OBJECTION to the Greater Cambridge Partnership's (GCP) application for a new busway to the southeast of Cambridge, submitted by them on 9 January 2025.

BY: Miranda Fyfe – resident of Stapleford and Green Party parliamentary candidate for this local area.

STATEMENT OF CASE

Summary

- Buses can and should run on existing roads - their relatively low capacity (compared to trams or trains) does not adequately justify such a large investment in bespoke infrastructure.
- This proposal offers only a very marginal decrease in journey times, at very high cost; more important disincentives to bus travel – such as lack of clear information or comfortable waiting areas – can and should be resolved directly without any need for a bespoke busway.
- Any busway through the Green Belt will not resolve congestion issues in central Cambridge, which is the main cause of current bus delays and unreliability.
- Continued private car use will not be disincentivised sufficiently by this busway, and the political failure of a local congestion charge proposal underlines that Government-level action is required to start an honest conversation with the public about road pricing.

I expand further on each of these points in the following pages of my statement.

Buses Run on Existing Roads

The GCP's own Peter Blake himself said: *"Why buses? Well, they can already run on existing roads."* That was in early 2023, as his opening statement in a BBC debate about the Sustainable Travel Zone proposal, which would have super-charged our local bus services prior to the introduction of a blanket weekday Congestion Charge within the city boundaries.

Adding many extra bus services to run on existing roads in and around the city is a low cost, environmentally friendly, and quick solution which has never yet been tried. Partly this is because historically the model of running bus services was such that the authorities were at the mercy of having to entice commercial companies to provide services. I was told during one of the early CSET consultation events that any bus company would require this dedicated new off-road infrastructure in order to be able to provide the proposed frequency of buses and still make a profit. For me, that begged the question: *"What is the purpose of Public Transport and government-funded infrastructure?"* The officer's answer back then revealed that this whole scheme with its huge budget seemed to be largely focussed on providing the means for a private bus company to make handsome profits for its directors and shareholders. That is an outrageous misuse of public funds, when the money could instead be used to provide actual bus services, directly benefiting the public.

Several years later, and the local authority is now in the process of implementing a Franchised bus service. This puts a very different complexion on the need – or not – for such dedicated off-road infrastructure, since it is the local authority who will be taking the financial risk on providing services. The Busway is no longer required as an expensive bribe to persuade bus companies to run buses.

As for the existing roads on which buses should run instead of this busway: both the A1307 and the A1301 corridors already have well-used bus routes, serving people who live close to those roads in the nearby villages. One significant factor putting people off using these existing services is their lack of sufficient frequency: three per hour at best on the A1301 from Sawston, and two per hour at best on the A1307 from Haverhill, with both routes reverting to only one per hour by 7pm in each direction. Simply spreading out the proposed eight new buses per hour between these existing routes would greatly enhance those on-road services, ensuring that even more people are attracted to use them, thus removing hundreds if not thousands of existing cars from those two roads and in turn helping reliability of the services.

Simple bus priority measures on existing roads can help with reliability, and also with encouraging bus passengers that they are not just going to be stuck in a queue of cars on their journey. Since just after the original concept of the CSET Busway was mooted, there has already been a bus priority lane out-bound at the A1307/A11 roundabout junction; such measures could easily be replicated at other roundabout junctions along the route. The existing road past Wandlebury is already dual width with very little of that remaining as dual carriageway in usage: the road could be adapted to having a dedicated bus lane past that point without necessarily having to encroach on the verges much at all. The fact that the GCP have not already tried these 'Quick Win' options is incomprehensible.

Passenger Incentives to use Buses

Theoretical journey time savings for this proposed busway are being vastly over-rated when it comes to motivating potential passengers to use a bus rather than their private car. Passengers on a bus will build the expected time of the journey into their day, and unlike car drivers (or cyclists) they have the ability to use that time productively if they wish – e.g. checking emails or social media on a phone, or

reading a book. This ability to do things while on a bus minimises the amount of time out of one's productive working day that the bus journey takes.

Far more important for passengers than actual A to B journey time are things like reliability, routing, and value for money ticketing. The existing St Ives guided busway has been seen as a great success story – why is that? I think one major factor is that passengers understand clearly where it goes, because it follows a very simple and direct route (at least until it hits the northern edge of Cambridge). In order to provide such clarity of routing information, it is not necessary to replicate the direct routing of that old railway line with a hugely expensive and environmentally damaging new-build busway! Rather, clear information and maps that potential passengers can actually understand, and most importantly can get easy access to – both online and in situ at bus stops – is essential, and should be developed as part of any project to increase bus usage.

The only aspect of journey time that does negatively impact on passengers is waiting time at bus stops – and that is greatly increased when frequency is low, as is the case for the existing services in this area (already discussed above). By contrast, the St Ives guided busway runs every 10 minutes throughout the day, and this is another major factor in its success. It is not the few minutes possibly shaved off the A to B journey time that would attract passengers to services on this new busway, rather it is the reduced maximum waiting time of only 10 minutes between buses. That frequency can and should be achieved on existing services running along the A1301 and A1307 roads (even if only as far Addenbrooke's Hospital, where 60% of passengers alight anyway, and there are frequent alternative buses onwards into the city centre for others to catch).

Facilities for interchanging at places like the Addenbrooke's bus station is another very important factor influencing passenger choice, but one which the local authority has failed to address in any of its work so far. Changing from one bus route to another can in theory provide passengers with many options for a wide variety of journeys using the bus network; but unlike at the central railway station where there is a warm and safe Waiting Room to accommodate passengers in comfort while waiting, all bus interchanges have only uncomfortable seats, exposed to the elements, which are actually specifically designed to discourage people from waiting around. Imagine the passenger who is perfectly happy to spend time waiting in-between buses because they will be enjoying reading a book on their journey: if major interchange hubs can cater for them with a warm, light, safe space where there is live service information clearly displayed, then such passengers would be encouraged to choose a multi-stage bus journey rather than their car, despite what seems on the face of it to be a greatly increased journey time.

Clear ticketing options that represent value for money and encourage more use of buses are also very important. In the last few years, the subsidized flat rate Single fares have given great incentives to passengers who are taking long journeys on a single bus route, but at the same time they greatly discourage complex multi-service journeys (just in case the lack of interchange waiting facilities was not disincentive enough!) Simple "Tap-on, Tap-off" and automatically Capped daily and weekly fares are already in widespread use across the country and would be instantly transformational here, at very little up-front cost by comparison to this one dedicated busway.

<u>Central Cambridge Congestion</u>

In my own experience of using the local buses for some fairly complex journeys, I have found that when buses get delayed it is not between outlying villages and the edge of the city that the problem lies, rather the hold-ups happen entirely within the city itself. My worst example of this was an

afternoon journey from Cambourne to Stapleford – having to interchange in central Cambridge of course. It was a wet November day when traffic had got particularly bad, and so the in-bound bus got snarled up once it got into the city centre. Then my outbound bus leaving Cambridge, instead of taking the scheduled 30 minutes to reach the Addenbrooke's bus station, took well over an hour for that segment of the journey. Once out beyond the city, the bus moved well again. Overall, the journey took an hour longer than it should have done; it was notable that NONE of that hour of delay was incurred in the sections of the journey that would be served by either of the proposed new busways.

My story illustrates how these busway proposals are a very expensive (and environmentally damaging) solution to the wrong problem. Instead of spending so much time and money in working up these busway plans over so many years, the local authority could and should have looked seriously at the 2018 proposal by Smarter Cambridge Transport for a 'bus hub' routing system around the Inner Ring Road. (See https://www.smartertransport.uk/cambridge-city-bus-hub/) This would free up the historic centre of Cambridge from having huge double-decker buses driving straight through it, while at the same time making far more of the historic centre directly accessible to passengers travelling in from any direction; and it would make interchanging between different bus services much simpler, as well as knowing where to catch any bus (because they all route around the same loop in the centre). The restriction for other vehicles to only being able to travel clockwise around the Inner Ring Road would provide a disincentive to travel, which in turn would help to ease congestion and thus improve bus reliability.

Large double-decker buses have no place in the historic centre of Cambridge, and nor do passengers such as myself wanting to get from one necklace village to another have any desire to have to sit in congestion in central Cambridge on a bus along the way. This busway proposal is an example of the total failure of the local authority to "think outside of the box" in finding really transformative solutions to the current problems with transport in and around Cambridge. Multiple radial busways just funnelling to the edge of the city does absolutely nothing to address the real problems, yet if allowed to progress will burn through the entire GCP funding pot and more.

Disincentivising Private Car Use

So, with Congestion being the main problem that needs to be addressed, the solution has to involve strong disincentives to the use of private cars in general. The abandoned 'Sustainable Travel Zone' (STZ) plan as proposed in 2022 would have provided one type of disincentive, but it was far too blunt an instrument and not sufficiently well-targeted, hence it is unsurprising that it lost political support from across the spectrum.

This busway proposal includes yet another Park & Ride site. The whole concept of Park & Ride sites is in opposition to disincentivising private car use, because by definition it "bakes in" car dependence for anyone who wishes to use the buses serving the site. The P&R site is also removed from the residential area of the nearby villages, meaning that even those who live closest are highly likely to remain dependent on their cars in order to use the busway. Running any bus services from Park & Ride sites always has a detrimental effect on other bus services nearby – those buses which do actually go near to people's homes such that those people can leave their car at home. By abstracting existing services in this way, Park & Ride provision means that people who cannot drive, or prefer not to, can become totally disenfranchised from the public transport network.

A truly transformative bus network would help encourage people out of their cars altogether: we need our many villages served by regular buses, and these could be small feeder services to fast express buses along major routes. Other counties demonstrate such models exist and work well – such as the 'Little White Bus' in the Yorkshire Dales.

The political failure of the local proposal to introduce congestion charging, and the ongoing toxicity of that subject, underlines the need for national government action to address this issue. In the same year that our local STZ was proposed, the House of Commons Transport Select Committee (TSC) had already published its recommendation to the then Government to "Act now to avoid a £35 billion fiscal black hole" – in other words, to start an honest conversation with the public about the need for road pricing nationally, as a replacement for both vehicle excise duty and fuel duty. (See https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1549/road-pricing/news/160791/road-pricing-act-now-to-avoid-35-billion-fiscal-black-hole-urge-mps/) The then Government's very delayed eventual response was dismissive of any suggestion of introducing road pricing, boasting instead of having held fuel duty static [yet again] "in order to support the motorist"; the current Government is also resistant to following up on the recommendations from that TSC report. It would seem that the Englishman's right to drive a car is viewed as being just as sacrosanct as the American's right to bear arms; the private car is viewed as the Englishman's "castle on wheels" – and I'm sure that the sense of control over one's mobile environment is a strong motivator in people keeping using their cars rather than trying public transport.

We need a national system of road pricing, which could be easily implemented by reforming vehicle taxes to be based simply on a function of miles driven (data already collected at annual MOT tests) and published vehicle weight, noting in the choice of calculation the 4th power law of stress to road surfaces caused by motor vehicles. Such a road pricing system would not only be absolutely fair in terms of ensuring those who make the most use of our roads pay the most towards their upkeep, it would also gently nudge drivers towards driving fewer miles, and choosing lighter vehicles.

Clearly, the GCP have no power to introduce national road pricing, but locally what they can do in order to help reduce car use is to NOT create any more Park & Ride sites, since these only add to car traffic and usage. The proposed P&R site at Babraham may well have the undesirable consequence of encouraging more car traffic along the A1307 from Haverhill to the A11, because many who would currently use the existing bus route along that whole journey might well be incentivised to drive as far as the new P&R instead. Apparently about 20% of staff who work at the Biomedical Campus live in Haverhill, so this would be a significant increase in car traffic on the A1307. What we urgently need on that road instead is more frequent buses all the way to Haverhill.

Conclusions

- I've set out my case for more frequent buses to run on existing roads – there is no good justification for such a large investment in bespoke infrastructure, especially now that the local authority has imminent control of routes through Franchising.

- I've spelt out what the various passenger motivations for using buses (or not) are, and explained why this proposal with its very small marginal saving in journey times is unnecessary in that regard, when far better incentives for passengers can be provided at minimal comparative cost.

- My real-life example of bus travel around Cambridgeshire has highlighted why the congestion issues holding up bus services in central Cambridge will not be resolved by this proposal, and I have pointed to an alternative, transformation proposal for bus routing that I hope will be pursued.

- Finally, I have discussed how the overall need to disincentivise private car use will not be addressed by this busway, because of its Park & Ride element. Ultimately Government-level action is required to properly disincentivise private car use by introducing fair and universal road pricing; in the meantime, the GCP can and should help by avoiding any further expansion of the local Park & Ride network.

I look forward to the opportunity to set this case before the Inspector during the Public Inquiry.

Miranda Fyfe
Resident of Stapleford, and Green Party parliamentary candidate for this local area.

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