



Coton Busway Action Group
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**Transport and Works Act Order to the Department for Transport (DfT)
for a new busway, linking Cambourne to Cambridge**

PROOF OF EVIDENCE TO BE PRESENTED AT THE PUBLIC INQUIRY

SUMMARY

Coton Busway Action Group

The Coton Busway Action Group (known as CBAG) was formed a decade ago in response to the Greater Cambridge Partnership's (GCP) proposal for a CtoC busway that would cut across Madingley Hill and Coton Orchard. CBAG wholeheartedly supports the development of improved public transport links from the developments west of Cambridge to the city's employment and educational hubs. However, we strongly oppose the GCP's scheme that includes an off-road section between Madingley Mulch roundabout and the M11. Alongside Cambridge Past, Present and Future and other stakeholders, we are advocating for an on-road alternative down the A1303. Contrary to the GCP's claim, this is a *viable* alternative that creates minimal environmental damage whilst offering more direct access to key destinations at significantly lower cost.

As a result of our long, consistently engaged campaign, we have detailed historical knowledge of all the steps in decision-making that have led to this inquiry. We shall therefore outline in greater detail the first of our five objections, which relates to the flawed process that enabled the GCP to reach the point of submitting the application. Our other objections are covered more fully by other parties, so we touch on them only briefly and give a little more detail in our Proof of Evidence.

1. Failure to appraise alternative routes

The GCP has consistently failed to evaluate credible on-road alternatives, in particular CAMBRIDGEPPF's proposal for an inbound bus lane along the A1303 from Madingley Mulch to the West Cambridge site. This alternative scheme offers a segregated bus lane largely within the A1303's boundary, avoiding impact on the Green Belt, the Site of Special Scientific Interest and the American Military Cemetery. Despite public and stakeholder support, the GCP has dismissed this plan without proper appraisal, instead comparing its off-road route to impractical on-road options, seemingly designed to fail.

From the outset, the GCP's evident bias has created a misleading narrative and led to flawed decision making. They have continually rejected valid objections raised by members of the public, by CAMBRIDGEPPF, and even by the Local Liaison Forum (LLF), set up by the GCP themselves to engage with local stakeholders. The minutes of the LLF, which was made up of councillors and other representatives from the whole length of the route from Cambourne to Newnham, demonstrate the depth of its members' feeling against the off-road section.

We provide a detailed chronology of the points of failure in our full Proof of Evidence and highlight here a few pivotal events.

2014: The creation of an all-ways junction at the Girton Interchange was dismissed without clear justification, despite its potential to reduce A1303 traffic by 30%.

2015: The GCP's public consultation outlined three options for the proposed busway. The on-road route received most support. The GCP ignored the results.

2016: The GCP claimed that the existing M11 bridge would not be able to accommodate a segregated bus lane. Yet an Atkins report, commissioned earlier by the GCP, confirmed that it *was* feasible, both in terms of strength and width, and would cost only £600,000. Despite the LLF pointing out the GCP's false claim, the GCP continued to assert that it was not possible, and the LLF's recommendations for a hybrid on-road solution were ignored. Not only does this call into question the integrity of those involved, it also indicates that ensuing decisions have been founded on erroneous assumptions.

2017: GPC staff, with Atkins, developed a multi-criteria framework (MCAF) to assess busway options. The results initially gave the off-road route a slightly higher score of 52 vs. 51 for the off-road. Following LLF's challenge to the methodology, the exercise was repeated, giving a score of 36 vs 42 in favour of the on-road. The GCP responded by producing another MCAF, again using questionable methodology, which put the off-road route back in front at 91 vs 77. Clearly it is hard to have confidence in such processes. Then another GCP public consultation favoured on-road routes. Again, the GCP dismissed the results.

2018: With trust in the GCP rapidly being eroded, CAMBRIDGEPPF called for an independent expert panel to review the evidence. This was rejected.

2021: An independent audit recognized the many benefits of the on-road scheme, including lower costs, less environmental harm and better connectivity – yet still inexplicably supported the off-road route. The GCP then voted to move forward with the off-road busway, having ignored repeated requests for a side-by-side comparison with CAMBRIDGEPPF's proposal.

2023: LibDem and Labour councillors approved the off-road route via a whipped vote. At the meeting, the LibDems argued passionately that the route was necessary for Cambourne students who could not otherwise get to city sixth forms, failing to mention the new Cambourne sixth-form college opening in 2024 and ignoring the fact that the journey could equally be made via an on-road route.

2025: The GCP's Transport and Works Act Order submission proceeded without evaluating the on-road alternative. A proposed amendment for an impartial report to compare the scheme with the CAMBRIDGEPPF alternative was rejected.

At every stage, the GCP have ignored stakeholder's interests, used data selectively, and lacked transparency. They have failed to engage with the arguments in favour of alternative routes, dismissing carefully researched points with unsupported and sometimes blatantly untrue assertions. It is extraordinary that their proposal has reached this stage without a fair, transparent appraisal of the very credible, far cheaper and much less environmentally damaging alternative.

2. Poor choice of route

The main centres of employment and education are now the Biomedical Campus, the area around the city centre train station and city sixth-form colleges, the Science and Business Parks on and around Milton Road and north of the city, and the West Cambridge site. The GCP's off-road scheme would not provide direct bus journeys to any of these except for the last. People travelling to any of the other destinations will be taken to the city via Grange Road, where onward journeys will likely be problematic because of city congestion and possibly a lack of onward services.

The GCP claims that their off-road route would reduce the CtoC journey by 2 to 3 minutes, but this is inconsequential in the context of its whole length. Moreover, the delays faced by passengers arriving in Grange Road will more than cancel this out.

The alternative CambridgePPF in-highway scheme would offer far more direct routes to all these destinations, including the West Cambridge site.

3. The impact of East West Rail

Central government is fully committed to EWR, and there is no doubt that if it were already in operation, no one would propose an expensive, environmentally damaging and less efficient transport scheme to serve the same communities – nor would central government be likely to support it. Despite repeated calls from residents and the LLF since 2020, the GCP has not factored EWR into its business case, dismissing it as “complementary” without providing evidence.

By contrast, an on-road bus lane could serve Cambourne residents at lower cost and environmental impact while EWR is developed.

4. Environmental impact

We are indisputably in a deepening environmental crisis, and also in one of the most nature depleted counties in the UK. This means that unnecessary destruction of green spaces is now unconscionable. Yet the off-road section of the busway will effectively destroy Coton Orchard, which records show is of immense value for wildlife. It will completely alter the distinctive character of Coton village and remove some of the only remaining unspoiled views and walks on the edges of this historic city, including in the area selected specifically by the US government for the American Military Cemetery. The GCP, however, has consistently underplayed the environmental effects of their scheme whilst undermining the value of the natural assets that they will destroy.

The landscape to the west of Cambridge is identified by the Cambridge Nature Network report as a Priority Area within a local strategic plan. Yet the off-road CtoC busway cuts directly across that designated Priority Area, severing two wildlife corridors. The Cambridge

Nature Network is backed by numerous organisations, including Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. It makes no sense for them to back this vital initiative whilst supporting the off-road busway proposal.

Poor value for money

The off-road busway is estimated to cost £160–200 million. The GCP's assertion of £680 million in economic benefits for the off-road route lacks credible evidence, especially when compared to the on-road option's lower costs and comparable travel time savings (only 2–3 minutes less than the off-road route). The on-road scheme, with construction costs of approximately £60 million, would have a benefit–cost ratio of at least three times that of the GCP scheme.

Conclusion

A sufficient case for compulsory purchase has not been made. The on-road option offers comparable travel benefits, significantly lower costs and minimal environmental impact, as well as aligning with public and stakeholder preferences. The GCP's persistent bias, failure to consider EWR's implications, and disregard for credible alternatives undermine the project's legitimacy. We therefore ask that the applicant's proposal be rejected.