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Railfuture East Anglia's Objection to the Transport and Works Act Order for the Greater Cambridge Partnership's (GCP's) Cambridge South East Transport (CSET) Scheme

Introduction

Further to our letter of objection dated 25 February 2025, Railfuture East Anglia presents its statement of case in advance of the public inquiry, which you are holding in respect of the Cambridge South East Transport (CSET) scheme. Railfuture East Anglia is a voluntary organisation campaigning for a better passenger and freight rail network. Our statement of case builds upon our original objection and focuses on the scheme's alignment with public transport objectives, its impact on existing bus services, and its consistency with Greater Cambridge Partnership's (GCP's) sustainable transport policies.

Public Transport Objectives and Impact on Existing Services

The proposed CSET scheme includes the development of a large Park & Ride facility near the A11 and A1307. While intended to encourage car users to switch to bus travel for the final leg into Cambridge, this approach may inadvertently undermine existing bus services extending beyond the Park & Ride, particularly those serving communities such as Haverhill and Linton. By concentrating resources on the Park & Ride model, there is a risk of diminishing the viability of longer-distance bus routes, potentially leading to reduced services for these communities.

Furthermore, the emphasis on Park & Ride may not effectively serve residents who rely on public transport for their entire journey, as it primarily caters to car owners. This could result in a public transport network that is less inclusive and fails to meet the needs of all users.

Consistency with Sustainable Transport Policies

The GCP's City Access programme aims to improve access by sustainable transport to the city centre and key employment sites, encouraging commuters away from cars, and supporting air quality improvements. The programme emphasizes the need for public transport journeys to be competitive, sustainable, and reliable, with safe and easy active travel alternatives that provide reliable options to replace car use.

We consider the current CSET proposal, with its significant reliance on a large Park & Ride facility, conflicts with these objectives. By promoting car travel to the Park & Ride site, the scheme may not sufficiently encourage a modal shift towards more sustainable transport options for the entire journey. This approach could lead to increased traffic congestion and environmental impacts in areas surrounding the Park & Ride, contrary to the goals of reducing car dependency and improving air quality.

Deviation from Original CSET Proposals

The original CSET proposals from around 2016 focused on more modest interventions, including bus priority measures, walking and cycling enhancements, and road safety improvements along the A1307 corridor between Haverhill and Cambridge.

These earlier proposals were more aligned with sustainable transport principles, aiming to improve existing infrastructure and services without encouraging additional car travel. The current scheme's shift towards constructing a new busway and large Park & Ride facility represents a significant departure from these initial plans, raising concerns about its environmental impact and effectiveness in promoting truly sustainable transport solutions.

Lack of progress with the City Access Programme

The GCP's City Access programme aims to reduce congestion and improve public transport to offer better journeys, as well as reducing air pollution and carbon emissions from transport.

However, the lack of substantial progress in implementing this programme undermines the effectiveness of expensive schemes like the CSET. Without comprehensive congestion reduction measures in Cambridge, access to the city will remain slow and unreliable. Investing in rail or light rail-based alternatives could provide more efficient and dependable transport solutions ensuring that the benefits of such infrastructure projects are fully realised.

Alternative Solution 1

Railfuture East Anglia advocates a solution that aligns more closely with sustainable transport objectives. We have, for many years, called for the restoration of the railway line between Cambridge and Haverhill. This proposal offers a rail-based mass transit system along the A1307 corridor, providing a sustainable and efficient transport option that could reduce car dependency and support the region's growth.

Such a rail link would offer the following advantages over the proposed busway.

- Increased capacity over the busway. A recent study by Railfuture and Jonathan Roberts Consulting indicated there could be as many as 2,000 daily journeys during peak periods alone - more than can be handled by the proposed busway [see attached report 'A big role for a Haverhill Railway']. A railway would be better placed to help meet the city's transport needs as it expands over the coming decades.
- Minimizes environmental impact. A railway, using much of the original alignment, would avoid the environmental damage that the construction of a new concrete busway would bring.
- Connects the growing town of Haverhill to the busy and expanding rail network centred on Cambridge and beyond. Haverhill is already one of the largest towns in the country not rail connected and yet could expand further in the future to around 40,000 people. The GCP has not properly considered the future transport needs of the town, many residents of which are dependent upon Cambridge for employment and other services. If substantial resources are committed to the busway, prospects for reopening a railway to Haverhill will be seriously diminished and the town will remain economically and socially disadvantaged compared to other large towns in the region.

The proposed railway has gained considerable public support over the years. This includes a petition with 5,000 signatures from the Haverhill area and support for the restoration from the current and previous West Suffolk (including Haverhill) MPs.

A 'Restoring your Railways' bid submitted by Railfuture in 2021 even though unsuccessful, received strong encouragement from the Department for Transport, with the scheme being rated as 'a good case for future development' [see attached bid and DfT response]. Railfuture appreciates that the rail link to Haverhill is a longer-term solution and that in the short term the original CSET proposals on the A1307 from 2016 could provide a way forward.

Alternative solution 2

The GCP has said that they did not consider the Haverhill rail option as a possible alternative to the busway because of the high associated costs. However, we would challenge whether comparing a 5-mile busway to Granta with a new 15-mile railway extending all the way to Haverhill is a valid comparison.

Railfuture's Haverhill report (attached) not only argues that a Haverhill rail link could be very successful but that there was also a distinct role for the inner part of the line from Cambridge to Granta Business Park (see para. 29).

It therefore follows that another alternative to the busway could be to build the railway as far as Granta Park as a first stage, with the prospect of extending to Haverhill as a second stage in the future. We believe that even building a new railway only as far as Granta Park could still provide substantial advantages over a busway and so attract more users. These include:

- Faster journey times: 10 minutes to Cambridge South, 13 minutes to Cambridge main station, and 18 minutes to Cambridge North
- Step change in capacity: a 4-car train providing more than 5 times the capacity of a single decker bus or 3 times a double decker; an 8-car train could provide 10 times the capacity of a single decker bus or 6 times a double-decker. This would future proof capacity as Cambridge continues to grow.
- Better journey for users: a train has much faster boarding times compared to buses and offers a smoother ride with greater comfort.
- Direct link into the local and national rail system, including East West Rail in the future at Cambridge South
- Potentially serving both Babraham Research Campus and Granta Park if a light rail option is adopted (see Haverhill report para. 121 and map).
- Potential for a new station at Sawston allowing more people to access the railway along the route (as well as providing direct access to the new Cambridge City Football Ground which recently opened in the village).
- The railway could for the most part use the course of the old line, potentially only deviating to the north in the Granta Park area to provide closer access to Babraham Research Institute. It would avoid the environmental destruction of the proposed busway route

A rail option would still include a park and ride site at Granta Park. In the short term this might still result in more car-based journeys from Haverhill and other parts of West Suffolk at the expense of connecting bus routes. However, this would only be until onward rail extension to Haverhill in the future. In addition, Granta Park could become an additional

railhead offering access to the national rail system as a whole and would deliver more rail-based journeys with corresponding environmental benefits.

Cost of a rail link

The 5-mile (8-kilometre) busway is projected to cost some £160 million or £32 million per mile. These costs are comparable to railway costs. The proposed reopening of the 7.5-mile (12-kilometre) March to Wisbech rail line, also being promoted by the GCP is estimated to cost up to £200 million or £26 million per mile. As an example of a railway line recently reopened, the 5.5-mile (9-kilometre) Leven Line in Scotland cost £116 million, or £21 million per mile. An additional and important consideration is that a railway option to Granta would only need to be four miles (6.5-kilometres) long since it would leave the West Anglia Mainline at the original junction location south of Shelford railway station.

A Haverhill-bound rail link would be more expensive due to land acquisition and preparation costs. Nevertheless, based on the busway projected cost of £160 million this still allows for rail construction at a higher level of £40 million per mile. Indeed, the full cost of a Haverhill railway, estimated at £600 million by the GCP also works out at £40 million per mile based on the 15-mile length.

It is clear to us that the busway proposal should have been tested against an alternative rail option to Granta Park and that dismissing the rail alternative by considering only the entire route to Haverhill is a serious error and an inappropriate comparison that inevitably leads to a predetermined outcome.

Conclusion

In summary, Railfuture East Anglia objects to the current CSET scheme on the grounds that it may undermine existing public transport services, conflicts with GCP's sustainable transport policies, and deviates from earlier, more sustainable proposals, as well as prejudicing the future delivery of light rail or heavy rail route to Haverhill, one of the largest towns in England without rail access. In the longer term a reinstated railway to Haverhill will help deliver the transport capacity needed along the A1307 corridor.

However, to proceed with the busway without testing rail alternatives to Granta Park could be considered negligent in that poor transport solutions may be adopted which could impact the city and its surrounding area for many decades to come and cause unnecessary environmental damage, which will remain in perpetuity.

We urge the Department for Transport to consider these concerns and explore the proposals we have put forward that better align with sustainable transport objectives and serve the needs of all communities in the region, as well as providing the necessary capacity for future proposed growth.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Hollinghurst
Secretary, Railfuture East Anglia

www.railfuture.org.uk www.railfuturescotland.org.uk www.railfuturewales.org.uk
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