

CONTRIBUTION TO THE INQUIRY INTO THE PROPOSED CAMBOURNE TO CAMBRIDGE BUSWAY: PETERBOROUGH CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT RURAL ENGLAND.

To: Transport Infrastructure Planning Unit: transportinfrastructure@dft.gov.uk
Programme Officer Joanna.Vincent@gateleyhamere.com
cc Adam.Richards@wbd-uk.com

Introduction

I am Tony Booth, speaking for the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Cambridge and Peterborough branch. We campaign nationally and locally to safeguard the long-term future of the countryside. We press the government, Parliament and others to protect precious green belts, promote urban renewal and restrict development on greenfield sites. We overlap with Friends of the Cam for whom Susan Buckingham provided evidence earlier, since some of us are on the steering group of Friends of the Cam as well as being trustees of CPRE.

I will not repeat in detail arguments and evidence presented by others and will summarise submissions made on behalf of CPRE by Alan James. We oppose the busway which we see as an unpopular, misconceived project, offering poor value for money, destroying valuable areas of the countryside and creating unnecessary carbon emissions.

If you walk into Cambridge City from Cambridge station along Hills Road with your eyes open, you might think that Cambridge is a dysfunctional city rather than a capital of growth, the UK's Silicon Valley. Hills Road, a main artery to the city is pockmarked with potholes and often under repair. In one of the richest cities in the country very little is spent on the public sphere. Near Station Road, there are three empty office blocks just near cranes servicing the building of a seven and five storey office block at the Flying Pig site – Botanic Place. The Cambridge growth plan is difficult to fathom.

We support CPPF's alternative scheme for busses, coupled with further measures to reduce traffic in Cambridge, particularly at rush hour, and radical improvement of cycle routes. We think it would be obscene to spend £200 million concreting over the countryside with a guided busway, instead of £20 million on the alternative on-road scheme, when, for example, there are homeless people in Cambridge, an urgent need for social housing for key workers, and a need to restore locks to keep the iconic River Cam flowing. We maintain that C2C is promoted because of deficiencies in the structure of governance creating opposing party-political interests and a lack of democratic accountability. East West Rail's proposed station at Cambourne raises further questions about predicted passenger numbers for C2C busses into Cambridge.

How did we get to this point of contention?

The Busway proposals emerged within the chaotic local governance structure comprising City Council, County Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) and Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA). In addition, there is the Cambridge Growth Company led by Peter Freeman under instruction from the Government and powerful influence from Cambridge University and Cambridge Ahead, drawing together the wealthier elements of the business and financial sector.

The Greater Cambridge Partnership was created by the [2014 Greater Cambridge City Deal](#) and comprises representatives from City, County, South Cambs District Councils, the University and business interests. It was financed with £500million from central government spread over . The money was to be used to promote growth through house building and new transport links: 'Orbital bus routes', 'new high quality public transport', 'links into Cambridge on key corridors, connecting with major employment centres'. 'a comprehensive network of pedestrian and cycle routes within Cambridge'...(P 3.)

These comprehensive proposals are only partially realised and include the Cambourne to Cambridge busway, which has repeatedly hit the buffers. This was inevitable when two years later, the [Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016](#) created 'Metro mayors' to lead [combined authorities](#) in England. The first Mayor of the Cambridge and Peterborough combined authority elected in 2017 to head the regional Transport Authority with responsibility for creating an integrated transport network across the region. With a Labour lead, Lewis Herbert, on the GCP, and a conservative Mayor at CPCA this set the conditions for potential disputes over the development of transport links in and around Cambridge. The first Mayor, James Palmer, was a vehement opponent of the busway and as we saw from the evidence of Paul Bristow, the present Conservative Mayor, has a similar viewpoint.

2020 saw a high point in the dispute between the GCP and CPCA after Mayor Palmer had once again rejected the C2C Busway proposal. A signed open letter from the GCP set out its frustrations at this opposition, which threatened to disrupt the plans of developers:

Thousands of homes and jobs are either entirely or in part dependent on it being built. Developers need to have certainty that this will happen by 2024 so they can plan accordingly ...

Governance is being rationalised only to an extent with elections in May 2027 for two unitary authorities operating from April 2028. However, the Greater Cambridge Partnership seen by many as the least democratic element of the local governance structures, as well as the Combined Authority remain. The mayor will therefore [retain responsibility](#) for the Local Transport Plan and "some additional powers in relation to nursery schools and education." The GCP is said to retain responsibility for delivering the City Deal with its delivery of transport links:

"Our mission now is to ... deliver the joined-up transport network for Greater Cambridge... From the 12 Greenways to the three mass passenger transport corridors and autonomous vehicle trials, the next few years will see a significant increase in our ability to move around our area by active and sustainable travel."

Policy conflict will evidently continue which raises questions about the extent of dialogue between central government departments responsible for local government reorganisation, and those allocating responsibilities to the mayor and GCP. As we have seen the busway is opposed by the Transport Authority under the Mayor who controls franchising of buses. CPRE believes that a comprehensive plan delivered by a responsible and accountable single Transport Authority is the right way forward, and had it been consulted would have urged local authority reorganisation to minimise policy conflicts.

Build Baby Build

C2C proponents seem to believe that exhortations for rapid growth from government will tip the decision in its favour to realise 'land value uplift'. "Build, Build, Build" became a slogan for Boris Johnson in June 2020, echoed by Cambridge estate agent Bidwells. The slogan was modified by Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Steve Reed, in a MAGA tribute act, at the 2025 Labour Party conference complete with red caps handed to supporters proclaiming "Build, Baby, Build".

In 2023 Michael Gove had proposed 150,000 new homes for the Cambridge area appointing Peter Freeman to lead the implementation now also adopted under Labour to lead the Cambridge Growth Company. We see the grand ambition of the CGC as delusional. The Cambridge growth phenomenon involves shifting jobs, housing and water from elsewhere in the country to the Cambridge area. Dependent on a jobs-led growth model, it creates a vicious cycle of housing shortages and rising house prices. CPRE argues that essential building should be spread across the country taking jobs to where they are most needed and in areas where water is plentiful. The idea that scientific expertise has to be physically located in large clusters is outdated with people sharing expertise over large distances, including globally. A comparable area to Silicon Valley in the US would be the whole of the UK rather than Cambridge.

We echo the testimony of Friends of the Cam, the Green Party and others that mass building in the lowest lying, hottest, driest and amongst the most nature depleted parts of the country, lacks sense. The prospect of the Fen Reservoir, not due to be completed for a decade, being a workable part of the solution for water supply has been described as "crazy" by [Rob Larter](#), of the British Antarctic Survey with his knowledge of rising sea levels due to ice melts from the Antarctic and elsewhere. The combination of rising sea levels, high tides, storm surges and salination will give that reservoir a limited life, even if it is completed. It is a key element of Anglian Water's plan for water supplies for the region as set out by the [Water Resources East](#), itself established by Anglian Water. Water Companies are extractivist, owing first allegiance to their shareholders, in this case, Canadian and Australian pension funds as well as investors in the City of London. The [Canada Pension Plan Investment Board \(CPPIB\)](#) which manages investments on behalf of the Canadian Pension Fund is investing heavily on the failure of UK water companies, United Utilities and Severn Trent. Severn Trent is a close partner of Anglian Water. Due diligence is important.

The needs of the Planet

CPCA set up a Climate Commission under Baroness Brown, which reported in 2021 that there were six years left of the carbon budget for the region to 2050, legally mandated by the 2008 Climate Act. It is certain that the embodied carbon emissions within concrete and steel in the area will breach the law within the near future. This matters. Global temperature rises have already passed 1.5°C, the agreed relatively safe limit for human and planetary flourishing, although there is already increased frequency of high temperatures, droughts, floods and wildfires around the world. [Bill McGuire](#) reports that at current global emissions rates (which continue to rise) it is likely that 2°C will be reached within the next ten to fifteen years. Turning away from, or denying, the reality of impending and multiplying environmental catastrophes due to global warming does not change its likelihood. Planning is meant to be about building for the future. Present planning locally and nationally is about building for no future. It is perilously close to being part of an Armageddon cult.

The minimising of emissions should be the starting point for planning. We note the detailed discussions of the emissions associated with the fixed busway. We argue that those linked to the proposed alternative scheme will be far less. We also want to see car travel into and through the City of Cambridge severely limited. Car parks draw cars into the city and should be phased out and repurposed. Rush hour travel is considerably affected by individual ferrying of students to and from private schools which need to be strongly encouraged to move to shared electric forms of transport.

The risks of proceeding

I have considered some of the risks of proceeding with the proposal to passenger numbers from East West Rail, and alternative bus routes established by the Transport Authority. There are obvious risks to the scale of building in the Cambridge area from water supply. As the hazards from global warming intensify further over the next couple of decades, planning which ignores them will only hasten them. 'The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry.' The worst laid plans almost always do.

We should not ignore the considerable risks of protest towards a scheme intending to fragment and destroy a large part of Coton Orchard. The level of national and local protest will be high and likely to disrupt and delay any proposed work in the Orchard and its vicinity. At CPRE we are close observers of the way opposition to the destruction of green space is mobilised in this area and particularly when this concerns the felling of old trees, who have developed irreplaceable interconnected ecosystems. I think that the establishment of camps to resist the destruction of the orchard is likely and would inevitably push up costs through delays, and policing, and create considerable negative publicity. The C2C could become Cambridgeshire's HS2.

Thank you for your attention.

Professor Tony Booth 21st October 2025