

Greater Cambridge City Deal: Tackling Cambridge Congestion ~ Response from Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport is a leading charity and environmental campaign group that promotes sustainable transport policies. Our vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. We welcome the opportunity to respond to proposals from the Greater Cambridge City Deal for tackling congestion in Cambridge.

Summary

We welcome the comprehensive approach taken by the Greater Cambridge City Deal to tackling congestion in Cambridge, looking at solutions involving investment in bus priority, cycling and walking provision alongside traffic demand management measures.

In particular, we strongly welcome proposals for a Workplace Parking Levy: this is a practical solution that has proved successful in Nottingham and we believe would also serve Cambridge well.

We also identify some additional measures which we believe could further enhance the plans, including an ultra-low emission zone, and a “smarter last mile” strategy for deliveries.

1. Better bus services and expanded use of Park & Ride

We support improvements to bus services. Buses are a vital and under-valued service, both for their users and – thanks to buses’ congestion-busting properties – for all road users. We support a rollout of dedicated bus lanes, and bus priority measures at junctions, to ensure that buses are able to offer a fast, convenient and reliable alternative for travellers into Cambridge.

We recognise that diesel buses are a contributor to air pollution – although less than the pollution from the dozens of diesel cars needed to transport the same number of passengers. We would therefore like to see the City Deal bring forward plans for greening the City’s bus fleet and make this part of any future bus contracts/ bus quality partnerships.

We would also like to see priority given to ‘bike & ride’ with high quality secure bike parking provided at bus termini, facilities for charging electric bikes, and safe cycle routes in and out of the park and ride sites.

2. Better pedestrian and cycling infrastructure

We strongly support improvements to pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, in particular well-designed segregated cycle lanes. Cambridge is already a leader in cycling and we want to see this continue. The impact of segregated cycle lanes and ‘mini Hollands’ in London has been dramatic, with a 71% increase in cycling in 2014 compared to 2004.

There are multiple well-recognised benefits from prioritising walking and cycling, including to public health, both mental and physical, and the local economy, as well as improvements to congestion and air quality from reduced motor vehicle use.

3. Improved public space and air quality

Improving public space is a desirable goal in any city, but particularly one with such a precious built environment as Cambridge.

We strongly support measures to improve air quality. Despite legally-binding standards, the UK's air pollution remains at lethal and illegal levels in every local authority area, including Cambridge. Transport emissions are the main offender and any reduction in the number of motor vehicles, particularly diesel vehicles, will help improve air quality.

We would like to see Cambridge go further and consider a Low Emission Zone or Ultra Low Emission Zone to encourage the switch to less polluting vehicles.

4. Peak Congestion Control Points in the weekday morning and evening peak periods

We support the principle of reallocating road space away from cars to manage demand and promote modal shift. Cambridge's current congestion problems, its status as an international tourist and regional business destination, combined with its projected growth, require action.

We understand that the proposals for Peak Congestion Control Points seek to achieve a balance between restricting access and managing congestion, without imposing road user charges, something the City has previously rejected.

We recognise that this is a controversial proposal and that objectors have raised concerns about traffic displacement and problems of access for essential users. The proposal to trial the scheme at six locations provides an opportunity to test those concerns against the real experience of the scheme. We encourage the City Deal to monitor these pilots closely and share the results widely in order to judge their effectiveness and make recommendations for the future.

It may be that a congestion charging scheme, which would preserve access while discouraging non-essential motor vehicle use, would prove more acceptable in the longer term. Congestion charging can be tailored by the local authority to provide exemptions for different categories of vehicles and users, and, unlike road closures, has the potential to generate revenue to reinvest in sustainable transport alternatives.

5. A Workplace Parking Levy

We strongly support the Workplace Parking Levy. Nottingham's experience shows that this can be a great success. In the Nottingham scheme, all employers with 11 or more spaces pay £375 per year per space (there are various exemptions). The revenue from this scheme has contributed towards additional tram lines, the upgrade of the main railway station, support for the local bus network, and a business support package of travel planning and parking management.

Since the Workplace Parking Levy went live in 2012, public transport use has risen to above 40% of journeys in the city, a very high percentage for the UK. Recent statistics show jobs growth in Nottingham has been faster than other cities, while traffic congestion has fallen. The levy, with the other measures, has also helped Nottingham reach its carbon reduction target a few years early.

6. On-Street Parking Controls (including Residents' Parking)

On street parking controls can be controversial at their introduction, but bring multiple benefits. They make it easier for residents of 'destination' areas to park near their homes, while discouraging unnecessary trips, thereby helping reduce congestion and pollution.

We would encourage parking controls to include provision for car club vehicles and space for secure on street bicycle parking. We would also encourage differential permit pricing to incentivise uptake of low emission vehicles.

7. Smart Technology

We support proposals to make real time travel information readily available. We recommend the rollout of smart technology in areas such as flexible and integrated ticketing, as well as better sharing of air pollution information to encourage modal shift.

Smarter logistics can bring real benefits through co-ordinating freight deliveries from local consolidation centres using ultra low emission vehicles, cargo bikes and other alternatives to conventional HGVs and LGVs.

8. Travel Planning

We support the work of Travel for Cambridgeshire (TfC) in providing support to local employers on greener workforce travel planning. We recommend this approach is extended on a holistic basis to be available to residents, students, tourists and individual employees.

9. Other measures

We recognise that the City Deal has chosen to pilot timed road closures (Peak Congestion Control Points) rather than introduce a congestion charge. We support piloting the scheme and look forward to seeing the results. However, should this approach prove ineffective or unacceptable in practice, then we would urge the City Deal to reconsider a congestion charge. A peak hour congestion charge has the potential both to discourage car usage and to provide income to support bus services and cycling provision. Local authorities have the powers to vary the level of charge and design discounts and exemptions to suit their environment and economy.

We would also encourage the City Deal to introduce a Low or Ultra Low Emission Zone in the city centre. This would have the dual benefit of tackling congestion and air pollution, and would encourage take-up of less polluting vehicles, a good fit with the City's hi tech sector.

Electric vehicles are not a solution to congestion, but they do greatly reduce roadside air pollution. Making more electric charging points available, perhaps as part of an electric car club network such as E-Car (already operating in Oxford, Northampton and Milton Keynes) could be a positive part of the mix: figures from industry body CarPlus show that only 21% of all car club members travel by private car at least once a week compared to 88% of residents in England and Wales.

More significance could be given to tackling the cause of Cambridge's congestion problems at source. A significant percentage of the road traffic in the city emanates from outside its borders. Ensuring that those travelling to Cambridge from its hinterland have affordable and convenient alternatives to driving is therefore essential.

Rather than supporting counterproductive projects to increase road capacity from nearby settlements, the GCP should actively encourage:

- enhanced transport choice through more frequent, better quality and higher capacity rail and bus services
- ensuring larger settlements such as Soham, Wisbech and Haverill have direct access to the rail network via new stations.

Finally, we believe specific measures to tackle freight are required. The growth in online shopping and consequent surge in the number of LGVs on the road requires smart solutions. Cambridge is extremely well-suited to the kind of smarter last mile delivery schemes that are being developed in other cities.

For example, the Crown Estate operates a consolidation centre to combine deliveries to different retailers in Regent Street, London, thereby greatly reducing the number of vehicles required. A similar partnership across the University, and/or the City's shopping centres, could work well.

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Campaign for Better Transport's vision is a country where communities have affordable transport that improves quality of life and protects the environment. Achieving our vision requires substantial changes to UK transport policy which we aim to achieve by providing well-researched, practical solutions that gain support from both decision-makers and the public.

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