



COMBINED AUTHORITY BOARD

THURSDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2025

Venue:	Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN	
Time:	10.00 am	
Present:	Dr Nik Johnson Councillor Anna Bailey Councillor Chris Boden Councillor Dennis Jones Councillor Lucy Nethsingha Councillor Anna Smith Councillor Bridget Smith Councillor Sam Wakeford Al Kingsley John O'Brien Councillor Edna Murphy	Mayor East Cambridgeshire District Council Fenland District Council Peterborough City Council Cambridgeshire County Council Cambridge City Council South Cambridgeshire District Council Huntingdonshire District Council [substitute] Business Board Integrated Care Board Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority
Apologies	Councillor Sarah Conboy Darryl Preston	Huntingdonshire District Council Police and Crime Commissioner

Minutes

1	Apologies for Absence
	Apologies were received from Councillor Sarah Conboy, with Councillor Sam Wakeford attending as substitute. Apologies were also received from Darryl Preston.
2	Minutes of the previous meeting
	The minutes of the meeting on 22 January 2025 were amended following a request from Councillor Chris Boden, approved as an accurate record and signed by the Mayor. The action log was noted.
3	Declaration of Interests
	No interests were declared at this point. Councillor Chris Boden declared an interest at agenda item 8 as a trustee of FACT Community Transport.
4	Announcements
	No announcements were made.
5	Public Questions
	Two public questions were received for the meeting. The questions and responses are published here.
6	Petitions
	No petitions were received.
7	Forward Plan
	It was resolved to: A Approve the Forward Plan for February 2025

8	Bus Reform [KD2024/067]
	The Executive Director, Place and Connectivity, introduced the report and highlighted key points to members. Councillor Anna Smith provided an overview of the Transport and Infrastructure Committee meeting held on 24 January 2025. The committee unanimously voted to recommend bus franchising to the Mayor. Members sought and received confirmation on various aspects, including financial streams, and discussed the risks and benefits of franchising compared to the Enhanced Partnership model. The discussion highlighted the greater control over planning and delivery that franchising would offer. Concerns about connectivity, particularly in rural areas, were addressed by officers. The focus was on the opportunity for a significant change, prioritizing community needs over profit. The extensive work by officers to reach this point was acknowledged. Members inquired about the mechanisms and implications if a future Mayor decided to reverse the decision, specifically regarding the financial implications in terms of additional work and resources required. The Legal Advisor explained that under section 123(n) of the Transport Act 2000, there are provisions for revoking the scheme. This would involve a review process of how the franchising is operating, meeting three specific conditions for revocation, conducting an assessment to ensure these conditions are met, and undergoing an audit and public consultation. The process is similar to setting up bus franchising and would take a significant amount of time and incur costs comparable to the initial process. If the decision is made to end franchising, there would be a run-off period for existing contracts to allow for replacements to be put in place. Councillor Anna Bailey acknowledged the significant work done by officers under competing demands. She advocated for better bus services, emphasising the need to set principles without meddling in details. She highlighted the challenges in East Cambridgeshire, such as low population density and long travel distances, and noted that franchising could help address these issues. However, she pointed out that franchising is costlier and riskier, and further work is needed to understand residual risks and uncertainties before making a decision. She also raised concerns about the lack of clarity on what a revised network would look like and the limited additional funding in the business case. She questioned the benefits for rural areas and the assumptions in the model, such as borrowing, car mileage reduction, and doubling bus passengers. She stressed the need for a mass transport system and expressed her reluctance to make a decision twelve weeks before the mayoral election. She emphasised that the decision is far-reaching and should be made after the election, while clarifying that she is not opposed to franchising in the future. Councillor Chris Boden stated that Fenland District Council recommended an Enhanced Partnership (EP) over franchising, though either scheme could work. While supporting franchising in principle, he highlighted unmitigated risks and the impact of development in South Cambridgeshire on bus usage, advocating for convenient, reliable busways. He expressed discomfort with the current franchising model and emphasised the need for further Board oversight over the next year. He raised concerns about the assumptions of a modal shift to buses, citing a lack of evidence and the general preference for cars due to unreliable bus services. He questioned the consultation process for only comparing one model of franchising against one model of EP, without exploring more detailed options. Officers explained that the assessment and consultation processes complied with legislation, with independent verification from Grant Thornton. The consultation also incorporated learnings from other regions and advice from Mike Bartram, a fellow at the Institute of Consultations. The process provided valuable insights into the network and wider connectivity, which should be utilised moving forward. Councillor Bridget Smith highlighted that residents in her village cannot access apprenticeships in Cambridge due to inadequate transport options, restricting their job opportunities. Stressing that the proposal aims to provide these individuals with more choices, she noted that lack of access to transport is a major driver of poverty and inequality. Providing reliable, affordable transport is a quick solution to this issue. Raising the potential for changes in government commitment to public transport in the future, she questioned how the scheme could be adjusted. Officers confirmed that within the currently proposed model, decisions can be made regarding commercial and procurement aspects, phasing of lots, and depot strategy. While the broad model is set out in the approved assessment, further granular decisions would be necessary. Thanking the team for their extensive work, Councillor Lucy Nethsingha noted the long process and

significant changes in the landscape since the decision-making began under the previous Mayor. She emphasised the need for flexibility and resilience in the system to serve Cambridgeshire and Peterborough effectively, highlighting the increased public funding in the bus network and the importance of democratic accountability.

The Chief Executive acknowledged the need for expertise to deliver the proposed workstreams and suggested changes in the organisation's operations, skillsets, policy, and governance. He confirmed there are ongoing discussions with other regions and the potential need for a separate committee to oversee bus service decisions, ensuring proper implementation and timely decision-making by the Board.

Acknowledging that cars are often the simplest option for those who can afford them, Councillor Sam Wakeford emphasised the importance of making decisions based on current data and the need for democratic accountability. He supported making a timely decision to address market failures and improve decision-making, thanking the team for their efforts.

Councillor Dennis Jones emphasised the importance of providing choice for people. He asserted that franchising is the way forward, as the principle has been established and the public has expressed their support. He urged for the implementation to proceed without further delay.

Praising the team for their efforts, Councillor Anna Smith acknowledged the long and significant work leading to this point. She noted the risks and costs associated with both franchising and Enhanced Partnership (EP) models, emphasising the importance of providing choice for residents. She pointed out that rural and urban areas would benefit from franchising, which offers greater control compared to EP. She stressed that decisions should balance commercial and social values, allowing for better planning and connectivity. She mentioned that residents, businesses, and schools consistently request better bus services, with 63% of residents in favour of franchising. While acknowledging that franchising is not perfect, she urged for immediate action to start the process, as residents expect timely decisions and improvements.

Al Kingsley acknowledged the validity of all perspectives and expressed a slight concern about the risks and benefits related to social equity, access to skills, and training. He emphasised the need to mitigate risks and find evidence of impact, suggesting a stronger commercial perspective to grow and sustain providers. He noted the importance of judging based on current knowledge and successful models in other regions.

John O'Brien emphasised that the primary goal from the Integrated Care Board point of view is to maximise opportunities for health and care services for patients and staff, which depends on greater control and influence. He noted that both models offer advantages. Health providers find franchising attractive but recognise the need to mitigate financial and resource-related risks. The appeal of franchising lies in the greater control it offers.

The discussion addressed the decline in national passenger numbers, noting that the local decline is less severe but significant work is needed to double passenger numbers. Emphasis was placed on focusing on frequency, fare, and safety to attract more bus users. The 30-year business plan is based on current local plans and is considered pessimistic regarding population growth, with an objective to reduce car mileage by 15%. Network design was discussed, with a proposal to present a network paper to the next TIC. The profitability of certain routes and the challenges in rural areas were highlighted, emphasising the need for a depot strategy to support smaller operators and SMEs. It was explained that borrowing would support depot acquisition and that both franchising and EP would impact the precept. The business case was initially based on a £12 precept, which has since increased to £36, making the percentage increase less significant.

The importance of democratic responsibility was emphasised, along with concerns about the Board's political interventions. It was stressed that the Board should establish principles. Once the scheme is operational, it requires oversight. There is a need to justify decisions to each Board Members' districts and but also a need to understand each other's challenges.

Members discussed the importance of considering safe travel, with officers highlighting lessons learned from Manchester where safety was initially less of a focus. It was noted that there are different aspects of safety, including passenger and operator safety, and the role of traffic commissioners in regulating bus and heavy-duty vehicles. While public transport is generally safe in the UK compared to other modes of transport, the importance of making people feel safe at bus stops and the perception of safety was emphasised. Officers confirmed that while the responsibility lies with operators, the

Combined Authority must stress the importance of safety, embedding it into all workstreams and flagging it at appropriate stages, such as procurement. Officers confirmed that following any decision, officers will begin implementation planning. Key workstreams have been identified, and decisions will need to go through the proper governance of the CPCA for oversight. Councillor Chris Boden sought advice from the Monitoring Officer whether he should participate in the vote on this item as a trustee of FACT Community Transport. The Monitoring Officer advised that such a decision rests with the individual Member, and whether they feel an impartial observer would view it as a conflict of interest. Councillor Boden made the decision to recuse himself from the vote for recommendations A to F. A recorded vote was requested by Councillor Anna Smith and was supported by Councillor Lucy Nethsingha and Councillor Sam Wakeford. On being proposed by Councillor Anna Smith, seconded by Councillor Dennis Jones, it was resolved to: A Note the completion of the bus reform consultation process, its extent and the responses received including the discussions and feedback from Transport and Infrastructure Committee and Overview & Scrutiny Committee in January 2025. B Note the Westco Consultation Report at Appendix 2 C Approve the CPCA Consultation Response Report at Appendix 3. D To recommend to the Mayor that he makes a franchising scheme as set out at Appendix 5, complying with all associated statutory requirements E When the Mayor has decided whether or not to make a franchising scheme agree: • to adopt and publish the Combined Authority's response to the consultation, together with the Mayor's decision as the report to be published by the Combined Authority under section 123G (1) of the Transport Act 2000 (as amended by the Bus Services Act 2017) (the "Act"); • in accordance with section 123G(2) of the Act to give notice to the Traffic Commissioner F If the Mayor decides to make a franchising scheme: • to publish the scheme set out at Appendix 5 on behalf of the Mayor at the same time as the Westco Consultation Report (Appendix 2) and CPCA Consultation Response Report (Appendix 3) to be published under section 123G(1) of the Act; • at the same time to publish a transitional notice in the terms set out in Appendix 6 and then within 14 days of the date upon which the transitional notice is published, to give notice to the Traffic Commissioner of its publication on behalf of the Mayor if the Mayor so decides (or alternatively CPCA) as required by the Public Service Vehicles (Registration of Local Services) (Franchising Schemes Transitional Provisions and Amendments) (England) Regulations 2018; • to agree that, in conducting the procurement process for the provision of local services, the Combined Authority will facilitate the involvement of small and medium sized operators in the provision of local services as set out in the report "Bus Franchising: Facilitating the involvement of small and medium-sized operators" at Appendix 4 to enable compliance with section 123 G (3) of the Act; • to commence with implementation and mobilisation of franchising, noting section 4.4 of this report (Next Steps in the event of a Mayoral decision to approve franchising). G If the Mayor decides not to make a franchising scheme: • to advance the process to implement an Enhanced Partnership in accordance with sections 138A to 138J of the Act, relevant statutory guidance and supporting legislation noting section 4.5 of this report (Next Steps in the event of a Mayoral decision not to make a franchising scheme). • Approve the repurposing of the existing 'development of bus franchising' budget to be used for the initial development work for the Enhanced Partnership.

The voting was recorded as follows:							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Councillor Anna Bailey	for	for	for	abstain	abstain	abstain	abstain
Councillor Chris Boden*	-	-	-	-	-	-	abstain
Councillor Dennis Jones	for	for	for	for	for	for	for
Al Kingsley	for	for	for	for	for	for	abstain
Councillor Lucy Nethsingha	for	for	for	for	for	for	for
Councillor Anna Smith	for	for	for	for	for	for	for
Councillor Bridget Smith	for	for	for	for	for	for	for
Councillor Sam Wakeford	for	for	for	for	for	for	for
*Councillor Chris Boden declared an interest as a trustee of FACT and recused himself from the vote for recommendations that could be deemed a conflict of interest.							
9	Recommendations from the Skills and Employment Committee						
	The Board was advised that the recommendations tabled had been unanimously supported by the Skills and Employment Committee at its meeting on 20 January 2025.						
9a	Further Education Cold Spots						
	Thanks were extended to the team for their significant work, which took longer than expected due to the thorough assessment by Grant Thornton. The importance of basing decisions on realistic data was emphasised. Appreciation was also expressed to all FE providers who engaged in the process and submitted impressive funding bids, highlighting the need for further investment in skills to drive productivity. It was clarified that the current phase was an expression of interest, and full applications had not yet been submitted. The importance of focusing on successful outcomes and the overall impact of investment on the breadth of provision and qualifications was stressed. Outcome measures will consider accredited learning and overall results, not just participation numbers. The issue of coldspots in East Cambridgeshire and St Neots was discussed, with a call for collaboration to address these areas and ensure the right courses are available. The enthusiasm of the Skills Committee for further involvement and support was noted, along with a request for clearer reports. On being proposed by Councillor Lucy Nethsingha, seconded by Sam Wakeford, it was resolved unanimously to: - A approve the proposed Grant Funding approach to spend the £4.5m Capital Investment - B delegate authority to the Assistant Director of Skills and Employment, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer, to enter into grant funding agreements with selected providers on behalf of the Combined Authority						
9b	Draft Adults Commissioning Strategy - KD2025/001						
	It was noted that the document's objective is a commissioning strategy, not an adult skills strategy, outlining intentions on how to commission. It is accompanied by a regional skills and employment plan that details the region's priorities. The focus is on commissioning arrangements rather than specific areas at this stage. There was an acknowledgment of the importance of adult skills funding, which includes residency, eligibility, and provision funding. The strategy should apply proportionately to areas, including disadvantage uplifts when going out for providers. Adult skills funding supports both adult learners entering work and those in low-paid jobs seeking to upskill for career progression. Members emphasised the need to channel funding to areas of greatest need noting that this document is part of a broader package and not about prioritising specific areas. The geographical uplift in percentage terms is currently small and it was suggested that this should be re-examined. The commissioning process should be influenced by the needs of under-skilled adults and those whose skills are underutilised.						

On being proposed by Councillor Lucy Nethsingha, seconded by Sam Wakeford, it was resolved unanimously to:

- A approve the proposed Adult Skills Commissioning Strategy 2025-2028
- B approve the implementation of the three-year plan-led grant funding agreements for FE Colleges and Local Authorities and the WEA subject to DfE funding for the period 2025 – 2028.
- C approve the procurement of Independent Training Providers (ITPs) under contracts for services, subject to DfE funding.
- D approve contracts for services to be issued over 3 years (2025 – 2028) to bring them in line with grant funding agreements and support sustainability and capacity building within the sector.
- E delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Skills & Employment, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer, to enter into multi-year grant funding agreements and contracts for services for the Adult Skills Fund and Free Courses for Jobs Fund on behalf of the Combined Authority.

Chairman at the meeting on
Thursday, 6 February 2025



Combined Authority Board

6 February 2025

Title:	Public and Member Questions
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Question 1 – from Simon Martin, local resident

Section "5.4 Current Situation in CPCA" in the agenda pack, sets out the current involvement the Combined Authority has in bus services across the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough region, in areas where the CA already has some form of day to day control and say in what happens with the existing bus network.

The region has for recent decades been blighted with unwelcoming poor condition bus stops, has what appears to be an increasingly unreliable realtime passenger information system which doesn't always reflect the true running status of buses, lacks an easily available affordable single ticket to be used across all operators and routes, has bus journeys badly impacted by traffic and roadworks, and doesn't appear to be doing anywhere near enough to actively increase awareness of the bus routes across the network that actually does exist right now in the region - not even to the catchment areas of those routes receiving £15 million - so as to improve ridership levels on those services, both now and in the years ahead to contribute to their chance of sustainable long term success as the region transforms in to the chosen method of Bus Reform.

The report further outlines at 5.2, that bus passenger numbers locally and nationally have been declining for many years - even long before Covid. With £15.046 million being invested in the vitally important 'socially necessary bus services' in this financial year alone, we as a region risk continuing this downward trend with further reductions in passenger numbers in the interim before the Combined Authority is able to have a more say and control, and such a continued fall in numbers could surely make services more unsustainable and costly to fund than they already are.

As a bus passenger, I very much welcome and look forward to improvement of the bus network in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. I'm hugely supportive of the overall aim that the Combined Authority has shown it wishes to achieve.

Please can the Combined Authority outline exactly what it is willing and able to do, in line with the region's adopted Bus Service Improvement Plan, Bus Strategy, and Vision for Better Buses, so as to further improve the day-to-day real life experience of bus passengers in the region, from today, covering the immediate short-term so as residents and visitors experience real noticeable improvements and avoid further bus network decline, right through the interim period until the time that the chosen model of Bus Reform has been completely implemented across the entire region fully operating as the model of Bus Reform that is chosen today.

RESPONSE:

Thank you for this detailed and well-informed question. It is my priority to ensure that further progress is made to improve bus services and deliver our bus strategy, whilst the *Bus Service Improvement Plan* (whether with franchising or Enhanced Partnership) is delivered.

The investments in bus services over recent years are testament to the priority the Combined Authority has made to provide better bus services and step in when the commercial market no longer provides some of those services. This is vital for connectivity in our region.

The Tiger On Demand services that have recently gone live in much of the region show the real-world differences and improvements that can be made as we reform the bus network, especially for rural areas. The Combined Authority has also delivered a significant percentage of the wider precept funded services, making real differences for residents with improvements to frequencies, new places being served and better connectivity between services. There are further Tiger routes to follow in the Spring 2025. Since 2019, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have had a 69% increase in local authority supported bus service miles while there was a 10% increase across England outside London over this time.

The Tiger pass has supported and enabled those Under 25 in the region to access education, work and leisure opportunities and has seen significant applications and usage. Working closely with our bus operators is vital to ensuring the ongoing success of that scheme and the local fare cap and other fare and ticketing schemes that deliver for passengers.

Having an effective, detailed idea of passenger satisfaction is important as we press for improvements now, roll out bus reforms and monitor our performance. Further details on that will be brought by Officers to the March Transport and Infrastructure Committee.

The Bus Operators Forum meeting involving our bus operators, highway authorities and CPCA is very important to us, and we aim to use this as a base for ensuring improvements during the transition to whatever form of bus reform is taken. In the forum and elsewhere, we are working closely with the local highway authorities on roadworks and congestion, and will continue to do this, up to and as part of bus reform.

There are over 20 million journeys made on the bus network in the region each year. It's the primary mode of transport for so many of our residents and its vital we make the system better.

Question 2 – from Sarah Hughes, Cambridgeshire Sustainable Travel Alliance

Cambridgeshire Sustainable Travel Alliance notes that on 24 January, the Combined Authority's Transport and Infrastructure Committee voted unanimously to recommend that the Mayor choses franchising as the key to bus reform.

We were delighted to note that Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative members on the TIC joined the 63% of consultation respondents who supported franchising.

Our Alliance believes that franchising would give the Authority the powers it needs to establish the expanded, co-ordinated, attractive, high-quality bus network which our communities require, by bringing the bus network under local control, accountable to the mayor who is, in turn, accountable at the ballot-box.

An Enhanced Partnership, however, would be contingent on agreement by the current private operators with an effective veto available to the one dominant operator, potentially jeopardising effective reform, and perpetuating barriers to entry by other operators who might bid to provide our communities with innovative, high-quality services.

Whilst Franchising may bring risks and responsibilities, we ask the Board to consider the risks inherent in not proceeding. Post-deregulation, our bus network has shrunk drastically, leaving many rural communities with no public transport options. Recent research from the Institute of Transport Studies showed that between 2008 and 2023, bus services declined by 84% in Fenland, 75% in Peterborough and 71% in Huntingdonshire and East Cambs. This decline must be reversed.

A high-quality, affordable, accessible bus network is the cornerstone:

- of an effective public transport system;*
- of fulfilling the Authority's key ambitions, of economic growth, connectivity, and quality of life;*
- of our young people's access to college courses, training and jobs;*
- of access to shops, healthcare and a social life;*
- of stemming the seemingly inexorable rise in road congestion;*
- of the prosperity and wellbeing of our local communities.*

What will the Mayor do to provide Cambridgeshire and Peterborough with a bus network that is fit for the future?

RESPONSE:

Thank you for this question. I appreciate we will shortly be having an extensive and detailed discussion on the bus reform item.

As outlined in my response to the previous question, the bus network is vital to our residents. The Combined Authority have made it a priority in recent years to provide bus services when withdrawn by commercial operators, boosting frequencies on existing services and putting in place new services to benefit residents.

It is vital we make the bus and wider transport network better. Bus services are the backbone of public transport and regardless of the delivery and governance model to be discussed shortly, the Combined Authority will continue its work to deliver the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Bus Strategy to build a Better Bus Network for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough residents. We will be talking of this again on today's agenda.