

The Cambourne to Cambridge Order

Statement of Evidence of Paul Bristow, Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough for the Public Inquiry opening 16th September 2025

1. I was elected as Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough on 1st May 2025. In this role, I lead the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority ('the Authority').
2. The Authority area covers the whole of the ceremonial county of Cambridgeshire, which includes the City of Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire (which together form 'Greater Cambridge' for various administrative purposes).
3. As Mayor, I have responsibilities relating to transport. The Authority is the Local Transport Authority, which is tasked with setting the overall transport strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This includes producing a 'Local Transport and Connectivity Plan' ('LTCP') for the whole area covered by the Authority and a series of sub-strategies for themes (including rail) and more localised areas, including Greater Cambridge. The current LTCP was formally adopted under my predecessor in November 2023. Work is now underway to develop the sub strategy for Greater Cambridge. The 'Greater Cambridge Transport Strategy' ('GCTS') will set out the long-term plan for Greater Cambridge, exploring various growth scenarios. I am working with the Authority's officers and members to ensure that both the LTCP and GCTS are developed in line with my manifesto commitments on transport.

4. As leader of the Local Transport Authority, it is my duty to promote the right long-term strategic decisions to support the growth of Greater Cambridge and the wider region. The importance of the role of Mayors in formulating and delivering these strategic plans has been reinforced by the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill and the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, both of which are progressing through Parliament. These will further expand the powers of Mayors in relation to planning and transport.

5. My concerns about the Applicant's C2C Busway proposal can be summarised as follows:

- a. I cannot guarantee the Applicant's assumed bus service levels on C2C will be viable under future bus franchising arrangements operated by the Authority;
- b. I can give no assurance that bus services will be permitted to operate on the C2C route under future bus franchising arrangements operated by the Authority;
- c. the reliability and safety of the proposed guidance technology is uncertain;
- d. the scheme will have an unacceptable impact on the local landscape (particularly Coton Orchard) and this damage is unnecessary as an alternative scheme with similar transport benefits is possible; and
- e. the scheme as currently proposed does not align with my mayoral priority to deliver a light rail network for Cambridge and the surrounding area.

Assumed bus service levels under future franchising arrangements

6. The C2C scheme has been designed by the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) and is proposed by Cambridgeshire County Council ('the Applicant'), but neither party has any control over the operation of bus services. The Authority is responsible for supporting, improving and building the bus network around the region. It also has powers under the Bus Services Act 2017 to reform the bus market and to adopt bus franchising.

7. In February 2025, under my predecessor, the Authority committed to adopt bus franchising and I have confirmed that I will proceed with this commitment. When bus franchising is in place, the Authority will be responsible for issuing service permits for bus services across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, including services that operate on guided busways. Franchising will give the Authority greater control of the bus network but will also expose it to greater financial risks. Under any franchising model, the Authority becomes responsible for determining the routes that bus operators can bid to run. It will also take on the financial risks associated with running the network, including covering costs if passenger numbers and revenue do not meet expectations. Any services using the proposed C2C Busway will therefore need to meet the requirements of the final franchising model that is adopted by the Authority. This model is yet to be agreed.

8. The Citi 4 bus runs between Cambourne and Cambridge. In the year 2023/24, there were 83,000 passenger journeys on this service. In its Statement of Case, the Applicant claims that 10,300 bus trips a day will be made on the C2C Busway. This would amount to 3.76 million journeys per year, a 45-fold increase in the number of passenger journeys between Cambourne and Cambridge by bus. More than 85% of these (8,000 per day, or around 3.2 million per year) are calculated to be 'new bus trips'. These numbers are based on 'assumed levels of service' of six buses per hour between Cambourne and the city centre, two buses from Cambourne to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus and a further two buses per hour from the Scotland Farm Park and Ride to the Biomedical Campus.

9. The Applicant's business case is predicated on these service levels and passenger numbers, but the Applicant is not in a position to guarantee them; nor will it be taking on the financial risk, if passenger demand does not materialise to support these services. It is my Authority that will

ultimately decide what services will be viable under the new franchising model and I am not able to commit to the assumed levels of service that underpin the Applicant's business case.

10. I have many reasons to be cautious about the assumed demand for services on proposed C2C Busway. For example, the Inquiry will hear evidence presented on behalf of Cambridge, Past, Present and Future (CPPF) that:

- i. the access charges (required to cover the Busway's maintenance, lighting, etc), may not represent good value for money for bus operators, particularly outside of peak travel hours;
- ii. services to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus would be quicker via a bus lane along on Madingley Hill and the M11 rather than having to loop back through West Cambridge from the busway or divert up Cambridge Road from Coton;
- iii. services to north Cambridge (including Cambridge Regional College, Cambridge Science Park, St John's Innovation Park, Cambridge Business Park and Cambridge North station) would be much faster via the A428 and A14; and
- iv. services to central and east Cambridge (including the business and research park planned at the Beehive Centre and the airport redevelopment) may well be quicker via the A428/A14 and Milton Road.

These issues could significantly reduce the number of viable services on C2C Busway.

11. Furthermore, for the longer-term transport needs of the Oxford to Cambridge corridor, the government remains committed to East West Rail (EWR), having allocated in June of this year a further £2.5 billion for the continued delivery of the project. EWR will offer reliable journey times from Cambourne of just 11 minutes to Cambridge South station (serving the Biomedical Campus) and 15 minutes to Cambridge station. By contrast, journeys on C2C will still be

affected by congestion between Grange Road and the city centre. The Applicant has not modelled the impact that EWR will have on the business case for the C2C Busway. This is of particular concern to me: if passengers switch to EWR from the busway, which seems is probable given the faster and more reliable journey times, then bus services using C2C would need to be subsidised from the Authority's budgets under a franchising model. The busway could become an unacceptable drain on the Authority's financial resources, requiring services to be withdrawn.

12. Given these uncertainties, I am unable to guarantee that the Authority would be willing or able to take on the financial and operational risks of bus services at the Applicant's assumed service levels on the C2C busway under any future franchising arrangement. This represents a serious threat to the business case of the busway, which is already categorised as offering poor value for money under its adjusted Benefit Cost Ratio. If bus services cannot operate at the assumed service levels, the business case will be further weakened. This is unacceptable, particularly as an alternative scheme could be progressed at much lower cost.

Uncertainty around Service Permits under future bus franchising arrangements

13. Under bus franchising arrangements, bus operators may apply for a service permit for routes that do not form part of the franchised network. If the proposed C2C Busway service is not included in the final franchise model adopted by the Authority, an operator could apply for a service permit to run a service on C2C without a franchise contract. This process is governed by the Transport Act 2000 and The Franchising Scheme (Service Permits) (England) Regulations 2018. The Act stipulates that the Authority must be satisfied that the proposed service will not have an adverse effect on any local service operating the franchise area. If the C2C Busway services were to operate in such a way as to divert demand from existing franchised routes, or

otherwise make it more difficult to deliver the franchised network to the specified standard (for example, through revenue loss or timetable disruption), that could amount to an adverse effect. In those circumstances, a service permit application may be refused for C2C. This raises the risk C2C services could be unable to operate under either a franchise contract or under a service permit.

Use of unproven guidance technology

14. It is proposed that the C2C Busway will use a form of optical guidance technology on buses which will travel at higher speeds along rural off-road sections with an adjacent active travel path, separated by a grass verge. I have been unable to find evidence of this type of guidance technology operating elsewhere in the world in this way.

15. Clearly, public safety must be an overriding priority of any transport system. The consequences of safety failures on guided busways are, unfortunately, painfully clear. There have been several incidents, including three tragic fatal accidents, on the existing guided busway in Cambridgeshire which uses a different kerb-guided system. The safety failures identified in those cases culminated in Cambridgeshire County Council incurring around £1.6m in legal costs, being fined £6m by the Health and Safety Executive and a decision in June of this year to install safety fencing along the whole length of the busway at a cost of up to £6.58m. The Authority will need to have full confidence that the technology used in any public transport services it is responsible for operating is safe. Given the uncertainty around the Applicant's proposed technology, it is not possible to have such confidence at this time and I hope the safety aspects of the technology will be considered further as part of this Inquiry.

16. If it transpires that the Applicant's proposed guidance technology is not reliable, the Authority may be unable to permit guided buses to operate on the busway.

Impact on local landscape and the CPPF alternative

17. I am aware that my objection to the proposed C2C Busway scheme may concern some stakeholders, who are relying on transport improvements to progress their current growth plans for Cambridge. There is a need to improve transport links along the Cambourne to Cambridge corridor to allow development at Bourn Airfield and Cambourne to progress. I am confident that the initial stages of these sites (which will be delivered over many years) can be unlocked with an alternative proposal for C2C. One such alternative, promoted by CPPF and others ('the CPPF alternative') could be delivered more quickly than the Applicant's proposed C2C scheme, which has an advertised end date for construction of May 2031. The CPPF alternative would involve a significantly lower cost than the Applicant's scheme and sit within the public highway, removing the need for Compulsory Purchase Orders. This alternative will be explained in more detail by CPPF who are giving evidence to this Inquiry, so I will not repeat the details here. I can confirm, however, that I would like to see this option progressed at pace.

18. A Compulsory Purchase Order for land to enable the C2C scheme to proceed requires the Applicant to demonstrate that all reasonable alternatives have been explored. I am not convinced that the Applicant has fully explored the CPPF alternative.

19. In addition to having a lower cost to the taxpayer and faster delivery period, the CPPF alternative would save Coton Orchard from significant harm. The Inquiry will hear evidence from other parties, who will set out the ecological and environmental impact of the scheme on the orchard. Valued habitats should only be compulsorily purchased and built upon as a last resort, when all other reasonable options have been exhausted. This is not the case in the Cambourne to Cambridge transport corridor, where other short and longer-term options are available.

Light Rail

20. Throughout my election campaign, I made a commitment to deliver a light rail network for Cambridge. I also confirmed this commitment in my election manifesto. It is my belief that the plans for new guided busways are outdated, suboptimal and will not meet the long-term needs of our region. A mass rapid transit system using light rail will better serve the growing population of Cambridge and the surrounding area. I was elected on this promise and it is now my duty to deliver it.
21. A compelling evidence base for light rail has been developed over many years by rail advocates such as Cambridge Connect, who have made representations to this Inquiry. I am working with rail experts, local partners and the government to progress work on a light rail network for Cambridge.
22. C2C would terminate at Grange Road with onward bus journeys at the mercy of the traffic on the city's already congested roads. By contrast, light rail would offer passengers direct, rapid journeys into the city and to major employment sites.
23. My conversations with local elected representatives of all parties, the public and the business community suggest widespread support for light rail as a concept. It is a proven technology elsewhere in the UK and around the world, where its popularity has driven the kind of modal shift we need in Cambridge. The optical guidance system proposed for the C2C Busway appears unproven. Light rail is used widely in Europe in cities of a similar size and character to Cambridge, such as Lausanne (Switzerland), Ghent (Belgium), Lund (Sweden) and Orleans (France). In the UK, Nottingham operates a 20-mile (32km) light rail system for a city with a population of 324,000.

24. It has been suggested to me that the C2C busway could, at some point in the future, be converted to light rail. This would not be straightforward and would provide poor value for money. First, building light rail on undeveloped ground does not involve laying what is, in effect, a road which will be difficult and costly to convert. Secondly, this would leave the C2C route with no service for the duration of the works, which could take months or years. Thirdly, the proposed route for C2C includes several sharp turns, which I understand are not desirable for light rail; in fact light rail may need a different alignment within the Cambourne to Cambridge corridor. Moreover, it would be a huge waste of taxpayers' money to spend £200m on a busway, only to spend many millions more than necessary to convert it, rather than building light rail from the outset.

Conclusion

25. As a consequence of the above concerns, I am unable to support the C2C proposals in their current form and I will invite the Secretary of State to reject the Draft Order.

Statement submitted to Inquiry on 19th August 2025