

Transport Infrastructure Planning Unit
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR
transportinfrastructure@dft.gov.uk

please reply to:
Paul Hollinghurst
Secretary, Railfuture East Anglia

paul.hollinghurst@railfuture.org.uk

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Railfuture East Anglia's Objection to the Transport and Works Act Order for the Greater Cambridge Partnership's Cambridge South East Transport (CSET) Scheme

Introduction

Railfuture East Anglia, a voluntary organisation campaigning for a better passenger and freight rail network, formally objects to the Greater Cambridge Partnership's (GCP) application for a Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO) concerning the Cambridge South East Transport (CSET) scheme. Our objection focuses on the scheme's alignment with public transport objectives, its impact on existing bus services, and its consistency with GCP's sustainable transport policies.

Public Transport Objectives and Impact on Existing Services

The proposed CSET scheme includes the development of a large Park & Ride facility near the A11 and A1307. While intended to encourage car users to switch to bus travel for the final leg into Cambridge, this approach may inadvertently undermine existing bus services extending beyond the Park & Ride, particularly those serving communities such as Haverhill and Linton. By concentrating resources on the Park & Ride model, there is a risk of diminishing the viability of longer-distance bus routes, potentially leading to reduced services for these communities.

Furthermore, the emphasis on Park & Ride may not effectively serve residents who rely on public transport for their entire journey, as it primarily caters to car owners. This could result in a public transport network that is less inclusive and fails to meet the needs of all users.

Consistency with Sustainable Transport Policies

The GCP's City Access programme aims to improve access by sustainable transport to the city centre and key employment sites, encouraging commuters away from cars, and supporting air quality improvements. The programme emphasizes the need for public transport journeys to be competitive, sustainable, and reliable, with active travel alternatives that are safe and easy to encourage people to move away from cars.

We consider the current CSET proposal, with its significant reliance on a large Park & Ride facility, conflicts with these objectives. By promoting Park & Ride, the scheme risks reinforcing car dependency rather than promoting a full modal shift to sustainable transport. This approach could lead to increased traffic congestion and environmental impacts in areas surrounding the Park & Ride, contrary to the goals of reducing car dependency and improving air quality.

Deviation from Original CSET Proposals

The original CSET proposals from around 2016 focused on more modest interventions, including bus priority measures, walking and cycling enhancements, and road safety improvements along the A1307 corridor between Haverhill and Cambridge.

These earlier proposals were more aligned with sustainable transport principles, aiming to improve existing infrastructure and services without encouraging additional car travel. The current scheme's shift towards constructing a new busway and large Park & Ride facility represents a significant departure from these initial plans, raising concerns about its environmental impact and effectiveness in promoting truly sustainable transport solutions.

Lack of progress with the City Access Programme

The Greater Cambridge Partnership's (GCP) City Access programme aims to reduce congestion and improve public transport to offer better journeys, as well as reducing air pollution and carbon emissions from transport.

However, the lack of substantial progress in implementing this programme undermines the effectiveness of expensive schemes like the CSET. Without comprehensive congestion-reduction measures in Cambridge, access to the city will remain slow and unreliable. Investing in rail or light rail-based alternatives could provide more efficient and dependable transport solutions, ensuring that the benefits of such infrastructure projects are fully realised.

Alternative Solution

Railfuture East Anglia advocates a solution that aligns more closely with sustainable transport objectives. For many years, we have advocated restoring the railway line between Cambridge and Haverhill. This proposal offers a rail-based mass transit system along the A1307 corridor, providing a sustainable and efficient transport option that could reduce car dependency and support the region's growth.

Such a rail link would offer the following advantages over the proposed busway.

- Increased capacity over the busway. A recent study commissioned by Railfuture indicated there could be as many as 2,000 daily journeys during peak periods alone - more than can be handled by the proposed busway. A railway would be better placed to help meet the city's transport needs as it expands over the coming decades.
- Minimizes environmental impact. A railway, using much of the original alignment, would avoid the environmental damage that the construction of a new concrete busway would bring.
- Connects the growing town of Haverhill to the busy and expanding rail network centred on Cambridge and beyond. Haverhill is already one of the largest towns in the country not rail connected and yet could expand further in the future to around 40,000 people. The GCP has not properly considered the future transport needs of the town, many residents of which are dependent upon Cambridge for employment and other services. If substantial resources are committed to the busway, prospects for reopening a railway to Haverhill will be seriously diminished and the town will remain economically and socially disadvantaged compared to other large towns in the region.

The proposed railway has gained considerable public support over the years. This includes a petition with 5,000 signatures from the Haverhill area and support for the restoration from the

current and previous West Suffolk (including Haverhill) MPs.

A 'Restoring your Railways' bid submitted by Railfuture in 2021 even though unsuccessful, received strong encouragement from yourselves with the scheme being rated as "a good case for future development".

Railfuture acknowledges that the rail link is a longer-term solution and that in the short term a much more modest scheme should be provided, more aligned with the original CSET aspirations of bus priority along the route of the A1307.

Conclusion

In summary, Railfuture East Anglia objects to the current CSET scheme on the grounds that it may undermine existing public transport services, conflicts with GCP's sustainable transport policies, and deviates from earlier, more sustainable proposals. In the longer term a reinstated railway to Haverhill will help deliver the transport capacity needed along the A1307 corridor. We urge the Department for Transport to consider these concerns and explore the proposals we have put forward that better align with sustainable transport objectives and serve the needs of all communities in the region.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Hollinghurst
Secretary, Railfuture East Anglia

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