

## **Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire Green Party (CSCGP) Position Paper**

### **First steps towards a Plan B for transport in the Cambridge area** **– a fairer, greener approach**

#### **A response to the Greater Cambridge Partnership's (GCP's) decision to abandon the idea of funding the Making Connections Plans via a congestion charge.**

Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire Green Party (CSCGP) has long called for a modal shift away from private car use in Cambridge and its surrounding areas to an effective public transport and active travel (cycling, wheeling and walking) system. This is now increasingly urgent: we must reduce carbon emissions and air pollution, both for the well-being of all who live or work or visit here, and for the natural environment on which we depend.

Now that the GCP's proposal for a congestion charge mechanism has been dropped, the CSCGP urges those responsible to quickly source alternative funding so that our region's net-zero targets can be realistically achieved. These sources must not disproportionately affect those on lower incomes who live in Cambridge and the surrounding area.

In summary:

1. Bus network and active travel network improvements must be delivered as soon as possible.
2. Funding sources must be found that will not cause financial hardship.
3. We have long supported a Workplace Parking Levy as an equitable line of revenue and this should be explored along with the potential for a council tax precept or a tourist tax.
4. The search should continue for a fairer, less expensive congestion charge to encourage able-bodied citizens to choose bus or active travel over car travel.
5. We would like to see much bolder plans for the design of how large buses enter and are routed around the city.
6. The unhelpful significant discrepancy between ticket prices for Park and Ride (P&R) buses versus regular rural bus services, with the former much cheaper than the latter, must be addressed.

7. Car clubs provide an excellent alternative to personal car ownership for those who still need to use a car occasionally. There is an urgent need for further efforts to expand these.

8. The long-term health of Cambridgeshire residents depends on a rapid reduction in fine particulate matter (PM2.5): the necessary reduction will be accelerated with a switch to cleaner bus travel and safer active travel.

The CSCGP holds that bus network and active travel network improvements must be delivered soon, and well. In order for this to happen and to meet the needs and wishes of the public, a major programme of communication and engagement must be put into place quickly, involving consultation on how an effective and fit-for-purpose bus and active travel network could be financed.

The CSCGP believes that a number of revenue streams will be required to fund the bus and active travel network. We firmly maintain that it is possible to find sufficient funding without causing further financial hardship to those struggling economically, and that this must remain an absolute priority.

We urge the GCP to explore the potential for a socially just Workplace Parking Levy. In both the 2021 [\[1\]](#) and 2022 Making Connections consultations [\[2\]](#), the CSCGP proposed a Workplace Parking Levy as a fair and just mechanism to ensure that the many large companies based in Cambridge and the surrounding areas contribute fairly to the costs involved, given that they benefit enormously from the city's globally famous brand and buoyant wealth-generating economy.

We recognise that a Workplace Parking Levy would not bring in enough revenue alone, and so we urge consultation on the public's view of a council tax precept. As Cambridge's Green Councillors have explained before, this would be a small and fair addition to the council tax, and would be more socially just than the originally proposed congestion charge, which would have disproportionately affected residents on smaller incomes, especially those running a local business requiring a vehicle. In addition, a tourist/visitor tax could be collected, for example, via Cambridge Business Improvement District (Cambridge BID). A £2 per night occupancy tax would recognise the serious over-use of water in this region, where the only source is the chalk aquifer.

We also suggest that a search continues for a fairer, better targeted congestion charge. In the long run, this would be necessary to get people out of their cars and to generate income for the switch to carbon-free transport that is so desperately needed. For example, Stockholm and Gothenburg run more affordable congestion taxes at 67 pence to £2.62 per crossing and the price depends on the time and whether you are in Stockholm or Gothenburg. The maximum charge of congestion tax in Gothenburg is 60

SEK (£4.49) per day and in Stockholm the maximum charge is 130 SEK (£9.73). The tax is not charged on Saturdays, Sundays, public holidays, the day before a public holiday and in the month of July. The minimum charge is a fraction of the cost originally proposed in the Making Connections plans and would avoid further deepening inequality in our city.

[\[3\]](#)

Our feedback and concerns regarding the Making Connections 2022 proposals focused on the impact of those proposals on Cambridgeshire residents, workers and small businesses who would be most adversely affected by an STZ charge while also being least able to avoid it. We were therefore pleased to see that the August 2023 revised proposals addressed some of those concerns: with peak-time only charging, and finishing at 6pm rather than 7pm; the 50% discount for local SMEs' vehicles; the 50 free days for account holders; no charge for motorcycles; and no charge for most patients and staff at the hospitals on Cambridge Biomedical Campus. However, the extension of the disability exemption for Blue Badge holders to also include those in receipt of mobility PIP was unconvincing, since most such PIP recipients would qualify for a Blue Badge anyway. And similarly, the exemption for those in receipt of Carers benefit would only benefit full-time carers (who spend at least 35 per week caring for someone) and did nothing to address the many examples of 'informal carers', i.e. people who need to drive into and through the City on a frequent basis to provide vital, regular support to family members or others on an informal basis. We also noted that there seemed to be no acknowledgement of or concession for those who live on the outskirts of the City, and regularly commute by car outwards - adding very little to peak time congestion for their short route out of the City, yet still having to pay the full STZ charge (all but 50 times per year).

We will not see details of the proposed bus network improvements until December, but we hope they will address the following points. Subsidising the headline-grabbing flat rate of £1/£2 for single bus fares does not sufficiently address the complex travel needs of many residents, commuters, visitors, and in particular family groups. The CSCGP would like to see much bolder plans for the design of how large buses enter and are routed around the city. As we pointed out in December 2022, Smarter Cambridge Transport has published excellent suggestions. In particular, their proposal for ring-and-spoke or 'lollipop' routing of all large buses around the inner ring-road [\[4\]](#) would be truly transformative in so many ways:

- making it easier to reach more parts of the city from any single radial bus service;
- making it easier for users to interchange between any two bus services, and thus opening up more destinations to all; and

- perhaps most importantly, transformative for the human environment of the city centre and the many historic streets and buildings which currently suffer from accommodating so many large double-decker buses.

We urge those who will be working on the detailed recommendations for our bus network transformation to revisit that 2018 suggestion, and to think boldly - beyond the current set-up of an unpleasant, crowded and hard-to-navigate city centre bus interchange area.

We note that the consultants who produced the Outline Business Case (OBC) for the GCP also produced the national Climate Change Committee's May 2023 report on understanding the requirements and barriers for a modal shift [5]. A key message of this report is that: *"Achieving meaningful modal shift requires a combination of measures aiming to reduce car use and measures that offer people alternatives, supported by effective communication and engagement activities."* That report stresses the importance of *reframing the narrative around the comparison in cost between car use and alternative travel modes*. It will be vital to the success of any scheme that, alongside publicity around cheaper fares, there is widespread education about the 'real' cost of car usage, relative to alternative modes of transport: this would help rebalance the common perception that car is an overall cheaper mode than public transport. For many example journeys locally, existing Dayrider bus fares already represent a cheaper overall option than single-occupant private car use [6], and a recent local survey showed that the most common reason bus users quote for getting the bus is in fact affordability (followed by convenience) [7]. So rather than keep repeating the false narrative that 'our current buses are very expensive', CSCGP would like to see, alongside any publicity about new subsidised fares, an effective programme of education about the true costs of car ownership. If well-targeted, this should influence people who may be thinking about replacing a car or buying an additional one, and thus will help grow bus patronage more quickly than just advertising cheap fares on their own.

A further priority is to look at the unhelpful discrepancy between ticket pricing for Park and Ride (P&R) buses and regular rural bus services: Adults are currently able to take up to three children for free with their £3.50 P&R return ticket, whereas on a regular village service this would require a "Large Group Dayrider" ticket, costing £11 or £17, depending on the originating zone. For too many years, this discrepancy has created the bizarre incentive for those who live close to a village bus service to nevertheless drive a mile or two to their nearest P&R site and get the bus from there. We recognise the ongoing importance of the P&R sites in providing a service for those who live where there is no local bus, and who therefore have no choice but to drive; however, the ticketing price structure for non-P&R services must be brought into line, so that leaving the car at home becomes the natural choice for those on existing rural routes.

The current focus on cheap flat-rate single fares makes for a good “quick win” headline, but does very little to address the complex travel needs of those who want to travel with family or friends, and who want to do more than just a simple there and back journey. The cost of multiple trips should be automatically capped per day, week, month, half-year and year. This eliminates the anxiety of trying to predict the type of ticket that will represent best value, and will make bus travel more attractive to people with varying work patterns and locations. Excellent detailed recommendations relating to this aspect of bus network transformation have been produced by Smarter Cambridge Travel [\[8\]](#).

Car clubs provide an excellent alternative to personal car ownership for those who still need to use a car occasionally, or as an alternative to owning a second or third car. We need emphasis on their expansion, whether through subsidy, marketing, or other means. The GCP’ consultation results indicated that many people have little understanding of the advantages of car clubs, which is probably indicative of the current limited and/or out-dated publicity by the GCP’s constituent councils about these [\[9\]](#). Nationally, each car club replaces 20 private cars, and 73% of car club members say that they have saved money compared to owning a car [\[10\]](#). Currently, only three of the Enterprise club cars around Cambridge are located outside the city (one in Longstanton and two in Melbourn). We would like a pilot roll-out to more non-city locations which would help to motivate a reduction in private car ownership and, in turn, progress the aim of achieving modal shift.

Finally, the health of Cambridgeshire residents, particularly those living near busy and congested roads, is negatively affected by high car use. Short- or long-term exposure to fine particulate matter (PM2.5) can cause hospitalisation and mortality among those suffering from heart disease (attacks and strokes) and lung disease, bronchitis and asthma; children, the elderly and those with existing health conditions are more vulnerable. The most dangerous pollutants (those associated with excessive premature mortality) are from these fine particles which penetrate deep into lung passageways, and are particularly prevalent in traffic emissions [\[11\]](#). The CSCGP thus firmly supports a urgent transformation of the way Cambridgeshire people move around in order to reduce pollution and its harmful effects. Convincing able-bodied people that buses are reliable and affordable and that active travel is safe are key to reducing use of cars, the majority of which are not electric and thus cause significant polluting emissions.

To conclude, the CSCGP is deeply concerned that the urgently required modal shift in transport for our region has still not materialised while the climate and biodiversity crises worsen. Rapid action must be taken to create a transport plan that draws its funds cleverly and equitably from the vast amounts of wealth that some earn in this region of the UK. The way we move around our city and county impacts on our health, our pocket and our planet; and time is of the essence.

1. [https://wordpress.greenparty.org.uk/cambridge/wp-content/uploads/sites/210/2023/06/Green-Party -Making-Connections-Response-Dec-2021.pdf](https://wordpress.greenparty.org.uk/cambridge/wp-content/uploads/sites/210/2023/06/Green-Party-Making-Connections-Response-Dec-2021.pdf)
2. <https://wordpress.greenparty.org.uk/cambridge/wp-content/uploads/sites/210/2023/06/CSCGP-Position-Paper-on-Making-Connections-Consultation-2022-FINAL-VERSION.pdf>
3. <https://visitsweden.com/about-sweden/information-swedish-transport-agency-swedens-congestion-taxes-and-bridge-tolls/>
4. <https://www.smartertransport.uk/cambridge-city-bus-hub/>
5. [Understanding the requirements and barriers for modal shift \(WSP\) - Climate Change Committee](#)
6. [https://youtu.be/hk\\_6-EHbDV4?](https://youtu.be/hk_6-EHbDV4?)
7. <https://cambstravelalliance>
8. <https://www.smartertransport.uk/buses/>
9. <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/parking-services/parking-in-cambridge-city-centre/car-club>
10. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/car-clubs-local-authority-toolkit/car-clubs-local-authority-toolkit#the-benefits-of-car-clubs>
11. <https://www.who.int/news/item/15-11-2019-what-are-health-consequences-of-air-pollution-on-populations#:~:text=It%20increases%20the%20risk%20of,poor%20people%20are%20more%20susceptible.>