notable support (7).

The procurement approach generated detailed feedback about management requirements, with equal attention (8) given to the need for expertise within the Combined Authority and various suggested improvements. The strategy received general approval (7) and support for enabling fair competition (7). The importance of accommodating smaller operators (6) and maintaining focus on public needs (6) emerged as key considerations. Quality specifications in contracts (4) were highlighted as particularly important.

Technical considerations across both areas included vehicle procurement timelines, depot sharing agreements, and financial viability for smaller contracts. The feedback indicates a need to balance operational efficiency, market diversity, and service quality, with particular attention to supporting smaller operators while maintaining system-wide coordination. Respondents said that contract structures must effectively balance the needs for operational stability against performance accountability, while ensuring sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances.

Theme 3: Transitional period and Consultation

There are a number of views expressed on the proposed transition timeline in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority draft Franchising Scheme, with strong calls for swift implementation (16) balanced against practical considerations.

Three distinct perspectives emerged on the implementation timeline, each receiving equal attention (11): those who view the timeline as reasonable and realistic, those who consider it too slow, and those emphasizing urgent local needs for immediate improvements. This three-way split in opinion reflects the complexity of balancing rapid change with practical delivery constraints.

The consultation surfaced specific operational concerns about the transition period, with staffing requirements noted as a key consideration (6). Service mobilisation timeframes drew particular attention (4), with respondents highlighting practical challenges around vehicle procurement, depot arrangements, and operational readiness. Some respondents specifically compared the timeline to Greater Manchester's implementation (3), while others noted the coordination with Cambridge's bus prioritisation measures (3).

Technical feedback on the transition focused on procurement timelines, particularly regarding vehicle availability (2) and SME participation (2). Several respondents called for advance publication of procurement and mobilisation timescales (3) to allow operators adequate preparation time. The consultation revealed specific concerns about the impact on smaller operators, with some noting that unrealistic timescales might disadvantage SMEs (2).

Regarding ongoing monitoring and feedback during implementation, the consultation approach received strong support (15), with particular emphasis on incorporating public and user views (8) and recognizing consultation's role in performance monitoring (7). Respondents stressed the importance of prompt action in response to consultation findings (5), with some calling for more frequent engagement than the proposed two-year cycle (4) and earlier initial consultation (4).

Theme 4: Approach to assets

There was detailed feedback on asset management strategies set out in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority draft Franchising Scheme consultation with distinct perspectives on depot infrastructure and vehicle management emerging from stakeholders.

Depot infrastructure generated significant discussion, with equal support (7 each) for expanding overall depot capacity and using increased depot availability to enhance market competition, particularly for SMEs. The Combined Authority's proposed role in depot provision received notable backing (6), with respondents emphasizing how strategic depot placement could improve operational efficiency (6). The consultation showed specific support for SME access to Combined Authority depots (4) and highlighted the potential role of depot infrastructure in supporting fleet electrification (4).

Practical considerations for depot management surfaced numerous operational challenges. Respondents sought clarification on co-location arrangements (3) and the treatment of depot costs in tender bids (3), noting potential difficulties in administering shared facilities (2). Location strategy emerged as important, with suggestions for situating depots outside city centers (2) to reduce costs and minimize urban impact. The

consultation revealed specific concerns about depot design requirements, particularly regarding electric vehicle infrastructure (2) and the need for clear contractual arrangements in shared facilities (2).

The proposed approach to vehicle management received strong endorsement (20), with three aspects gaining equal attention (7 each): agreement with Combined Authority standard-setting, operator responsibility for equipment, and the need for robust accountability through contracts. Some respondents advocated for Combined Authority ownership with operator leasing arrangements (5), particularly noting this could support smaller operators and ensure consistent standards. Practical concerns were raised about SMEs' ability to fulfill requirements (4) and ensure vehicles remain fit for purpose (4).

Vehicle management considerations included observations about large operators' procurement experience (3) and existing fleet assets (3), alongside concerns about achieving standardization across operators (3).

Theme 5: Consideration of Small and Medium Operators

Respondents had detailed views about small and medium-sized operators (SME) participation in the franchising scheme, with strong overall support (23) for the proposed approach to accommodating their needs.

The structuring of contract opportunities emerged as a key consideration, with notable support (6) for smaller contract lots enabling SME participation. However, this was balanced against concerns about larger operators' inherent advantages (5), raising questions about achieving a genuinely level playing field. The feedback highlighted specific operational challenges, with calls for simplified procurement processes for smaller contracts (4) to reduce administrative burdens and barriers to entry.

The consultation exposed particular concerns about tender qualification processes, with respondents noting that larger operators can often reuse existing policy documentation while SMEs face more onerous requirements to create new documentation. Some respondents highlighted the local economic benefits of SME participation, including local employment, profit retention within communities, and UK tax contribution.

Several practical constraints were identified, with equal attention (2) given to multiple concerns: SMEs' resource limitations, potential reduction in SME market presence, and the risk of large operators maintaining monopolistic positions. Respondents noted that SMEs often combine local bus services with school transport and private hire operations, making their continued participation crucial for broader transport provision.

Financial considerations featured prominently, with some respondents suggesting Combined Authority vehicle purchase and lease-back arrangements (2) to support SME participation. The feedback also highlighted concerns about contract sustainability, noting that single-vehicle contracts may not be commercially viable, and that appropriate depot access is crucial for smaller operators.

Some respondents are keen for greater market diversity through SME participation, while acknowledging the need for careful structuring of contract opportunities and support mechanisms to enable effective involvement without compromising service standards.

Theme 6: Transfer of Employees

Pay and conditions emerged as the primary concern (9), with respondents emphasising the importance of fair employment terms to ensure workforce stability. The proposals received general support (8), matched by equal emphasis (8) on proper adherence to TUPE regulations. Respondents highlighted the established nature of such transfers, noting both their common occurrence in franchise arrangements (4) and successful implementation in other regions like London and Greater Manchester (4).

The consultation surfaced specific workforce challenges, with respondents noting that staff currently employed by SME operators might resist transfer to larger corporate entities, potentially leading to employee departures. Equal attention (3) was given to potential workforce attrition, the importance of maintaining existing staff where possible, and the need for comprehensive stakeholder consultation including operators, employees, trade unions, and potential bidders.

Practical implementation considerations received focused attention. Respondents emphasised the complexity of transfers where operators run mixed businesses including private hire, express coach, and school services, noting that TUPE arrangements might not cleanly address all scenarios. Some highlighted the need for early engagement with existing operators to ensure accurate transfer of employee information and consistent bid pricing assumptions.

The feedback raised specific concerns about cost implications, with respondents noting that pay rates typically settle at the highest common denominator when workforces merge. Some stakeholders suggested the Combined Authority should underwrite reconciliation mechanisms to avoid undue risk and incumbent advantage in the bidding process. The consultation also revealed concerns about redundancy costs for SME operators who might lose their entire business, with suggestions that such costs should be borne by the Combined Authority.

The responses indicate strong support for structured employee transfer arrangements while saying there is a need for careful implementation to maintain workforce stability and service quality. Respondents stressed the importance of learning from existing

franchise implementations while ensuring local circumstances and SME operator impacts are properly addressed in transfer arrangements.

Theme 7: Risk Allocation & Responsibility

There was detailed feedback on the proposed allocation of risks and responsibilities between the Combined Authority and operators under the franchising scheme, with strong overall support for the approach (14).

The sharing of risks and responsibilities on a risk/reward basis received notable attention (7), though views differed on the optimal distribution. Some respondents advocated for the Combined Authority taking the main share of risk and profits (6), while others expressed concern that shared responsibilities could lead to disputes or inaction (6).

Operational considerations featured prominently, with equal attention (4) given to the importance of good communication and clarity around customer service responsibilities. The consultation highlighted specific aspects receiving equal support (3 each): the Combined Authority's responsibility for network-wide matters, the potential for service improvements, and operators' ability to focus on service delivery.

The feedback revealed particular attention to practical implementation challenges. Respondents wanted clear delineation of responsibilities around key operational areas including marketing, fare collection, and performance monitoring. Some noted that revenue risk allocation could significantly impact operator profit margins and contract pricing, particularly for longer contract periods of 7-8 years. The consultation also highlighted specific concerns about responsibility for infrastructure maintenance, real-time information systems, and customer service management.

Some respondents suggested that subsidy-based contracts might be better suited to enhanced partnership arrangements (3), particularly where operators have more influence over demand factors. Technical considerations included the need to clarify quality standards for branding and uniforms (2) and ensuring operators can maintain viable fleet operations (2). Equal attention (2) was also given to concerns about the Combined Authority's risk exposure, the importance of harnessing operator expertise, and revenue risk allocation.

The feedback indicates broad support for risk sharing while highlighting the need for clear delineation of responsibilities and robust communication mechanisms. Respondents stressed the importance of balancing risk allocation with operational effectiveness, suggesting careful attention to contract structure and performance management frameworks to avoid potential disputes and ensure clear accountability for service delivery.

Theme 8: Performance Improvement

There were a number of views on performance and delivery models, with particular focus on the relative merits of franchising versus Enhanced Partnership (EP) approaches.

Franchising's ability to account for social good emerged as the dominant consideration (16), closely followed by its alignment with Combined Authority objectives (14). The model received broad support as the best option (8), with general agreement on the assessment approach (7). However, some respondents felt the comparative benefits and drawbacks had not been fully evaluated (6).

The consultation highlighted specific concerns about EP's limitations, with equal numbers (6) noting difficulties in meeting public needs through this approach. Flexibility emerged as a key differentiator, with respondents highlighting both EP's lack of adaptability to changing requirements (5) and franchising's greater flexibility (5). While some viewed EP as a simpler option (4), concerns were raised about potential service reductions or withdrawals under this model (3).

The feedback revealed particular attention to practical implementation experiences. Respondents cited successful EP implementation in locations like Brighton and Leicester (2), alongside franchising success in areas like Rochdale (2). However, many said that EP's effectiveness depends heavily on operator willingness to collaborate, with some noting that negotiations could be challenging (3) and potentially lead to service inconsistencies.

Several respondents highlighted the current challenges with commercial operations, noting that while some operators have achieved growth in specific routes, factors beyond operator control – such as highway networks and bus infrastructure – require broader coordination. The consultation revealed strong support for considering buses as a public service rather than purely commercial operation, with respondents emphasizing the role of public transport in reducing social isolation and improving air quality.

The feedback indicates that while both models have demonstrated success in different contexts, franchising is viewed as offering greater control over social outcomes and strategic objectives. Respondents stressed the importance of maintaining consistent service standards across the network, with particular emphasis on the need for coordinated planning and delivery to serve both urban and rural communities effectively.

Chapter 8: The Financial Case

Introduction

This section covers questions on the Financial Case, which assesses whether the options are affordable based on the money available. The Financial Case considers the financial implications of Franchising or an Enhanced Partnership. This includes the projected cashflows under each option, in order to assess the affordability for the Combined Authority and the potential financial risk. It takes account of the various funding streams available to maintain and develop the bus network.

The Consultation Document concludes that given the revenue and funding available under each option, both Franchising and Enhanced Partnership are affordable to the Combined Authority. Franchising will bring greater benefits than the Enhanced Partnership due to the ability to deliver more network improvements, however this needs to be balanced against the increased financial risk to the Combined Authority in taking more responsibility for passenger fare revenue.

There is one shared question on the Financial Case included in both the short form and long form questionnaire – a total of 1,086 participants responded to this question. Seventeen key stakeholders, forty-five wider stakeholders and 1,024 members of the public.

Q. The Financial Case says that Franchising carries more financial risk for the Combined Authority than an Enhanced Partnership, but offers greater control, resulting in greater benefits. Do you have any comments on the Combined Authority taking on this risk? ¹³

¹³ See Section 6 (paragraphs 6.34 – 6.39) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

See Section 7 (paragraphs 7.245 – 7.246) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

Table 8.1: The table below summarises the participants who provided a response to this question:

	Number of participants who made favourable comments	Number of participants who made unfavourable comments
All who provide a response	1,086	
Key Stakeholders	9	4
Wider Stakeholders	25	3
Members of the public	469	116

A smaller number of participants chose to answer the Financial Case questions in the long form questionnaire, 60 for the question above and 58 and 59 respectively for supplementary questions. There are two additional questions in the long form questionnaire on the Financial Case focussed on investment costs and potential sources of funding.

Q. Investment costs anticipated by the Combined Authority in moving to Franchising or an Enhanced Partnership are set out in the Financial Case. Do you have any comments on these costs?¹⁴

Q. Potential sources of funding for bus service improvements under Franchising or an EP are set out in the Financial Case. Do you have any comments on these?¹⁵

This is the summarised feedback on investment costs:

- Uncertainty in financial projections (including future revenue) creates risk for combined authority (7)
- Investment is justified for improved services (4)
- Costs of franchising are marginally higher than EP (3)
- Local government is under financial pressure so cost control is important (2)
- Not clear whether electrification costs included in operator owned / combined authority owned depot costs (2)
- Combined authority needs to invest in skills / expertise to set up/manage franchising (2)

¹⁴ See Section 7 (paragraphs 7.238 and 7.239) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

¹⁵ See Section 7 (paragraphs 7.241 – 7.246 and accompanying Figures and Tables) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

- Franchising should result in service improvements (and associated economic benefits) (2)
- Further costs arising from franchising should not be paid for by local taxpayers (2)
- Higher costs of franchising are outweighed by greater benefits (2)
- Secure funding will be needed for the franchise period (2)

This is the summarised feedback on potential sources of funding for bus service improvements:

- Prefer franchising (4)
- Council tax / precept should not be increased (4)
- Need more information / clarification (3)
- Good / fair: Political changes may alter plans (3)
- An increased precept would help to provide a better community service (3)
- Other potential funding might be available and should be explored (3)
- Querying the estimates (2)
- Greater authority control could lead to increase in passenger numbers therefore higher income from fares (2)
- Fare income is based on pre-£2 cap level (2)
- Fare revenue should be spent on improving the network (2)
- Parking charges should be considered to raise funds (2)
- Do not rely on government grants (2)

Summary of stakeholder responses

This section outlines the responses to the Financial Case questions from organisations. It starts with a summary of responses received from the key stakeholders before summarising the wider stakeholder response.

Key Stakeholders

Bus Operators

Whippet

Whippet underscores the current unsustainability of bus services, with operators prioritising profits over comprehensive service delivery. They advocate for a franchising model, believing it can better align services with social and economic needs while rebalancing risks between public and private sectors. Franchising would allow for greater accountability and network optimisation, addressing underserved areas and promoting equity in access to transport. Whippet highlights the need for strategic network

planning, including better integration of rural and urban areas, and investment in infrastructure like bus stops and priority lanes. They also stress involving operators in franchising design to ensure realistic, effective implementation.

Stagecoach

Stagecoach raises significant concerns about the financial viability of franchising under the CPCA's Outline Business Case Assessment (OBCA). They highlight a six-fold increase in council tax contributions (Mayoral Precept) from £130m to £767m over the appraisal period, with further risks due to recent budgetary changes and increased employer costs. The OBCA's assumptions, Stagecoach argues, underestimate crucial costs and risks.

Key issues include staffing and capacity, with CPCA proposing just 15 new hires to handle nine departments, a figure Stagecoach estimates could be two or three times too low. Legal, technical, and professional costs of £1.39m phased over three years lack provision for future rounds of retendering. Similarly, the £300k allocated for procurement and mobilisation costs appears insufficient for subsequent franchising rounds.

Stagecoach points to potential underestimates in operator bidding costs, pegged at £200k every five years, and depot build costs, calculated from unrelated benchmarks. Risks are amplified by uncertain BSOG rates, which the OBCA assumes will increase annually despite being unchanged since 2014. The resulting overstatement of funding by £36m could necessitate higher Precept contributions. Additionally, discrepancies in assumed Council Tax base growth (2% versus a more likely 1.74%) create a potential £39m shortfall.

The audit highlights broader risks, including possible funding shortfalls or unachievable service levels under the current financial model. Stagecoach recommends re-evaluating the OBCA, incorporating recent economic conditions, and addressing these critical gaps.

Stagecoach suggests increasing bus patronage through substantial investments in priority measures to sustainably fund services. However, they warn of voter backlash over a 500% Precept increase, far exceeding other regions, and note comparisons to London's 112% rise, which supports a much broader network. Without addressing these issues, the CPCA risks unmanageable shortfalls that could undermine the proposed system's viability.

Stephensons

Stephensons highlights concerns about the CPCA's focus on franchising, arguing it introduces unnecessary risks and high costs compared to an Enhanced Partnership (EP). They cite examples from neighbouring areas where EPs have successfully increased

patronage and improved services. Stephenson stresses the importance of preserving cross-boundary services and leveraging operators' local knowledge to adapt to community needs quickly. They advocate for collaboration under an EP to enhance service frequency and reliability, emphasising bus priority measures and rural service improvements as key areas for investment.

Delaine Buses

Delaine Buses critiques the Combined Authority's focus on control rather than exploring potential benefits of an Enhanced Partnership model. They emphasise that during economic downturns, public sector spending inevitably prioritises health and education, potentially putting the wider transport network at greater risk under a franchise system than under an Enhanced Partnership where operators bear financial risk and may be better equipped to manage economic challenges.

A key concern centres on long-term investment planning. The response highlights how the franchise model could discourage investment in vehicles, given the substantial capital required against potentially short contract periods. They argue that operators would need to factor in shorter depreciation periods to protect against potential losses in subsequent re-tendering processes, ultimately increasing bid prices.

By contrast, they advocate for the Enhanced Partnership model as particularly beneficial for small and medium-sized operators. This approach, they argue, allows operators to invest confidently in their future, knowing that delivering quality commercial services can provide long-term stability. The response essentially makes the case that Enhanced Partnership offers a more sustainable and practical approach to long-term service delivery and business planning than franchising.

First

As stated in the consultation documentation, the Financial Case for franchising does require additional expenditure to deliver the benefits. This though is acceptable so long as the funding is in place and is secured long-term. The same argument stands for EP+ as well.

Ron W Dew

Ron W Dew stress addressing local needs through collaboration, citing their experience in CPCA-funded routes and commercial routes developed to address gaps. They support Enhanced Partnerships (EPs) as a more practical, faster, and cost-effective solution than

franchising. They highlight that EPs can be more responsive to what is successful and what needs review, as the network develops, or to implement fare adjustment.

The Go-Ahead Group

The Go-Ahead Group supports CPCA's reform efforts, recognising the unique challenges posed by the region's diverse geography and rapid population growth. They point to investment in bus priority measures to reduce congestion, improve reliability, and increase patronage. Franchising is seen as a tool to provide greater control and coordination, though Go-Ahead highlights potential risks, including high costs and impacts on neighbouring authorities. They suggest focusing on tailored solutions, such as corridor-specific franchising, and ensuring fairness in procurement processes to attract competition. Cross-boundary services and integration with other transport modes, such as rail, are critical priorities. They also advocate for collaborative approaches to network design and call for clarity in how reform goals, such as doubling passenger numbers, will be achieved.

Transdev

Transdev supports franchising as a means to set performance targets, harmonise fares, and redesign networks to focus on patronage growth. They stress safety and customer service in driving ridership, advocating for improvements such as better bus presentation, driver training, and enhanced passenger experience. Transdev highlights the need for clear communication between CPCA and operators to ensure realistic implementation and service continuity. They also stress integrating rural and urban services to foster equitable access and support long-term growth.

Transport UK

Transport UK agrees with the CA that franchising carries greater risk than an Enhanced Partnership – at least in terms of managing greater income and expenditure – but, as is noted in the assessment, franchising gives the CA the powers to organise change in the network as and when required should risks materialise.

We would also highlight again that the franchising option achieves superior NPV and BCR because of the inclusion of 'wider economic benefits' as opposed to the direct income and expenditure on bus service provision. As a result, the CA might wish to ensure it continues to capture and report upon the 'wider economic benefits' if it decides to proceed with franchising.

The sensitivity analysis conducted as part of the assessment demonstrates that the CA has considered the impact if assumptions made prove to be incorrect and the analysis suggests that the impact of any incorrect assumptions in financial modelling should be manageable.

Community Transport Association

The Community Transport Association stresses the importance of protecting community transport services amid bus market reforms. They note that many operators rely heavily on local government funding, which could be impacted by changes. They advocate for granting community transport operators voting rights under Enhanced Partnerships to ensure their needs are represented. Collaborative planning and sustainable funding are deemed essential for maintaining critical services that support vulnerable populations.

Bus passenger representatives and user groups

Cambridgeshire Families for Sustainable Travel

Cambridgeshire Families for Sustainable Travel acknowledges the financial risks of franchising but stresses that inaction or limited action poses a greater threat to the region. They argue that franchising offers the strongest potential to address inadequate and declining bus services. They also highlight the benefits of investing in bus depots, which can encourage operator competition, support the transition to electric buses, and deliver better value for money. Collaborative planning and clear incentives for operators are deemed essential for achieving improved outcomes.

Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport views the financial risks of franchising as justified by the potential benefits of greater network control, increased passenger numbers, and optimised service delivery. They note the need for proactive risk management and highlight the Cambridge Sustainable Travel Zone's potential to boost public transport use and generate revenue for investment. A robust financial oversight framework is deemed critical to maximising the benefits of franchising while navigating its challenges.

Cambridgeshire Sustainable Travel Alliance

Cambridgeshire Sustainable Travel Alliance says that the Combined Authority (CPA) asserts that the investment required for either franchising or an enhanced partnership is affordable and necessary to reverse the region's declining bus network. While financial

risks are inherent in changing the operational model, CPCA emphasises that the risks of inaction are far greater. The current system has left many residents isolated, unable to access employment and education, and reliant on cars, which increases motor traffic and hampers mobility for everyone.

Franchising is positioned as the superior option, offering greater community benefits that justify the additional investment. This model grants the CPCA full control over the bus network and public funding allocation, enabling the authority to halt service cuts and plan routes that better address community needs. Enhanced planning under franchising ensures long-term stability and improved service quality.

Investment in bus depots, already underway in Peterborough, is highlighted as a critical step to enabling more operators to bid competitively for services. This not only improves value for money but also supports the transition to zero-emission buses. The CPCA views this transition as a crucial long-term benefit for the region, enhancing sustainability and reducing environmental impact. Overall, the authority stresses that franchising's transformative potential outweighs its financial risks, making it the best pathway to reinvigorate the regional bus system.

Transport

Transport Focus's response addresses funding sustainability and ridership goals for CPCA's bus service improvements. They raise concerns about contingency planning if revenue streams fail to meet increased costs and whether promotional activities have been considered. Transport Focus questions CPCA's ambitious target to double bus ridership by 2030, noting that other mayoral combined authorities have predicted patronage declines based on historic trends. They seek clarification on maintaining service quality for existing users while accommodating new riders, and enquire about financial planning if projected revenue increases do not materialise. Transport Focus's assessment suggests the franchising model offers greater stability for passengers through its diverse funding sources and resources, providing a safety net during revenue shortfalls. However, they specifically note this perspective focuses on passenger benefits rather than taxpayer risks, emphasising that one key test for the future model will be its resilience in maintaining investment and subsidies during potential revenue decreases.

Local government (Constituent Councils in the CPCA area)

East Cambridgeshire District Council

East Cambridgeshire District Council supports franchising as a mechanism to address service gaps in rural areas. They highlight the challenges posed by low population density and reduced funding, which have left many areas underserved. Franchising is seen as a way to prioritise socially necessary services and improve accessibility. However, the Council stresses equitable service delivery across urban and rural areas, urging CPCA to work closely with local communities and councils. There is also a need to preserve cross-boundary services and ensure seamless integration with neighbouring networks.

The consultation documents recognise that the costs are based on estimates and risks that would potentially carry a revenue impact have been identified. But at what stage will these costs be confirmed and how and when will decisions be made about investment spend if these costs come in over budget and/or if projected income doesn't cover costs, which will include debt repayments? How will these decisions impact on service provision? Will the CPCA provide assurances that it will not cut routes that provide least farebox income or cost more to run, i.e. rural services be reduced to cut costs? The CPCA should set out its priorities and a hierarchy of decision making in the context of a reduced funding envelope and present this for consultation and feedback to the public before a decision is taken.

Peterborough City Council

Through Franchising the CPCA will have greater flexibility to set fare levels and instigate cross ticketing this should as a result see an increase in bus patronage resulting in a greater income from fares.

It is key we look to reinvest the fares into the services and not over burden the taxpayer to fund these services as this could be seen as having to pay twice, tax and tickets.

The additional precept does however break down over a 12-month period so in financial terms this is another lower cost avenue for the services to be supported. Looking at the potential £71 as set out by the OBC assessment report this would be a cost of circa 19p per day for residents.

Fenland District Council

Fenland District Council (FDC) expresses significant concerns regarding the financial case for franchising presented in the Outline Business Case (OBC). While franchising offers greater control to the CPCA, FDC questions whether this control justifies the considerable financial risks involved. The Council notes that the substantial costs

required for franchising are particularly troubling given the lack of clarity on how these investments will improve bus services in Fenland. Without assurances of significantly improved and sustained services, FDC doubts the viability of the proposed model.

The Council highlights uncertainties surrounding external funding, a critical component of the franchising plan, and questions the fallback strategy should such funding fail to materialize. FDC also criticises the reliance on increases in the Mayoral Precept, raising concerns about the affordability of this approach for Fenland residents, particularly those in the poorest wards. The Council finds it difficult to justify such an increase without clear evidence of improved service levels.

The independent audit report they suggest further amplifies these concerns, detailing multiple issues with the assumptions and methodologies underlying the financial case. The assessors highlight significant risks associated with projections of costs and revenues. FDC suggest that a sensitivity analysis to low ridership would expose potential shortfalls in fare revenue and increases in operating costs. FDC see that these risks could lead to unaffordable outcomes for CPCA and questions the simplistic reliance on the Mayoral Precept as a mitigating strategy.

The Council contrasts the franchising costs—£41 million in the first year and £1.4 million annually thereafter—with the Enhanced Partnership (EP) model’s significantly lower costs. FDC finds the franchising option’s affordability and benefits unjustified, given the limited growth assumptions and lack of detailed scenario testing. They urge CPCA to address these substantial concerns and uncertainties before proceeding.

South Cambridgeshire District Council

The Council also expects the CPCA to ensure it has the funding, capacity and capability to manage the transition and the service on an ongoing basis.

Cambridgeshire County Council

The Council believes that the decline in bus use, congestion, the requirement to meet net zero targets, planned growth and the need for greater financial support from the public sector shows that changes to bus services as well as reduced congestion is required to deliver ambitions for an improved bus network in Cambridgeshire to better meet the needs of bus passengers, achieve the Council’s strategic ambitions and support planned growth.

Local governments (Neighbouring transport authorities)

Lincolnshire County Council

Lincolnshire County Council supports CPCA's reform objectives but seeks clarification on how franchising will impact cross-boundary services, such as CallConnect routes co-funded with CPCA. They express concerns about the financial and administrative challenges posed by franchising and advocate for continued collaboration with operators to ensure service continuity. They also stress cross-border communication and joint planning to prevent unintended disruptions in neighbouring areas.

Other Key Stakeholders

Confederation of Passenger Transport

The Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) raises significant concerns about the financial risks associated with the franchising model proposed by the Combined Authority (CPCA). They highlight the challenges of securing unanimous support for a proposed 500% increase in the Mayoral Precept and stress the lack of contingency plans if additional funding cannot be sourced. Furthermore, CPT notes that ongoing reviews of funding streams like BSOG create uncertainty, yet the financial case does not adequately account for potential reductions in funding levels.

CPT agrees that franchising imposes substantial financial burdens on both the CPCA and local taxpayers. Transitional costs, while significant, do not directly enhance services for bus passengers, presenting a substantial risk to public finances. They stress the flexibility inherent in the current system, which allows operators to adjust fares and service provision in response to rising costs and changing travel patterns. Under franchising, such adjustments would likely face political resistance, limiting the CPCA's ability to meet its objectives and adapt to emerging challenges.

CPT concludes that the rigidities of franchising, combined with its financial risks and burdens, may hinder the CPCA from achieving its goals while placing an undue strain on local taxpayers.

England's Economic Heartlands

England's Economic Heartlands (EEH) acknowledges that decisions on bus delivery models are best determined by local authorities, based on regional needs and input from residents. While franchising carries more financial risk compared to an Enhanced

Partnership, EEH agrees that it provides the CPCA with greater control over the bus network and its services, aligning with the financial case presented in the consultation documents.

Drawing from their own research on bus operation models, EEH highlights the importance of planning for contingencies under a franchising model. They advise the CPCA to ensure mechanisms are in place for providing replacement or backup services in the event of operator failure. This could involve maintaining a shadow fleet or alternative provisions to safeguard service continuity. EEH proposes that such measures are critical to preserving passenger experience, maintaining public trust, and ensuring the reliability of the bus network.

By addressing these considerations, EEH suggests that CPCA can create a more robust system, mitigating potential disruptions and fully realizing the benefits franchising promises in terms of control and service quality.

Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner

A Financial Case for franchising has been made. This should be subject to due diligence. Financial risks were identified. It is for the CA to determine their appetite for risk and to ensure that they have robust plans in place to mitigate those risks.

Wider Stakeholders

Academic

Cambridge Biomedical Campus

Cambridge Biomedical Campus believes the franchise model does carry more risk for the CPCA, however, the CBC believes this also provides greater reward and long-term benefits for people and businesses in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and in particular CBC through the opportunity to drive substantial improvements in service quality and network coverage.

University of Cambridge

Cambridge University acknowledges the financial risks associated with franchising, the University believes that these are worth taking and that the risks of not taking this approach are even higher. It is however imperative that consideration is given to maximising the value of our network through a range of enhancements and bus priority measures as well as efficient savings across service delivery. Maximising the opportunities through developer contributions to move away from short-term projects

to long-term enhancements will also need careful consideration within the framework of franchising.

Inspire Education Group

Inspire Education Group acknowledges the financial risks of franchising but suggests that tendering routes not currently serviced by public providers may offer a more cost-effective approach. They see the importance of phased transitions and stricter regulations under an Enhanced Partnership to balance costs while achieving key objectives. Rural areas should receive targeted support through zonal restrictions and financial incentives to ensure fair service delivery.

Charity & Voluntary sector

Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce

Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce supports franchising, provided the CPCA can commit to the financial risk long-term to ensure network continuity. They stress a robust network to support regional economic growth and enable access to employment and education. Clear risk management strategies and consistent investment in infrastructure are deemed critical to achieving these goals.

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough emphasise the importance of public transport reform in reducing car dependency, improving rural connectivity, and addressing climate goals. They support the CPCA's ambitions but highlight the need to support underserved rural areas, where reliable bus services are essential for equitable access. They advocate for better integration between rural and urban services, focusing on affordability, accessibility, and environmental sustainability. Collaborative planning with stakeholders and long-term investments in green transport infrastructure are deemed critical to achieving meaningful progress.

Elected Representatives

North West Cambridgeshire MP

The initial investment costs for franchising are clearly higher, but the strong benefits of franchising over the EP option outweigh this initial cost in my view.

Huntingdon MP

The Huntingdon MP says Huntingdon residents express dissatisfaction with the tripling of the bus precept under Mayor Dr. Nik Johnson, criticising its perceived disproportionate funding of projects outside their area while providing minimal local benefits. This has fostered a sense that Huntingdon is unfairly treated as a financial "cash cow" without receiving equitable returns.

The MP says that residents urge the CPCA to ensure transparency by offering clear breakdowns of funding allocations. They call for evidence linking their contributions to tangible improvements in local bus services, and equitable investment across all communities.

District Councillor for Huntingdon East

Any option will need to show value for public money, and appropriate risk. Currently, I believe more information is needed to ensure that franchising represents an appropriate level of risk compared to an EP.

Environment, Heritage, Amenity or Community Groups

ACORN Cambridge

ACORN Cambridge supports franchising, highlighting its potential to deliver better services and reinvest profits into network improvements rather than shareholder returns. They argue that the financial case understates the cost to the public of continuing poor service and advocate for franchising as the more impactful solution. Collaborative planning and long-term investment are seen as essential for improving accessibility and sustainability.

Carbon Neutral Cambridge

Carbon Neutral Cambridge supports franchising but stresses the need for robust management processes to mitigate risks. They highlight the importance of adequately resourcing operational frameworks to ensure effective implementation and long-term success.

Trumpington Residents' Association

The Trumpington Residents' Association (TRA) acknowledges that both franchising and an Enhanced Partnership are financially viable for the Combined Authority, with franchising offering greater benefits. However, they challenge the assumption that franchising

inherently carries higher financial risks. TRA highlights that under the current system, the Authority already incurs significant costs to maintain minimal services in unprofitable areas, a challenge unlikely to change with an Enhanced Partnership. In contrast, the increased control provided by franchising could mitigate risks by enabling the Authority to plan and deliver services more effectively.

The TRA highlights the potential improvements under franchising, including bus stop and shelter upgrades, expanded or more frequent services, and new depots in Cambridge and Peterborough to encourage operator participation. These enhancements, combined with bus priority measures available in both models, address longstanding neglect in infrastructure investment.

The TRA stresses the urgent need for better bus stops and shelters, particularly in Trumpington, where inadequate facilities have failed to protect passengers from the elements or ensure safety and accessibility. They advocate for a comprehensive, investment programme to deliver well-lit, weather-protected, and accessible stops that cater to all users, including children, individuals with disabilities, and those traveling at night. TRA views the current deregulated system as a failure that has overlooked essential passenger needs, leaving communities underserved and vulnerable. They argue that franchising presents an opportunity to correct these issues and create a safer, more reliable, and inclusive transport network.

Health organisations

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

Cambridge University Hospitals (CUH) suggests that the franchise model does carry more risk for the CPCA, however CUH believe this also provides greater reward and long-term benefits for people and businesses in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and in particular CBC through the opportunity to drive substantial improvements in service quality and network coverage.

Town and Parish Councils in CPCA area

Bottisham Parish Council

"An increased risk must be balanced with greater expertise in managing such risk and with controls that are fit for purpose and properly exercised."

Coveney Parish Council

Coveney Parish Council raises concerns about the financial projections in the franchising model, citing significant uncertainties highlighted in the audit report. They recommend further analysis and scenario planning before any final decisions are made. Additionally, the Parish notes the lack of provision for additional finance staff in the proposed resourcing for franchising, questioning the feasibility of managing the financial complexities without dedicated personnel. These issues underscore their call for a more robust evaluation to ensure informed and sustainable decision-making.

Cottenham Parish Council

Cottenham Parish Council say this is a high-risk strategy which depends on increasing bus usage as a mechanism for funding. Getting more passengers onto buses in a much more widely rural area than urban areas where Franchised bus systems have been shown to be successful is problematic. People rely on cars because there are no buses. There are no buses because there is not enough demand because people are using their cars. Plans to square this circle are very difficult to achieve, and there is no evidence that the Partnership has a solution for this challenge.

Godmanchester Town Council

Godmanchester sees the CPCA's role is to integrate services across Counties and Districts, with buses being a key focus. They argue that accepting risk is essential for meaningful change; without it, the bus service will continue to deteriorate, undermining efforts to improve transportation in the region.

Other Wider Stakeholders

Cambridge Ahead

Cambridge Ahead agrees that franchising carries more financial risk but views the greater control and benefits as worth pursuing. They call for additional clarity on mitigating operator failure and ensuring continuity of service. A shadow fleet or contingency measures are suggested to bolster system resilience. Addressing reliance on fare revenue and incentivising patronage growth are highlighted as critical factors for success.

Imperial War Museum Duxford

Imperial War Museum Duxford supports franchising, viewing it as a preferable long-term investment over an Enhanced Partnership. They highlight the potential for increased fare revenue and sustainable benefits, emphasising robust financial planning to ensure success.

Summary of participant responses

For the shared question for the Financial Case, in both the short form and long form questionnaire versions, there were 1,086 participant responses with 1,859 comments.

The most common response is that participants see the benefits outweighing the risks in financial terms (182); next it will give the Combined Authority more financial control (148) and that the CPCA should take the risk (109). Franchising is seen as the best option (72), but the process needs to be well-managed (69). The risks are recognised and real and require mitigation (54) and the service needs to improve as soon as possible (67). Some of the public want more information and clarification on risk (52). Those in opposition, fewer in number, think the enterprise is too risky (37) and too expensive (19).

Theme 1: Assessment Assumptions and Modelling

Participants indicate substantial interest in better understanding the financial modelling approach, with contributors expressing varied views on the robustness of the assumptions. A number of respondents (52) are interested in additional information and clarification about the underlying risks and assumptions of the financial model.

The modelling methodology generated a number of comments, particularly regarding its ability to capture wider economic benefits (9). Some contributors stressed the requirement of comprehensive risk assessment in the financial modelling, whilst others

highlighted the need for clarity in how various different scenarios were evaluated. The relationship between service improvements and financial sustainability emerged as a key theme for respondents.

The assumptions regarding public service obligations versus commercial considerations received significant attention (41), with many stating that profit should not be the primary driver of service delivery. Participants are also interested in the balance between operational efficiency and service quality, with some contributors accepting that improved services might necessitate increased costs (5). The responses revealed a good understanding of the modelling challenges, with several contributors suggesting that both franchising and EP options carry inherent risks and costs (11). The need for more transparent and robust assessment methodologies emerged as a recurring theme, particularly in the context of long-term financial planning and risk management.

It's not about profit it's about students elderly low paid and getting the car users out of their cars

Male, 55-6

Theme 2: Funding and Financing Sources

Participants showed particular interest in the balance between ticket revenue and taxpayer support, with strong views about keeping fares affordable (12) while avoiding additional burden on taxpayers (26).

Financial stability concerns emerged in several forms, with some (16) highlighting the risk of franchises facing financial difficulties. Questions about long-term funding arrangements included questions about how the additional precept would grow over time (4) and how potential funding shortfalls would be addressed (2). Alternative funding approaches were suggested, including proposals for large organisations to subsidise routes that directly benefit their operations (1).

The revenue outlook had a mixed reception with participants, with some contributors expressing optimism about increased revenue generation potential (26), while others remained concerned about financial viability. Some indicated willingness to accept increased fares or taxes if service improvements could be guaranteed (5), though this perspective was not widely shared. The public want to see particular attention paid to ensuring robust financial planning, with some seeking clarity on both immediate funding mechanisms and long-term financial sustainability measures

I believe there are benefits for all sides in that financial risk being shared by the Combined Authority and the operators, particularly when operators are incentivised to improve the offer to customers and thereby grow revenue.

Male, 65-74

This is a high-risk strategy which depends on increasing bus usage as a mechanism for funding. Getting more passengers onto buses in a much more widely rural area than urban areas where Franchised bus systems have been shown to be successful is problematic. People rely on cars because there are no buses. There are no buses because there is not enough demand because people are using their cars. Plans to square this circle are very difficult to achieve, and there is no evidence that the Partnership has a solution for this challenge.

Member of the public

Theme 3: Costs of Implementing the Proposed Franchising Scheme

The analysis of implementation costs generated significant discussion about value for money, with the majority of participants (182) stating that the benefits outweigh the costs and risks. However, cost concerns were evident, with some saying the Combined Authority needed to avoid passing expenses to taxpayers (26).

The risk is worth the potential benefits. Growth, accessibility and equality of opportunity requires an excellent public transport system

Female, 55-64

Participants were also interested in how investment and affordability would be financially managed. Twelve respondents focused on the importance of maintaining affordable fares, while others focused on the potential for increased revenues (26) to offset implementation costs. Several highlighted concerns about fare increases (6), demonstrating tension between service improvement costs and maintaining accessible pricing. The relationship between implementation costs and passenger benefits emerged as a key consideration in evaluating the overall financial proposition.

Without significant financial support from the combined authority many of the bus routes probably wouldn't be run by the bus companies, or at least not at a usable frequency. Hopefully the greater financial risk will provide a better bus service, which more people will use as a result, and in turn that will increase revenue.

Male, 35-44

Theme 4: Financial and Cost Risks to Combined Authority

Participants expressed some concern about risk management and risk mitigation. A number of respondents acknowledged that some level of risk is inevitable in such a scheme (20). Others identified certain financial vulnerabilities, including concerns about franchises facing financial difficulties (16) and questions about the management of any funding shortfall (2).

The risk is entirely offset by the benefits. The purpose of government is to take risks the private sector will not accept.

Male, 35-44

Greater the risk, greater the reward

Female, 25-34

Questions about the Combined Authority's financial management surfaced repeatedly, with some of participants expressing doubts based on previous performance (17). Again, several raised concerns about fare increases (6) and taxpayer impact (26), suggesting careful consideration of risk allocation between different parties including taxpayers.

I don't support taking this risk as it's a burden on taxpayers and that money should be spent on education and hospitals.

Male, 35-44

The public and stakeholders were interested in long-term financial sustainability, with contributors seeking clarity on precept growth (4) and revenue generation (26). The public want to see robust financial safeguards in place while maintaining service quality and affordability.

When having greater control, it may also introduce potential financial liabilities. To mitigate these risks, it's essential to implement robust contract terms, performance monitoring, and financial safeguards. By carefully balancing risk and reward, the Combined Authority can ensure that franchising delivers a high-quality, sustainable bus service.

Prefer not to say, 45-54

Theme 5: Capacity and Capability

Analysis of capacity and capability issues revealed specific concerns about the Combined Authority's readiness to manage the financial aspects of the scheme. Contributors raised particular questions about financial management capability, with some (17) explicitly referencing concerns based on previous experiences with the Authority's financial handling.

I am somewhat sceptical as to both the financial strength and capability/experience of the Combined Authority to be able to take on this level of risk. It is not a simple undertaking and there could be significant downside if things go wrong. Nevertheless, I agree that if handled well franchising could result in greater benefits.

Male, 45-54

The relationship between organisational capability and financial outcomes generated focused discussion. Some contributors questioned the Authority's ability to manage complex financial arrangements, citing specific concerns about funding shortfall management (2) and preemptively addressing financial difficulties (16). The data suggests particular interest in ensuring proper financial expertise within the organisation.

The public and stakeholders highlighted the need for robust financial management systems, with a focus on revenue monitoring (26) and cost control. The analysis reveals key concerns about the Authority's capability to handle financial challenges, with some suggesting the need for additional financial expertise. Particular attention was paid to the relationship between organisational capability and financial risk management (20), underlining the requirement of having appropriate financial skills and systems in place for successful implementation.

If you're monitoring it, then you should be able to mitigate the risk

Male, 35-44

Chapter 9: The Management Case

Introduction

This section encapsulates questions on the Management Case, which sets out how the Combined Authority would manage the Proposed Franchising Scheme. There was one question relating to the Management Case in the short questionnaire – a total of 937 participants responded to this question. The same question was included in the longer questionnaire along with one further supplementary question. Sixteen key stakeholders answered the question and forty-two wider stakeholders and 879 members of the public.

Q. The Management Case sets out how the Combined Authority would manage the bus network under Franchising or an Enhanced Partnership. Do you have any comments on these plans?¹⁶

Table 9.1: The table below summarises the participants who provided a response to this question:

	Number of participants who made favourable comments	Number of participants who made unfavourable comments
All who provide a response	937	
Key Stakeholders	5	0
Wider Stakeholders	12	1
Members of the public	135	32

A smaller number of participants chose to answer the Management Case questions in the long form questionnaire, 56 for the question above and 53 for supplementary question. The additional question in the long form questionnaire focussed on the increase in

¹⁶ See Section 6 (paragraphs 6.40 – 6.50) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

See Section 7 (paragraphs 7.265 – 7.297 and accompanying Figures and Tables) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

capacity and capability of the Combined Authority to manage bus service improvements with either model.

Q. The Combined Authority will need to increase its capacity and capability to manage bus service improvements, both in the case of Franchising and Enhanced Partnership. Have you any comments on these plans?¹⁷

The response was as follows:

- Need capacity to manage service properly (11)
- Difficult/competition to recruit the right people (8)
- Employ the right people (7)
- Learn from other authorities' experience (6)
- Level of resource/expertise needed has been underestimated (5)
- Leverage expertise from operators (4)
- Agree with statement (3)
- The authority must take control/be accountable (3)
- Be cautious of creating a bloated workforce (2)
- Difficult to get right balance (2)
- Good that it creates jobs (2)
- Positive comments (2)
- Share resources with other local authorities (2)

Summary of Stakeholder Responses

This section captures the responses to the Management Case questions from organisations. It starts with a summary of responses received from the key stakeholders before looking at the wider stakeholder response.

¹⁷ See Section 7 (paragraphs 7.249 – 7.257 and accompanying Tables) of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

Key Stakeholders

Bus Operators

Whippet

Whippet supports CPCA's plans to enhance management capacity, stressing that centralised control is critical for aligning service delivery with community needs. They highlight the shortcomings of the current system and emphasize the importance of skilled leadership to ensure that bus reforms are effective. Whippet recommends CPCA focus on robust planning, proactive monitoring and seamless transitions to minimize service disruptions. They advocate for a tailored approach that considers local challenges, particularly in underserved areas. Whippet sees CPCA's management reforms as an opportunity to create a more reliable and customer-focused network, emphasising accountability and transparency throughout the process.

Stagecoach

The Combined Authority (CPCA) must enhance its capacity and expertise to manage bus service improvements effectively, whether through Franchising or an Enhanced Partnership (EP). Implementing these models will necessitate substantial investment in new staff and resources within CPCA, which could be partially alleviated through collaborative efforts with operators. Ensuring that newly recruited staff possess the necessary skills is critical; inadequately trained teams could damage CPCA's reputation and delay implementation.

Experience suggests that CPCA may underestimate the workforce needed for Franchising, where managing nine distinct functions with 15 staff appears insufficient. Conversely, the estimate of eight to ten additional roles for an EP seems more accurate, given operators retain more responsibilities. However, outsourcing costs mentioned in Table 7-26 lack clarity, warranting further clarification.

Governance frameworks and planning timelines for both Franchising and EP are outlined and appear reasonable, with EP offering shorter implementation periods. Yet, details on daily network management and contract responsibility remain vague, which could deter operators from bidding. The focus on accountability within management teams is commendable, but greater emphasis on operational, engineering, and customer service roles is needed to ensure tangible benefits for passengers.

Over-reliance on reporting structures risks inflating administrative costs without improving services. CPCA should consider streamlined approaches, such as Franchising light or EP+, to balance accountability with efficiency, reducing the administrative burden while supporting improvements that directly impact the public.

Stephensons

Stephensons stressed the importance of realistic planning for CPCA’s capacity-building initiatives. They cautioned against underestimating the complexities of franchising, advocating for more investment in staffing and training to ensure readiness.

Stephensons also raised concerns about potential disruptions during the transition to new management frameworks and stressed the need for clear communication with operators and stakeholders. They suggest CPCA adopt phased implementation to manage risks effectively and maintain public trust. Their focus on detailed, practical approaches reflects their preference for a collaborative strategy that integrates operator expertise into CPCA’s broader vision for bus service reform.

Ron W Dew

We would seek clarity on who the responsibility of customer service and other associated costs fall upon within contracts. SME’s may need to recruit additional internal staff to manage the workload. Operators should receive consultation and importantly final decisions on these details, in good time before preparing bids.

First Bus

First Bus strongly suggests collaboration among Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) to address the challenges of improving bus management capacity. They advocate for the development of standardized operational frameworks that facilitate shared learning and implementation of best practices across regions. Investment in workforce development is critical, including targeted recruitment and training to equip teams with the skills required to manage complex reforms. First Bus underscores the necessity of fostering robust public-private partnerships and maintaining open lines of communication with stakeholders to ensure that reforms meet both operational needs and public expectations. The organisation also highlights the importance of embedding clear accountability mechanisms to measure progress and maintain trust. By focusing on these key strategies, CPCA can build the capacity needed to deliver sustained improvements and achieve its ambitious goals. First Bus believes that strategic investments and strong leadership will play a pivotal role in creating a resilient and future-ready public transport system that meets the needs of diverse communities.

The Go-Ahead Group

The Go-Ahead Group strongly supports CPCA’s outlined approach to enhancing bus management capacity and suggests the significance of strategic leadership in this

process. They stress the need for clear recruitment policies to bring in skilled professionals who can effectively navigate the complexities of the proposed changes. Go-Ahead highlights that comprehensive training programs, tailored to the challenges of public transport reform, will be critical to ensuring the success of management improvements. Stakeholder engagement is a central focus of their feedback, as they argue that CPCA must maintain an open and collaborative dialogue to adapt to challenges and opportunities that arise during implementation. They also advocate for a structured and transparent approach to ensure public confidence in CPCA's ability to deliver its objectives. Go-Ahead believes that these measures, coupled with operational efficiency and long-term planning, will enable CPCA to build a robust and resilient public transport system capable of meeting future demands.

Transdev

Transdev offers limited specific comments on the proposed bus management plans but expresses a willingness to collaborate with CPCA in its reform efforts. They highlight the potential value of partnerships and knowledge sharing with other successful organizations to guide CPCA through the complexities of capacity building. Transdev encourages CPCA to consider innovative approaches to workforce development and system integration, focusing on solutions that drive efficiency and improve service delivery. By fostering collaboration and adopting flexible strategies, Transdev believes CPCA can navigate the challenges of public transport reform. Their response reflects a commitment to supporting CPCA's vision while displaying adaptability in achieving long-term success.

Transport UK

Transport UK notes that, in Table 6-4, the CA sets out a timeline of commencing procurement of franchised services in May 2025 but, in paragraph 7.294 there is a statement that "Transition to a franchised network is programmed to deliver the first franchised services 'in the first eight months' and take about 3 years to complete". This appears to imply that some franchised services may commence eight months after procurement, unless it is intended to mean that contract awards (followed by standstill periods) will be made in the 'first eight months'?

Alternatively, Transport UK could perhaps understand if it was the intention of the CA to award a number of smaller contracts – perhaps 1-bus franchises – designed for SMEs to commence within eight months of procurement. But it would be useful to receive clarity on this point.

Community Transport Association

The Community Transport Association (CTA) underscores the need for CPCA to adopt an inclusive and equitable approach to management capacity improvements. They recommend more engagement with community transport providers to ensure that local expertise is integrated into broader planning strategies by strengthening the role of the community transport officer. CTA stresses that equitable service delivery should remain a core focus, particularly for underserved rural communities. They suggest CPCA establish communication channels to align areas of focus and address challenges collaboratively with all stakeholders. Ensuring smaller operators retain a voice in decision-making processes is vital to maintaining service quality and public trust.

Bus Passenger Representatives and User Groups

Cambridgeshire Families for Sustainable Travel

Franchising offers the Combined Authority greater control and long-term stability, making it the superior option for managing the bus network. While this model entails a higher level of responsibility and a more significant transition, the consultation demonstrates that these challenges can be managed effectively.

In contrast, the Enhanced Partnership model involves a smaller transition but is less efficient and uncertain, as it places greater reliance on various bus operators. The Franchising model's potential to deliver a coordinated, stable network outweighs its management risks, which can be mitigated as outlined in the consultation.

Campaign for Better Transport

The Campaign for Better Transport highlights the importance of careful planning and phased implementation to manage complexities in transitioning to a new bus network model. Both franchising and enhanced partnerships demonstrate thoughtful approaches to governance, but franchising offers the advantage of centralized management. This streamlined structure enables quicker responses to issues like service disruptions and fosters a more cohesive network. However, the transition to franchising demands investment in staff training within the Public Transport Team to ensure they possess the necessary skills for effective management. The campaign underscores the need for robust preparation to minimise disruptions and maximise the benefits of a well-coordinated and responsive bus network.

Cambridgeshire Sustainable Travel Alliance

Although the Combined Authority would need to adapt to a greater degree, and it would take longer to implement franchising, the Management Case demonstrates that it has considered the issues involved and can manage the transition and deliver this option successfully. A franchised (fully contracted) system would be better 'future-proofed' to provide new services as the region develops and not be dependent upon continual negotiations as would be the case under an enhanced partnership. The outcome of enhanced partnership negotiations could not be guaranteed to deliver the required benefits for local communities.

Transport Focus

Transport Focus supports the CPCA's plans to manage customer relations under both franchising and enhanced partnerships, emphasising the importance of engaging with passengers to improve their experience. The commitment to conducting an initial consultation within 24 months of implementing the first contracts is welcomed, and Transport Focus offers its expertise in effective passenger engagement strategies.

Building trust is vital in transport, fostering loyalty and repeat usage. Research highlights that trust has both rational and emotional components. The rational elements include reliable service, punctuality, and value for money, while the emotional aspects, such as staff care and personalised attention, create stronger passenger affinity. Currently, bus travel largely focuses on the rational elements, with limited attention to emotional benefits. Passengers often perceive bus companies as detached, unresponsive, and lacking mechanisms for meaningful dialogue.

Transport Focus underscores the need for a robust passenger engagement strategy within CPCA's proposal. Key recommendations include gathering passenger satisfaction data, consulting on timetable and route changes, and publishing performance data to enhance transparency and trust. Clear communication during service disruptions and effective complaints handling systems are also essential. CPCA should assess current complaints processes, outline advantages and challenges of taking over these functions, and use complaints data proactively to improve services. Enhancing collaborative, transparent, and customer-centric practices is fundamental to success.

Local Governments (Constituent Councils in the CPCA Area)

East Cambridgeshire District Council

East Cambridgeshire District Council commends CPCA's focus on enhancing bus management capacity and addressing challenges in rural connectivity. The Council highlights the importance of ensuring equitable distribution of services across urban and rural areas, with particular attention to smaller communities that often face limited access to public transport. They stress the need for targeted investment in infrastructure and workforce development, including recruitment and training, to support CPCA in managing complex operational challenges. Transparency in planning and stakeholder engagement are essential for maintaining public confidence throughout the reform process. East Cambridgeshire recommends that CPCA ensure that management efforts align with local needs. These reforms are seen as a critical step toward creating a robust, accessible, and sustainable transport network that can adapt to future demands.

Peterborough City Council

The management case clearly sets the full end to end service, and it is good to see the engagement with other interested parties as being one of the key bullet points. If Franchising moves forward it is essential that we engage all stakeholders when building the new services and routes and maintaining this consultation post implementation will ensure the services deliver to the needs of the public. Looking at the various roles and outputs the CPCA will need a substantial team to deliver on this works.

Research and development and provision of supported services will be needed and early on as routes will need to be fluid to meet demand, we feel it should also address all transport requirements including Home to School Transport. Many children are transported to schools via taxis or minibuses we need to optimise the use of public transport to reduce these single occupancy journeys offering both monetary and carbon savings.

The idea of having one common branding is good and shows that services are all connected at present we have several brands in the city, and this indicates the routes are not joined or connect. Also, through this dealing with all customer interactions around service standards, queries, and compliments will give a much-improved service to the public as it will offer one central location for all queries. There should be a clear aim to drive the branding so that when residents see these buses it is epitomised with good levels of services, respectful and polite staff members and cost-effective routes.

As the brand grows and with it the trust we should see increased levels of patronage as a result.

Cambridge

The Council recommends that the CPCA ensures it secures access to the required level of resource and expertise to complete the contractual requirements of franchising in a timely manner.

The Council would like to understand the processes that would be in place for reviewing, monitoring and quality control of services that would operate under any proposed franchising arrangements.

The consultation acknowledges that an enhanced bus network with greater connectivity and availability could be achieved under either an Enhanced Partnership or Franchising. We look forward to a preferred model being developed by the Combined Authority which will detail how the existing and future Busway / Park and Ride services and facilities are included in or integrated with a franchised network.

Cambridge City Council

Of course, the Council recognises the risks and challenges associated with the scale of change envisaged. The Combined Authority will want to assure itself that it has or will have the capacity and capability to manage the transition, and the ongoing management of bus services in the future. We will be keen to understand more about how this can be assured, and how the operational management will be delivered.

South Cambridgeshire District Council

The Council is keen to ensure that governance arrangements for the franchising set up (in whatever entity the franchise is established) have democratic oversight, including taking on board the views of local members.

Local Governments (Neighbouring Transport Authorities)

Suffolk County Council

Suffolk County Council urges CPCA to focus on cross-boundary service continuity as part of its management reforms. They focus on the importance of collaborative planning with neighbouring authorities to ensure seamless connectivity and prevent disruptions to shared services.

If neighbours also go for Franchising, there is the possibility of creating an agile, cross-border staff group to help upskilling across all authorities and share knowledge.

Should probably be expanded to cover control of the road network, development across the region etc.

Other Key Stakeholders

Campaign for Passenger Transport

The Campaign for Passenger Transport urges CPCA to collaborate with local operators to utilize their expertise and knowledge. Concerns are raised over the use of consultants unfamiliar with the area, which could lead to misallocated services, cuts, and increased costs. While the proposed timelines and planning steps seem reasonable, operators need clarity on day-to-day contract management responsibilities to build confidence in bidding for services. Additionally, clear details on who will oversee customer service responsibilities are essential to ensure effective implementation and service quality.

England's Economic Heartlands

EEH suggest that given the increased control and flexibility that the CPCA would have in managing the bus network under the franchising model, it offers opportunities for strategic consideration of bus network design to ensure it can adapt to meet the changing needs of the place. This should be done in partnership with local communities, employers and services, and the governance structures in place should reflect the need for this kind of ongoing engagement. With Cambridge's expected growth trajectory, the design of the bus network should take into account emerging and future employment sites, housing developments and planned transport infrastructure. This is essential to make sure that as new housing and business communities develop, they do so in parallel to improved bus services and therefore establish ways of travel using public transport, rather than contributing to reliance on private vehicles and the associated impacts this has on congestion and the environment. This has the potential to enable the behaviour

change needed to increase patronage which will support the longer-term viability of the bus network, the shift to an integrated transport system, and the broader economic, social and environmental gains available.

Office of the Police & Crime Commissioner

The Management Case was set out for both options. The management case as presented supported the CA's business justification for Franchising.

Wider Stakeholders

Academic

Cambridge Biomedical Campus (CBC)

The franchising model would require significant change and additional departments at the CPCA to control and operate a county-wide bus network which will come at cost and resources. However, having a single body overseeing the whole bus network presents the opportunity to provide a more seamless and coordinated bus network, and one that also complements other modes of public transport.

The CBC would like to stress the importance of allocating appropriate funding and resources to ensuring that a seamless and coordinated bus network can be created. The CBC would encourage the CPCA to liaise with other authorities which have implemented a franchise model for their bus network, such as Greater Manchester Combined Authority, so that experiences can be shared, and mistakes can be avoided.

University of Cambridge

Cambridge University agrees that franchising will require a significant expansion of resources and governance structures at the CPCA, and these should not be underestimated. In addition to knowledge of the franchising model, it is imperative that the CPCA engage with the wider network of support, and we encourage the CPCA to reach out to colleagues in other areas already delivering franchising, such as Manchester (GMCA), and London (TfL). In addition, we encourage the CPCA to embrace the broader knowledge and skills within the region to include local authority partners, bus operators and businesses.

From our own learning, we would encourage the CPCA to include route managers who can work directly with operators and others to ensure the day-to-day delivery reaches

its potential and can address issues before they become problems that undermine the value of the network.

Inspire Education Group

Inspire agrees that the Consultation Document rightly identifies the risks of full-scale franchising, in particular its complexity and cost. A collaborative Enhanced Partnership offers a balanced alternative, leveraging transport providers' expertise while minimizing risks for the Combined Authority. By maintaining key elements of the existing system, this approach could achieve desired outcomes without the challenges inherent in franchising, providing a practical and effective path forward.

Charity & Voluntary Sector

Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce

The Chamber says there needs to be adequate planning if franchising is adopted, noting that an Enhanced Partnership places greater responsibility on delivery partners. Engaging with industry experts is crucial under both models to ensure the best outcomes for local communities.

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough call for CPCA's management reforms to recruit the right people, and align closely with sustainability and climate objectives. They highlight the need for innovative service planning that reduces car dependency and promotes environmentally friendly transport solutions.

Elected Representatives

North West Cambridgeshire MP

The North West Cambridgeshire MP would like a detailed breakdown of estimated staff costs, questioning the cost per employee, particularly under the franchising option, even considering the table spans two years.

Huntingdon MP

While franchising offers the opportunity for greater control, it places significant administrative and operational responsibility on the CPCA. There are concerns about the Authority's capacity to effectively manage this complex system and ensure local authorities actively collaborate.

The Huntingdon MP would recommend an independent oversight board involving local MPs, council representatives, and residents to regularly review the system's performance, financial health, and adherence to agreed goals, to be established.

District Councillor for Huntingdon East

Regardless of the progressed option, market town areas such as Huntingdon need to see improved services, including intra-town connectivity and improved journey times to key destinations such as Cambridge and Peterborough.

Environment, Heritage, Amenity, or Community Groups

ACORN Cambridge

ACORN supports franchising as the better option, arguing that additional manpower can focus on system improvements rather than negotiating with operators, as in an Enhanced Partnership. They advocate for greater democratic participation in managing the bus network through a transport board including representatives from the public, bus drivers, unions, and local councils. This inclusive approach would make the service more responsive to the needs of passengers and workers, ensuring the network is designed and operated with direct input from those most affected by its performance.

Trumpington Residents' Association (TRA)

The TRA response critiques the Enhanced Partnership (EP) model, arguing it is unlikely to achieve the Combined Authority's (CPCA) ambitions for public bus services due to the limited control it affords CPCA and the continued dominance of commercial operators. Under EP, operators retain ownership, fare revenues, and decision-making power, leaving CPCA reliant on legally binding plans and commitments from operators. If an operator fails to meet its obligations, CPCA would face limited recourse beyond costly legal action or terminating agreements—neither ensuring timely service delivery.

In contrast, these challenges are absent in the Proposed Franchising Scheme, which provides CPCA with greater control over the bus network. TRA say there is a need for robust staff resources, governance, and organisational structures, particularly under

franchising. CPCA must focus on careful planning, drawing on informed advice to build a team with substantial operator experience and strong commissioning skills. Lessons from other local authority services highlight the importance of maintaining operational expertise within the client organisation. Without this, contracting out services risks undermining quality and public benefit. TRA concludes that franchising offers a clearer, more reliable path to achieving CPCA's goals, provided staffing and governance are adequately developed.

Health Organisations

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

The franchising model would necessitate significant changes at CPCA, including the creation of new departments to manage a county-wide bus network, requiring substantial costs and resources. However, centralising control under one body offers the potential for a more seamless, coordinated bus network that integrates effectively with other modes of public transport.

Cambridge University Hospitals (CUH) highlights the need for sufficient funding and resources to achieve this vision. They recommend CPCA engage with other authorities, such as Greater Manchester Combined Authority, which have adopted a franchising model, to learn from their experiences and avoid potential pitfalls.

Town and Parish Councils in the CPCA Area

Bottisham Parish Council

Bottisham Parish Council highlights the importance of CPCA's management capacity improvements in addressing connectivity challenges faced by rural communities. They emphasise the need for targeted investments to ensure that smaller, underserved areas benefit from bus service reforms. Bottisham advocates for CPCA to engage directly with local councils to identify specific community needs and integrate these insights into broader planning strategies. Transparent communication and collaboration with stakeholders are seen as critical for ensuring the success of CPCA's management reforms. The Parish Council views these efforts as essential for creating a reliable and inclusive public transport network.

Girton Parish Council

Girton Parish Council supports CPCA's management reform efforts, supporting the importance of reliable and accessible services tailored to local needs. They stress the need for transparent decision-making processes and ongoing stakeholder engagement to maintain public trust throughout the reform process. The Parish Council recommends CPCA adopt a collaborative approach that incorporates community input into its planning and management strategies. By addressing connectivity gaps and fair service delivery, Girton Parish Council believes CPCA can achieve its goals of creating a robust and sustainable transport network.

Northstowe Town Council

Northstowe fed back that lots of Enhanced Partnerships would be unwieldy and difficult to manage. It will be important to learn from carrying out future case scenarios and monitoring data - having these areas of work centralised through franchising, the Combined Authority should then be able to use this data and focus on encouraging people to get on buses, to ensure there is a good price point, and to provide a good service that benefits residents across the whole area.

Whaddon

Whaddon Parish Council said CPCA's management reforms should focus on improving service reliability and accessibility, particularly in underserved areas. They advocate for collaboration with local councils and stakeholders to identify community-specific needs and ensure reforms address these effectively. Transparency and accountability in planning processes are highlighted as critical for maintaining public trust. Whaddon Parish Council supports CPCA's efforts to build management capacity but stresses the importance of fair service delivery and continuous stakeholder engagement to achieve sustainable and inclusive transport outcomes.

Other Wider Stakeholders

Cambridge

Cambridge Ahead supports franchising for its increased control and flexibility, enabling strategic bus network design to adapt to the city's growth. They stress the importance of engaging local communities, employers, and services to align bus services with emerging employment sites, housing developments, and planned infrastructure. Integrating public transport into new developments can reduce reliance on private vehicles, easing congestion and environmental impacts. This approach promotes behaviour change, increasing bus patronage and supporting long-term network viability. It also fosters an

integrated transport system, driving broader economic, social, and environmental benefits for Cambridge's expanding population.

Imperial War Museum Duxford

The Imperial War Museum supports the Franchising model for its ability to create job opportunities and enable the Combined Authority (CA) to implement improvements swiftly, as it assumes greater management responsibilities. In contrast, the Enhanced Partnership relies on negotiations with transport operators, making change and improvement less certain and potentially slower to achieve.

Summary of participant responses

For the main question for the Management Case, there were 937 public responses with 1271 comments.

General Feedback

Participants made 385 general feedback comments about the Management Case. Service quality and management emerged as the dominant concerns, one in six (63) said that management needed to focus on better and more reliable services; a similar proportion (58) highlighted the importance of improved management and expertise.

Hire some good people, give them authority to do what's necessary, objectives to meet and hold them accountable for the success of the project. Don't micromanage.

Male, 35-44

Public engagement and accountability featured prominently, with 55 responses stressing that public needs should be prioritised through consultation. Control and accountability of the Combined Authority was another significant theme for some (41). Thirty-three respondents expressed a lack of confidence in the Combined Authority's capability to deliver the bus reforms.

Consultation with local parish councils and residents is essential. Working together as communities.

Female, 65-74

Learning from other cities' experiences, particularly London and Manchester, was referenced 18 times, while others highlighted the importance of maintaining and improving rural services (14). Affordability was a recurring theme, with 13 mentions of the

need for affordable fares, and 7 responses explicitly warning against passing expenses to the public through fares or taxes.

Operational considerations also featured (10) concerning staffing challenges and opposition to profit-driven services. More specific operational aspects, including environmental factors (2), new technologies (3), and cross-boundary services (1), received fewer mentions but highlight the breadth of considerations raised.

There was a significant amount of feedback regarding whether the franchising approach was likely to lead to better management outcomes (278). Eighty-four per cent of this feedback was positive (233), mainly saying that franchising was the better option (61), and that franchising gives more control and accountability (50). A minority highlighted that it would be too costly so fares or taxes would rise (12). Others thought that management under an enhanced partnership would be better (7).

The general feedback suggests strong public interest in service improvement, but with clear concerns about implementation capacity and the need for robust accountability measures.

Theme 1: Organisational ability to manage

The public, and significantly stakeholders, have concerns about organisational capacity and management capability for bus reform. The strongest theme was the need for better management and expertise (58), followed by a direct lack of confidence in the Combined Authority's ability to deliver (33).

"Happy path" seems relatively sound, but with the skills being niche and the employment market being extremely challenging at the moment, it's hard to see whether competent, experienced and capable staff could be sourced and retained.

Female, 45-54

Service management emerged as a critical concern, with participants wanting better, reliable, and regular services (63), alongside stronger control and accountability mechanisms from the Combined Authority (41). Multiple responses highlighted specific operational challenges, including the anticipated difficulty in recruiting and training staff with the required skills (10).

The associated additional resources for Franchising seem reasonable and worth the greater control the Combined Authority will have. The Combined Authority can be held to account more readily by the public than a commercial bus company.

Male, 65-75

Participants emphasised the importance of learning from other cities and regions (18), suggesting the need to build on existing managerial experience rather than starting from scratch. The responses also indicated concern about maintaining service standards, on preserving and improving rural services (14) and ensuring joined-up service delivery (13).

Long-term planning and sustainability featured prominently, with responses highlighting the need to focus on long-term improvements (13) and accurate data-driven decision making (3). Technical and operational considerations were also noted, including the implementation of new technologies (3) and cross-boundary service management (1).

The feedback suggests widespread recognition that successful reform requires robust organizational capacity, management expertise, operational capability, and strong accountability mechanisms. This indicates that building and demonstrating organisational competence should be a key priority for the Combined Authority in implementation planning.

Theme 2: Recruitment, staff and employment

The public highlighted specific worries about the difficulty of recruiting and training staff with the required skills (10), particularly given the specialist expertise needed for managing a franchised system.

It would be good to operate the franchise version, as long as the 15 employees it discusses recruiting have between them a good understanding of local transport planning and delivery.

Female, 35-44

Employment-related responses acknowledged potential positive impacts, with some noting that both proposed plans would create jobs (5). However, this was balanced against concerns about the need for better management and expertise (58), suggesting apprehension about the availability of appropriately qualified personnel.

I agree that either option should be well within the Authority's capacity to manage, especially if it recruits well and motivates the team

Male, 65-74

The issue of staff consultation emerged in the responses, with specific mentions of the need to include bus employees in consultation processes (1) and seek cooperation with cross-border staff groups (2). This indicates recognition that existing transport workers' experience and insights should be considered in the reform process.

Management capacity featured in the responses, with some participants expressing a lack of confidence in the Combined Authority (33), often linking this to concerns about staffing and expertise. These concerns about organisational capability were frequently connected to the broader theme of needing better management expertise (58), suggesting that recruitment and retention of skilled staff is seen as crucial to successful reform.

The feedback indicates that workforce planning, recruitment strategy and staff retention should be key considerations in implementation planning, with particular attention needed for specialist roles and management positions.

Theme 3: Management costs

Participants expressed concerns that both franchising and EP are expensive and will increase costs for taxpayers (3) and wanting to avoid passing expenses onto the general public through fares or taxes (7).

The extra posts and funding required for EP could be a complete waste of funds if the desired improvements are not achieved. It will cost a lot more to set up a whole department to deal with the franchising model, but it cannot be started without investment, and we should be willing and ready to fund it if we wish to give it every chance of success.

Female, 75-84

Yes, save the taxpayers from being charged more and walk away from getting involved

Male, 75-84

Cost concerns were especially prominent in relation to franchising, with responses highlighting that franchising could be costly and could lead to increased fares or taxes (12). However, this was balanced by those who felt that improvements available through franchising are worth the extra investment (3).

Management efficiency featured prominently, with a significant number of responses emphasising the need for better management and expertise (58). This was often coupled with concerns about the Combined Authority's capability (33), suggesting worries about both management costs and value for money in the new structure.

Some responses specifically noted that services should not be run to make profits (10), suggesting a preference for cost-efficient management focused on service delivery rather than commercial returns.

The feedback indicates that while the public recognises the need for investment in management structures, there are significant concerns about cost control and the impact on service affordability. This suggests that transparent cost management and clear demonstration of value for money should be key areas of focus in implementation planning.

Theme 4: Management of transition period

In terms of management of the transition period, the public and stakeholders have significant workforce concerns, in particular staff recruitment and training challenges (41). This workforce dimension is especially critical given the complex nature of service transformation. Participants suggest that there is a need for better management expertise (10) and advocate for learning from other cities' experiences, such as London and Greater Manchester (13), highlighting the value of established best practices in successful transitions.

Although the Combined Authority would need to adapt to a greater degree, and it would take longer to implement franchising, the Management Case demonstrates that it has considered the issues involved and can manage the transition and deliver this option successfully.

Female, 45-54

A crucial aspect highlighted is the importance of accurate data-driven decision making (2) and the implementation of new technologies to support the transition (9). The technological integration component is seen as fundamental to modernizing service delivery and ensuring operational efficiency. There are notable concerns about cross-boundary service management (3), suggesting the need for careful coordination across different administrative areas and potential implications for regional connectivity.

The public and stakeholders support maintaining service quality during the transition, particularly the need for better and more reliable services (55). This underscores a mandate for careful transition planning that supports service continuity while implementing structural changes. The focus on learning from other cities' experiences suggests a pragmatic approach to transition management, combining innovative solutions with proven methodologies from successful implementations elsewhere.

Just make it fairer and more accessible and better cost for villagers who do not drive but need to get to work

Female, 35-24

Theme 5: Managing risks

Risk management emerges as a multifaceted concern, with financial sustainability being a primary focus that permeates multiple aspects of stakeholder feedback. The public and stakeholders expressed strong concerns about cost implications, with a significant number (58 responses) specifically that expenses should not be passed onto the general public through increased fares or taxes.

Political risks to franchising implementation were highlighted (3), while some viewed franchising itself as too risky (11), indicating a perceived need for more robust risk mitigation strategies. The need for accurate data to inform risk management decisions was emphasized (2), suggesting a desire for evidence-based decision making in risk assessment processes.

A franchised system could be far more agile, adapting to new circumstances and technologies as they arise. But again, needs the right leaders who understand risks and leading an agile business.

Male, 25-34

Some risks are involved in both. A form of EP may be quicker & initially less costly to implement but would be too much dependent on the outcome of negotiations with operators. The overall goal of full control by the Combined Authority is worth the extra time & staffing costs.

Male, 65-74

Environmental risk considerations featured prominently, with a substantial number of respondents (61) calling for environmental factors to be prioritised in risk management strategies, reflecting growing awareness of sustainability imperatives. Operational risks regarding service reliability received significant attention, with many respondents (55) making calls for better and more reliable services. This operational focus suggests a sophisticated understanding of the interconnected nature of service delivery risks and their potential impact on system performance. The feedback supports comprehensive risk management approaches that address financial, environmental, and operational dimensions while maintaining service quality.

Theme 6: Role of County Councils, District Councils and partnership working

There was limited feedback from participants on partnership working. This said, they called for ensuring local authority areas are represented on the Bus Board (3) and emphasized the importance of regular input from Parish/Town Councils, highlighting the need for inclusive governance mechanisms.

The feedback shows support for collaborative approaches between the Combined Authority, County and Districts as well as Parish & Town Councils along with operators and the public themselves.

Part of this thinking can be understood in the context of public support for the managerial aim of Combined Authority providing greater accountability and control.

The focus on partnership working suggests a recognition that successful service delivery requires effective coordination across multiple administrative levels and other stakeholder groups. The feedback indicates a clear preference for governance structures that balance local input with strategic coordination, while maintaining clear lines of accountability and responsibility across all participants.

The district councils and in some cases even parish councils must have input. The combined authority is too distant from the necessary detail.

Male, 75-84

Theme 7: Consultation and engagement requirements

Overall, in the Management Case, there was limited focus on consultation and engagement mechanism (13) compared to other topics.

Plans look sensible. Will be good to understand if the public will be consulted upon bus route commissioning needs. Rural bus connectivity is not well articulated in this consultation, and rural populations will make up a large number of car owners with longer car journeys to avoid if buses work well

Female, 35-44

There was support for establishing a Bus Board (3) a formal mechanism to support the next stage of implementation.

Concrete recommendations from the public included ensuring bus employees are part of consultation processes, incorporating input from non-bus users, and maintaining regular engagement with Parish and Town Councils.

Consider a redraw of the network with inputs from existing users and non-users.

Male, 35-44

Chapter 10: Draft Equality Impact Assessment

This section summarises the comments received on how the Proposed Franchising Scheme could impact on persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Combined Authority's Draft Equality Impact Assessment.

Q. The Combined Authority's draft Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) identifies the potential impacts of the proposed Franchising Scheme or Enhanced Partnership on people with protected characteristics. Do you have any comments on it?¹⁸

Overall, there were 880 participants who provided comments in response to the potential impact of the Proposed Franchising Scheme on persons with protected characteristics

Key stakeholder organisation responses

There was limited response to this question from stakeholder organisations.

Bus Operators

Go-Ahead Group

The Go-Ahead Group highlights significant opportunities for market improvement through inclusive recruitment practices and social value initiatives under the proposed franchising model. The company cites its own successful programmes, particularly Go-Ahead Women and apprenticeships, as evidence of effective diversity recruitment.

The competitive procurement process within franchising could deliver additional community benefits by incorporating social value metrics in bid evaluations. This could include initiatives targeting recruitment of people with disabilities and the long-term unemployed, extending benefits beyond purely network improvements.

Furthermore, Go-Ahead stresses the value of leveraging diverse commercial operators' expertise to enhance service accessibility and inclusivity. This would be achieved through continued engagement with charities, innovative training programmes and ongoing

¹⁸ See Section 6 (paragraphs 6.57 – 6.62) of the Consultation Document and Appendix 6 for information to support answering this question. See Section 7 (paragraph 7.321 and Table 7–34) and Appendix 6 of the Consultation Document for information to support answering this question.

improvements in bus design specifications. The company concludes that these combined approaches would strengthen both operational delivery and community impact through the franchising model.

Local government (Constituent Councils in the CPCA area)

Cambridge City Council

People need regular, reliable and affordable connection to vital services including education and training, healthcare, employment, open spaces, leisure, retail and other essential services.

This is particularly important for groups who are more likely to experience social isolation, people on low incomes and those eligible for concessionary fares, people with disabilities or caring responsibilities, young people aged under 25 who need to travel before 9:30am, the elderly and those with young families.

Cambridge's communities have also seen bus services chopped and changed too frequently, with residents in some parts of the city left feeling disconnected from amenities and services in other parts of the city and its hinterland.

It will be important that bus services are accessible to people with disabilities and affordable. And that there are suitable complementary arrangements in place for people for whom, for whatever reason, buses are unlikely to meet their needs.

Local governments (Neighbouring transport authorities)

Suffolk County Council

Improvements apply to all users whether they fall into one or more of the protected characteristics.

Bus Passenger Representatives and User Groups

Cambridgeshire Families for Sustainable Travel

Cambridgeshire Families for Sustainable Travel suggest that the current bus system restricts some people's life chances more than others and therefore transforming the bus network will particularly benefit younger people, older people, women and disabled

people. They contend this places a strong moral case on the Combined Authority to act in the way that will create the largest benefit and do the most to reduce inequalities. The Combined Authority will be able to transform the bus network to a greater extent under franchising than an enhanced partnership.

Campaign for Better Transport

The draft Equality Impact Assessment identifies potential benefits and challenges for individuals with protected characteristics. For instance, ensuring accessible transport for disabled users is vital, especially in areas with historically poor access, such as certain areas in Cambridge. Engaging with local advocacy groups during implementation can ensure that services are designed to meet the diverse needs of all users.

Wider Stakeholders

Academic

University of Cambridge

We see that the franchising model offers better potential to deliver more targeted and equitable improvements across the bus network and the supporting infrastructure to include standards and consistency of reliable information, both visual and audio.

Inspire Education Group

While the Consultation Document concludes that a franchising agreement would have no negative impact on accessibility, this assumption appears to be based on existing national regulations, which would likely apply regardless of the chosen model.

Charity & Voluntary Sector

Cambridgeshire Chambers of Commerce

Under whichever scheme it is imperative that protected characteristics remain protected. It is also important that disadvantaged in terms of connectivity are given greater consideration.

Elected Representatives

North West Cambridgeshire MP

As the Equality Impact Assessment makes clear, people with some of the protected characteristics (particularly disabled people, young adults, and older people) will benefit particularly from franchising as these are often people that may be less likely to drive and therefore more dependent on effective public transport networks.

Environment, Heritage, Amenity, or Community Groups

ACORN Cambridge

Equality Impact Assessment shows how important Franchising could be in widening access to the bus network. It would offer better security for more groups through improved safety at bus stops and on the buses. Improved and consistent standards for vehicles would make buses more accessible and better able to serve the needs of the community.

Trumpington Residents' Association

Trumpington Residents' Association (TRA) endorses the Combined Authority's Equality Impact Assessment, particularly franchising's potential advantages over Enhanced Partnership for protected groups.

TRA say there is a need for a structured approach to implementing improvements, recommending rolling inclusion and safety audits of individual bus routes. Key areas of focus include safety concerns such as bus stop lighting and passenger behaviour, alongside accessibility issues ranging from physical infrastructure to information provision.

TRA advocates for direct involvement of people with protected characteristics in the audit process to ensure practical, well-informed improvements. They also stress the importance of contingency planning to prevent service gaps from creating exclusion from work and other opportunities.

Health Organisations

Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

We see that the franchising model offers better potential to deliver more targeted and equitable improvements across the bus network. CUH strongly suggest that continual monitoring is undertaken by the CPCA to mitigate any negative impacts on vulnerable groups to ensure this is not overlooked beyond the initial assessment, after implementation. CUH would support regular reviews to ensure this does not occur.

Town and Parish Councils in the CPCA Area

Kingston Parish Council

The Equality Impact Assessment mentions the impact on users of the need to access technology e.g. through smartphones, to get information about services and to make payment to use these services. We believe the provision of offline alternatives is crucial to enable potentially disadvantaged groups such as the elderly and the disabled to fully benefit from bus services, and that greater emphasis should be given to this. Would Franchising, if it gives greater control to the CA, enable the CA to demand that full offline provision is made for access to information?

Great Wilbraham Parish Council

We think that a bus service through our village would be better protected under the Franchising Scheme. From our survey we identified that prime users of a bus route would be children going to and from the Village College at Bottisham, attending sixth form colleges in the Addenbrooke's/Hills Rd area and elderly people who do not have access to a car or do not drive, some of whom are disabled. All of these vulnerable people would be better served and less socially isolated and dependent on others by a more secure service under the Franchising Scheme.

Histon & Impington Parish Council

Histon and Impington Parish Council contend that buses run as a service for people, rather than a corporation to extract profit would be better placed to support people with protected characteristics; and that, accommodations to support people with diverse needs should be deliverable with the investment into the service that a Franchising Scheme will allow.

Other Wider Stakeholders

Imperial War Museum Duxford

The Imperial War Museum consultation feedback emphasises the potential benefits of improved public transport accessibility to enable broader visitor access to this significant cultural institution.

The proposed improvements in bus service infrastructure and demand responsive transport would enhance visitor access, particularly for older people and those relying on public transport. Connecting local communities with transport hubs and the museum would create new opportunities for visitation and engagement with this important heritage site.

Reduced and consistent fares were highlighted as crucial for improving financial accessibility, potentially opening the museum to visitors from rural communities who currently face barriers to access. Increased service consistency and quality would build visitors' confidence in using public transport to reach the museum.

Summary of participant responses

For the main question for the Draft Equality Impact Assessment, there were 880 participant responses with 1,373 comments.

General Feedback

Disability access emerged as the most pressing concern (110), highlighting the critical importance of inclusive transport design and delivery.

Disabled people are more likely to rely on bus services and therefore any improvement needs to take their needs into consideration. I would like to see improved wheelchair spaces on buses and seating at every bus stop. (I am disabled and currently one barrier for me using the bus is that although I can walk reasonably ok, I can't stand to wait for a bus).

Female, 35-44

As a disabled person my needs are not met by the local authority or local bus service provider! This is disability discrimination it whenever the issues is raised to the local authority and to the bus companies it is ignored! I do not choose to travel by bus I have to due my disabilities and being unable to drive!

Male, 35-44

There is substantial support for equality-focused improvements, with many respondents explicitly agreeing that equality is a crucial consideration and viewing franchising as a

superior option for delivering equality outcomes (both 83). Access for older passengers emerged as another primary concern (56), followed by a broader need for more accessible services across all user groups (46).

The bus companies in Cambridge are not providing a service that allows women with buggies to rely upon getting on a bus they are being failed. Disabled people cannot be sure of a place because space is at a premium because the inadequate number of buses is causing overcrowding. Old people are having to stand, the designated seats are being grabbed by young fit people who are perfectly able to stand but are too selfish and ignorant to offer up their seat to a more needy person. But the real problem is not enough buses being run for the numbers of people travelling. It is deeply discriminatory. It takes so long to get to town and back anyone needing more frequent toilet visits would not use these buses and it is isolating them. The whole thing is shameful. Only the franchising system would address these inequalities that are affecting residents with protected characteristics on a daily basis at present and I see it with my very own eyes far too frequently. It should not be happening at all.

Female, 65-74

Notably, some respondents said that bus services should serve the entire community rather than specific demographics (40). The better-coordinated, consistent services, particularly regarding ticketing systems, was highlighted as a key factor in promoting equality (38). Some members of the public would like to see the impact assessment widened to include those with mental health issues and neurodiversity.

Unified/one stop shop ticketing, and timetables would be easier to manage, especially for people with learning difficulties or older people who are less confident getting around. Control of the network by the combined authority could also take into account other needs rather than just the mass of commuters. e.g. People caring for others, often working shifts or non-standard hours and fitting their caring duties around their work, whose economic value (i.e. through their ability to get around to do unpaid caring) nevertheless has an impact.

Female, 45-54

Chapter 11: Qualitative research and Events

Summary of focus groups

This section is a summary of the findings from the focus groups that were conducted alongside the public consultation survey, as part of the Qualitative Research Report, with specifically:

- Under 16 year olds
- 17 and 18 year olds
- Disabled people
- Minority ethnic women
- Students and taxi drivers
- Businesses
- Low-income residents of all ages
- Mid-life parents with young children and no/low bus use

For methodology and full report details, please refer to Qualitative Research Report. We provide the qualitative summary finding in two ways: first by key theme mentions bullet-pointed and then in detail following the logical flow of the consultation materials from current perceptions through to supporting or opposing the proposed Franchise Scheme.

Key themes

By counting mentions across all the groups, it is possible to gain some collective sense of the thematic areas of interest with participants. However, we would suggest that bus frequency was ahead of network coverage as a priority issue through the detailed analysis.

1. Reliability & Punctuality (c180+ mentions)
 - Late buses
 - Cancellations
 - Not showing up
 - Unpredictable service
2. Network Coverage & Routes (c160+ mentions)
 - Limited routes in rural areas
 - Poor connections between towns
 - Need for better coverage
 - Everything focused on city centers
3. Cost & Affordability (c150+ mentions)
 - Ticket prices
 - Value for money
 - Comparison with driving costs

- Student/youth discounts
- 4. Frequency & Availability (c140+ mentions)
 - Limited evening/night services
 - Long wait times
 - Infrequent services in rural areas
 - Peak time issues
- 5. Safety & Security (c120+ mentions)
 - Safety concerns at night
 - Behavior of other passengers
 - Lack of CCTV/security
 - No seatbelts
- 6. Accessibility (c100+ mentions)
 - Issues with pushchairs
 - Wheelchair access
 - Elderly access
 - Limited space for mobility devices
- 7. Driver Behavior (90+ mentions)
 - Attitude of drivers (usually positive)
 - Helpfulness
 - Communication
 - Treatment of vulnerable passengers
- 8. Cleanliness & Hygiene (80+ mentions)
 - General cleanliness
 - Maintenance
 - COVID concerns
 - Condition of bus stops
- 9. Comfort & Experience (70+ mentions)
 - Seating comfort
 - Temperature control
 - Overcrowding
 - Journey experience
- 10. Public Transport Integration (60+ mentions)
 - Connection with trains
 - Interchange between services
 - Integration with other transport modes
 - Combined ticketing

Detailed summary of focus groups

Perceptions of Current Bus Services

Participants described bus services as essential to mobility, accessibility, and environmental goals, but that systemic weaknesses undermine their effectiveness.

Reliability was identified as the most significant issue. Delays, last-minute cancellations, and inconsistent schedules frustrated users, eroding trust and discouraging reliance on the network. Rural users were particularly affected, often finding that delays or cancellations left them stranded with no viable alternatives.

“Buses are often late, and cancellations happen without warning. It’s impossible to plan your day.”

M, Over 35s, Low Income Group

“If you miss the morning bus because it’s full, you’re stuck waiting for the next one, which might not come for 30 minutes.”

F, 17-18, Student Group

“Real-time updates would make a huge difference. Right now, you just stand there guessing when the next bus will come.”

F, 17-18, Student Group

Frequency was another pressing concern, particularly in rural areas where buses run infrequently or not at all during evenings and weekends. Urban users highlighted overcrowding during peak hours, which made services less comfortable and reliable.

“In rural areas, buses are few and far between. If you miss one, you’re stuck for hours.”

F, Over 35s, Disabled Group

“There aren’t enough buses after 6 p.m. It’s hard to get back home if you’re out late.”

M, Under 35s, Parents and Low Bus Usage Group

Coverage gaps were particularly troubling for rural participants, who felt isolated due to the lack of direct connections to urban centres or essential services such as hospitals and schools. Urban users generally highlighted the bus network worked best in the centre of town but noted challenges in accessing peripheral or suburban areas.

Despite these issues, participants acknowledged the affordability of bus services as a key strength, particularly for students and low-income groups. However, this affordability

was seen as insufficient to compensate for the network's operational weaknesses. Participants stressed the need for reform to address these persistent challenges.

"Once you're in the city, buses are everywhere. The problem is getting into the city in the first place."

F, Under 35s, Business Group

"In rural areas, buses are few and far between. It feels like public transport just doesn't prioritise us."

F, Over 35s, Low Income Group

Priorities for the Bus Service

Participants valued reliability above all else. Punctual, dependable services were seen as the foundation of a successful network. Without reliability, participants felt other improvements would have limited impact.

"Reliability is everything. If the buses aren't on time, people just stop using them."

F, Over 35s, Parents and Low Bus Usage Group

"Cancellations with no warning are the worst. It completely disrupts your day."

F, Over 35s, Minority Ethnic Female Group

Frequency emerged as the second most important priority. Participants called for more frequent services during peak hours to reduce overcrowding, as well as expanded schedules during evenings and weekends to accommodate shift workers, leisure activities, and rural communities.

"More buses during rush hour would make such a difference. Standing in packed buses every morning isn't sustainable."

F, Under 35s, Business Group

Coverage was critical for rural participants, who stressed the importance of direct routes to key destinations. Infrequent or slow, multi-stop journeys to hospitals, schools, and workplaces made buses impractical for many.

Accessibility improvements were also prioritised. Participants stressed the need for low-floor buses, well-designed stops with shelters and seating, and clear information systems, particularly for older, families with push chairs and disabled users.

“Buses need to be accessible for everyone. That means ramps, clear timetables, and stops that are easy to reach.”

M, Over 35s, Low Income Group

Support and Opposition to the Proposed Bus Franchising Model

The balance of opinion, in the groups, leaned significantly toward supporting franchising, with participants viewing it as an opportunity to address structural flaws in the current bus service. Supporters identified franchising’s potential to centralise control, provide a larger, stronger bus network, and introduce integrated ticketing systems. Many felt franchising was the only way to promote public needs over corporate profitability.

“Coordinating everything—routes, timetables, tickets—makes it simpler for everyone. That’s what franchising can deliver.”

M, Over 35s, Students & Taxi Drivers Group

Participants highlighted franchising’s potential to protect vulnerable routes, particularly in rural areas, which were often neglected under the current deregulated model. Centralised control was seen as essential for creating a cohesive network that serves all communities, not just profitable ones.

“Franchising can push for better buses—electric, accessible, and reliable. That’s what’s missing now.”

M, 17-18, Student Group

However, opposition focused on the financial risks and potential for operational disruption. Participants expressed concerns about fare increases, service cuts on unprofitable routes, and the challenges of managing a transition to franchising. Others questioned whether franchising could effectively address issues like traffic congestion and driver shortages, which they saw as fundamental barriers to improvement.

“Manchester’s franchising system is still new, but it’s had problems. We need to make sure we’re not repeating their mistakes.”

M, Over 35s, Students & Taxi Drivers Group

“If something goes wrong, it shouldn’t all fall on the public. Operators need to share the risk.”

M, Over 35s, Low Income Group

“Although franchising carries risk. It would still be better overall for the communities involved.”

F, Under 16, School Group

While support outweighed opposition, participants focussed on the need for transparent planning, robust oversight, and community engagement to ensure that franchising delivers tangible benefits where they are needed without exacerbating existing challenges.

“A Bus Board with people from all areas—users, operators, councils—would keep the system grounded and responsive.”

F, Over 35s, Parents and Low Bus Usage Group

Strategic Case for Bus Reform

Participants viewed bus reform as an opportunity to realign the network with broader societal objectives. Strategically, reform was seen as essential for achieving environmental sustainability, reducing congestion, and fostering social mobility. The current system was described as fragmented and outdated, unable to meet the demands of a growing population. In particular, participants emphasise that it is difficult to commute using buses and the need for better rural services with more extensive coverage.

Participants highlighted the importance of integrating buses with other transport modes, such as trains, cycling infrastructure, and walking paths, to create a seamless transport system.

Participants also stressed the need for reform to improve public perceptions of buses, making them a viable and attractive alternative to cars. This shift was seen as critical for achieving long-term environmental and social benefits. The public see that ongoing consultation and engagement with them is necessary to successfully achieve these reforms.

“If we want people out of cars and onto buses, we need a radical rethink of the whole system.”

F, Under 35s, Minority Ethnic Female Group

Economic Case for Bus Reform

Economically, participants highlighted the role of buses in supporting local economies by improving access to jobs, education, and healthcare. Reform was viewed as a way to remove barriers for marginalised communities, enabling greater economic participation and reducing inequality.

“With franchising, there’s less chance rural routes would be cut. It would put people before profits.”

F, Over 35s, Minority Ethnic Female Group

“I think the government can provide a better service, using less money.”

F, Under 16, School Group

“Lower fares would get more people on buses. It’s simple—make it affordable, and more people will use it.”

M, 17-18, Student Group

However, participants emphasised the need to balance cost efficiency with public benefit. They argued that reform should prioritise equity and accessibility over profitability, ensuring that all communities—particularly rural and underserved areas—have access to reliable and affordable transport.

Commercial Case for Bus Reform

The commercial case for reform focussed on creating a system that balances public accountability with operational efficiency. Franchising was seen as a mechanism to introduce centralised oversight, while allowing for commercial innovation. Participants highlighted the importance of using franchising contracts to enforce consistent service standards and prioritise public needs.

“Reliability is key. If people can trust the buses to show up on time, they’ll use them more—and that’s good for business.”

M, Under 35s, Student Group

Integrated ticketing systems were identified as a key commercial benefit of reform, offering users a seamless experience across multiple operators. Participants also saw franchising as an opportunity to create more cohesive and efficient networks, reducing redundancies and optimising routes.

Concerns about monopolies and reduced competition were raised, with participants designed in such way franchising contracts that encourage innovation and prevent complacency among operators.

“SMEs need help to compete. Otherwise, it’ll just be the big companies dominating again.”

F, Over 35s, Business Group

Financial Case for Bus Reform

The financial case for reform highlighted the need for substantial investment to achieve meaningful improvements. Participants recognised the importance of public funding in supporting unprofitable but essential routes, particularly in rural areas. Cross-subsidisation—using revenue from profitable routes to support less viable ones—was seen as a key mechanism for creating a network focussed on local communities.

“Rural routes don’t make money, but they’re essential. Franchising means you can fund them properly without cutting corners.”

F, Over 35s, Parents and Low Bus Usage Group

Participants also stressed the importance of aligning financial priorities with environmental goals, such as investing in electric buses and sustainable infrastructure. While the upfront costs of reform were acknowledged, participants argued that long-term savings from reduced congestion and car dependency could justify these investments.

“Public transport should lead the way on climate action. If we manage this well, it could set an example for other sectors.”

F, Over 35s, Minority Ethnic Female Group

Concerns about the financial risks of franchising were frequently raised. Participants warned that poorly managed reform could lead to fare increases, service cuts, or inefficiencies. Transparent financial planning and accountability were seen as essential for maintaining public trust.

“What happens if the numbers don’t add up? Will they raise taxes or cut services? Either way, we lose.”

M, Over 35s, Low Income Group

“They need to look at other ways of raising money—taxpayers can’t be the fallback every time.”

F, Over 35s, Disabled Group

Management Case for Bus Reform

From a management perspective, participants identified several operational challenges that reform must address. The current system’s fragmented governance was seen as a major barrier to creating a cohesive network. Participants emphasised the need for centralised oversight to coordinate routes, schedules, and standards effectively.

“With franchising, they can finally manage the system properly- set standards, monitor performance, and actually deliver what people need.”

F, Over 35s, Business Group

Driver shortages and inconsistent training were highlighted as significant issues affecting service quality and reliability. Reform was viewed as an opportunity to invest in workforce development and standardise operational practices across the network.

“Driver shortages are already a problem. If franchising doesn’t address that, it’ll fail no matter how well it’s planned.”

M, Over 35s, Students & Taxi Drivers Group

Improving communication with users was also a key priority. Participants stressed the importance of real-time tracking systems, clear and consistent information about delays and cancellations, and transparent feedback mechanisms to rebuild trust in the service.

“Franchising needs to be well-organised—proper timetables, clear communication, and penalties for operators who don’t deliver.”

M, Over 35s, Parents and Low Bus Usage Group

Participants called for greater community engagement throughout the reform process, ensuring that public needs and expectations are central to decision-making. This was seen as critical for creating a system that reflects the priorities of all users with ideas like the Bus Board and a recognition that the public know locally how the buses are actually working.

Summary of presentation events

Events commenced in the second week of September to ensure people were back from summer holidays. CPCA, supported by Westco, arranged 3 different kinds of events: invite only meetings for stakeholders, meetings focussed on sharing information about the bus consultation with protected characteristic groups, and pop-up events in locations across the whole of Cambridgeshire to raise awareness with the wider general public.

Stakeholders events

Six events, one for each district, were held for stakeholders inviting them to a detailed presentation by CPCA officers with an opportunity to ask questions. Each event was attended by the senior team at the Combined Authority including Judith Barker, Executive Director of Place & Connectivity and Andrew Highfield, Assistant Director of Public Transport Services. Note takers from Westco recorded key questions from stakeholders at these events.

While stakeholders were encouraged to attend a stakeholder event in their area, they could also attend any one of them.

A meeting was also held for all the bus operators to listen to any concerns and respond to their questions at the outset of the bus consultation.

Protected characteristics

CPCA held seven events to engage people from protected characteristic groups that would be more likely to use the bus network, more likely to be impacted by any changes, as well as being potentially harder- to-reach through the broader consultation survey mechanisms. This included an event at a food bank, a child and family centre, the RNIB, the Deaf Association, a retirement village, an ethnic society and a disabled group.

These events were attended by at least one of the Combined Authority's senior team plus support from Westco Ltd and were tailored to the needs and requirements of each of the groups.

Drop-in events

Westco conducted a further sixteen wrap round drop-in events at locations across the region, strategically chosen to ensure we spoke to bus users and potential bus users, as well as ensuring the public events took place in all the district council areas in the CPCA area. These were advertised in advance to ensure anyone who wanted to could come

along and ask questions or get help in filling out the short survey form. These events took place in bus stations, train stations, and town centres.

At the drop-ins a large numbers of summary leaflets were handed out to the public, while a much smaller number of people were supported to complete survey forms there and then.

Questions and comments have been grouped together thematically for ease of understanding what was asked across all of the events – it was common for similar questions to be asked in a number of the sessions.

Financial & Business Model

- "What is likely accuracy of the benefit cost models?"
- "The costs look linear -are the congestion costs baked into the costs per hour?"
- "I'm here in a personal capacity as a taxpayer. The Return On Investment in the business case. Is it true there is a margin of error of 20%?"
- "Were there any objections to the increase to the mayoral precept?"
- "Re bus levy -how much is currently allocated to bus services and how much discretion is there around this?"
- "Can you tell us more about the financial modelling?"
- "Is it built into the business case that operators make x% return?"
- "What is the margin for error in pricing costs?"
- "Re franchising -what are the benefits for the public?"

Governance & Political Concerns

- "CPCA is a political body, how would we be protected from political decisions?"
- "What could be the impact of the mayoral election?"
- "Since 1985 transport act was introduced to promote competition, but this hasn't worked. Therefore, I'm a big supporter of franchising, but why is the consultation so long and what could be the effect of the mayoral election in May 2025? Can the process be reversed by a new mayor?"
- "How will CPCA behave differently if franchising comes in?"
- "Who will manage the network under franchising?"
- "The timeline as outlined states that the decision will be made on 22 January. There will be a mayoral election in May 2025. Normal business will cease towards the end of March 2025 due to the pre-election period. With 8-10 weeks before the end of his administration, why is the Mayor making this decision so close to an election whereby a different mayor could take a different view, which has a massive impact on all our businesses?"
- "What happens if the mayor is not re-elected?"

Operational Issues & Infrastructure

- "We already have bus depots, why can't they be used?"

- "Re depots -there is 1 in Cambridge and 1 in Peterborough -will you consolidate existing depots?"
- "Is this an individual route model or depot model?"
- "Are bus shelters part of franchising?"
- "How will we get experts in buses to the area?"
- "Nine months ago, the mayor's office announced new routes. What are they?"
- "Evening services in Peterborough. Some journeys across the city are impossible due to timings. How closely are you looking to integrate with train services?"
- "Why ruled out workplace parking levy?"

Route Planning & Network Coverage

- "What will CPCA do if left with lots of unprofitable routes?"
- "How will routes be changed to meet new developments?"
- "On network design - where is the network going to come from and who will pull it together?"
- "How will the network be extending in Huntingdonshire?"
- "Can we have more access to the countryside? Can we have a bus stop at Wimpole?"
- "Are we going to get lost in this?"
- "We only have one bus service, which comes from Royston in Hertfordshire, will this be included in the proposals?"
- "Is the network serving people in the right way?"
- "Are we stuck with this?"
- "Which option will give the most reliable service?"

Rural & Cross-Boundary Services

- "What reassurance can be given to rural areas?"
- "What consideration has been given to cross boundary services?"
- "Will you subsidise fares for cross-boundary fares coming in?"
- "With franchising would you still coordinate with other local authorities for bus routes that cross boundaries?"
- "Of the three Franchising examples that were given, West Yorkshire, Manchester, Liverpool, all are totally different to our area, are there any more relevant examples?"
- "Are there any examples where franchising has benefited rural services?"

Private Operators & Competition

- "Why have the private operators not been pushed to improve?"
- "How will you persuade private operators to tender?"
- "Will there be contractual obligations on the private operators under franchising?"

- "SMEs will be effected by the model and the majority of operators in this region are SMEs. There is not a lot of security or protection for us. What is in the plan for SMEs over and above small batches of work, as operators are searching for more security than that?"
- "If franchising goes ahead, are you going to do something for smaller operators?"
- "You mentioned having 12% control at the moment. What would that look like with franchising?"
- "Are you talking to colleagues where enhanced partnerships are working exceptionally well, for example Norfolk. There is an excellent combination of operator knowledge, funding enhancements to services, investment in infrastructure with TCF money which is changing how the buses operate. How does this flow into the consultation and to the mayor's decision on which route to take?"

Integration & Accessibility

- "Are you connecting with walking and rail networks?"
- "Will people be able to take bikes on buses?"
- "What is going to happen about community transport?"
- "Can they also be increased from rural areas to the Park & Ride stations, to act as feeder services?"
- "Is that revenue the same as other fare paying passengers?"

Consultation Processes

- "Does the Council have capacity to deal with the consultation?"
- "Are you able to contact vol orgs and employers in the NHS for consultation?"
- "Why does the questionnaire not ask why people are not using the buses?"
- "Don't have a bus service, but keen interest. We have already done a survey; do we transfer the results to the questionnaire?"
- "Can we get copies in different languages?"
- "When will this happen?"
- "I missed the start of the meeting. Is the outcome to decide between franchising and procurement?"

Environmental & Congestion Concerns

- "If we don't get a good bus services, including running at a loss, how will we get to net zero?"
- "How do you get people out of their cars, as an on-time bus network is dependent on lower congestion?"
- "Has the cost of moving people away from cars etc. into bus journeys been taken into account, e.g. advertising for people to use the bus?"
- "Congestion is one of the most difficult challenges that an operator deals with on a day-to-day basis and the customers judge us on this metric of service satisfaction. A question for the CPCA on designing and procuring the network, if franchising is decided, how does the influence on the LHA change and what might the outcome of that be? Stagecoach have been operating 99.5% reliably. For the modelling, consider that it will cost £3m in cost to get the services where they need to be. £2 fare is 1.5m extra passengers p.a. and where are they going to come from?"
- "Regarding the cost of operator being related to RPI and wage inflation, you put vehicles in every schedule change just to stand still and that has to be a metric within it. Find a way to have greater control over the road network; what else can you lead on to level the playing field and help the SMEs in terms of vehicle purchasing?"
- "Is CA looking at improving roads as well?"

Other Questions

- "What is the value of suppressed demand, those people who want to use buses but can't?"
- "Are we to understand that franchising is the preferred option?"
- "Has imposing a statutory tourist tax been investigated?"