

Objection by John Preston to Transport and Work Act Order to the Department for Transport (DfT) for a new busway linking Cambourne to Cambridge

I John Preston of [REDACTED] write to make a formal objection to the “Application for a Transport and Work Act Order to the Department for Transport (DfT) for a new busway linking Cambourne to Cambridge”, as submitted by the Cambridge Greater Partnership on 12 November 2024.

While I support improvement of public transport, and active travel, I object to this scheme in the strongest possible terms. My objection relates to the off-road section between Madingley Mulch and West Cambridge.

My objection is on 3 principal grounds:

- 1) There is an excellent on-road alternative including new bus lanes and bus priority measures following the A1303 which has never been properly assessed by the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP).
- 2) There is no possible justification for the environmental damage the proposed scheme will cause, given the Government’s commitment to East-West Rail. Both EWR proposed routes will achieve the same aims with far less environmental damage.
- 3) The assessment of the proposed scheme’s environmental impacts is totally inadequate, particularly in relation to strategic heritage considerations (see below), resulting in flawed conclusions which do not withstand detailed scrutiny.

I concur with Cambridge Past Present and Future’s preference for the on-road alternative. The recent go-ahead for EWR has fatally undermined the business case for the proposed scheme.

Strategic heritage considerations

The origin of Cambridge’s Green Belt, first designated in 1955, lay in efforts to protect “the only true University town left in England” ¹. The landscape west of Cambridge, and the West Fields in particular, are, as users of the Coton and Red Meadow footpaths know, vital parts of the setting not just of the listed buildings mentioned in the Heritage Statement, but of the University city as a whole, with long views including King’s College Chapel, St John’s College Chapel, and Great St Mary’s rising above trees. Although Cambridge’s nomination for World Heritage Site status in the 1980s lapsed due to failure to agree a buffer zone boundary, the University city meets the WHS criteria for Outstanding Universal value.

So it is shocking that the proposed scheme’s Heritage Statement considers only the West Cambridge Conservation Area, and individual local listed buildings, without considering the impacts on Cambridge’s strategic heritage significance. Such consideration should have included not only

- the very damaging physical impacts of the proposed scheme, which will totally change relationships between the western edge of the historic city and its landscape setting, but also
- the potential disastrous impacts of the busway in opening up this landscape setting for development.

¹ “The Origins of the Cambridge Green Belt” the late Anthony J Cooper “Planning History” Vol 20 No.2 1998 pp6-19 https://planninghistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/1998_vol-20_no2.pdf