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Council 19 December 2022 Agenda Item 13: CGP – Making Connections Consultation – to receive a recommendation for a Town Council response to the consultation from the Task and Finish Working Group

Summary

A City Access Public Consultation “Making Connections” covering the Greater Cambridge and the travel to work area is asking for comments by 23 December 2022. This would have major implications for the Newmarket / Bury St Edmunds corridor and surrounding villages so the Development & Planning Committee on 5 December 2022 approved establishing a working group to formulate a draft response for consideration at Council which is presented here.

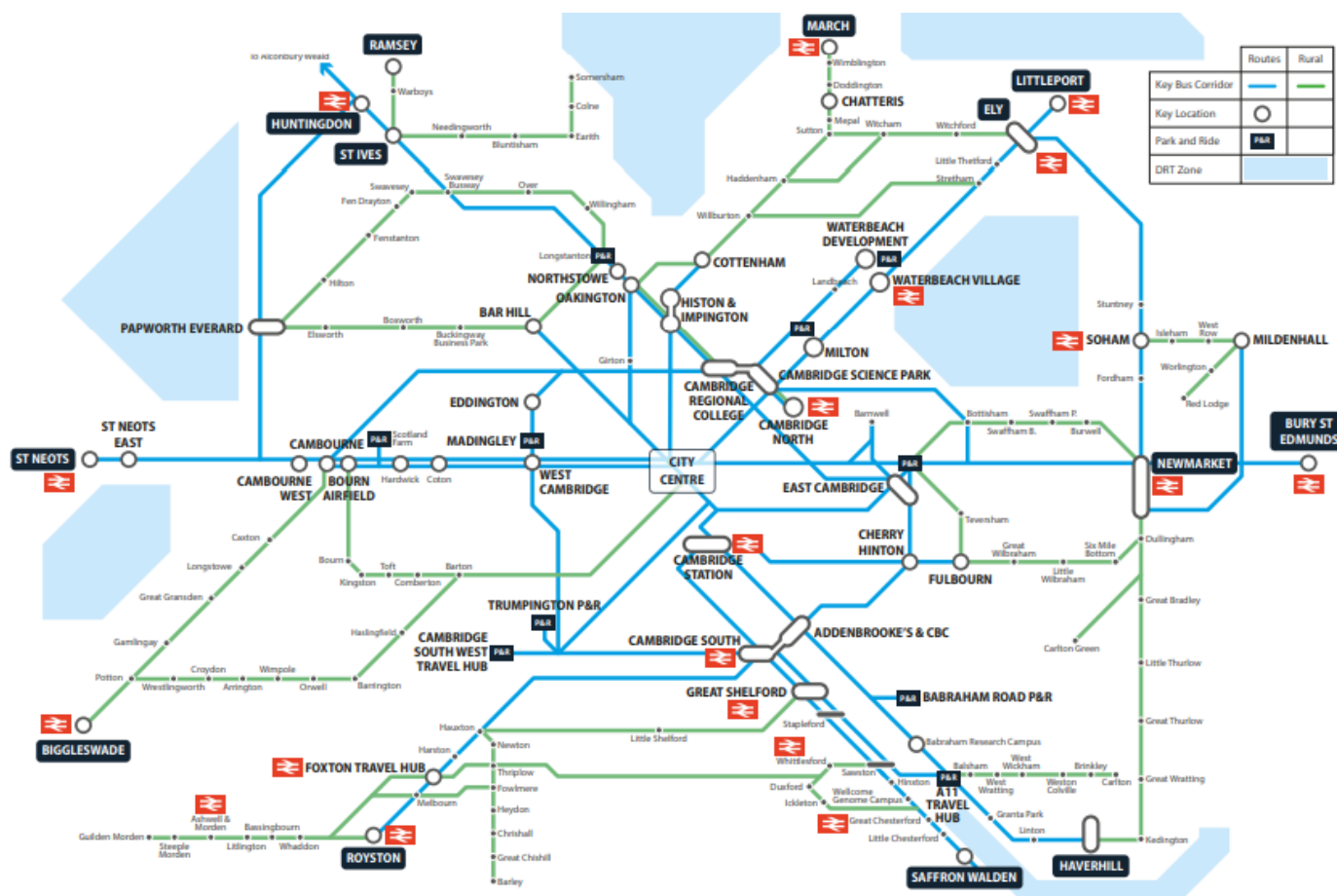
Context

The “Making Connections proposals” lead by the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP), alongside Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) and in conjunction with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) contain the main elements as summarised below with further detail at:

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/news/2022/10/17/consultation-launched-on-proposals-to-transform-how-people-travel-around-greater-cambridge> and Making Connections consultation / proposals at:

<https://www.greatercambridge.org.uk/sustainable-transport-programme/city-access-programme/making-connections>

Map of area and routes:



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- From as early as 2023, the GCP is proposing to transform the bus network through more routes, for longer hours at higher frequencies and cheaper fares set at £1/2 per journey across the whole region.
- Alongside the bus network, the proposals are to invest in new sustainable travel schemes, such as better walking and cycling links.
- These changes would be paid for upfront by the GCP and phased in over four years before the proposed introduction of a Sustainable Travel Zone (STZ) aimed at reducing traffic congestion and environmental impact, introducing a road user charge.
- Vehicles would be charged for driving within the Zone between 7am and 7pm on weekdays and money raised would fund improvements to the bus network and other sustainable travel schemes. The Zone would be fully operational in 2027/28 but only once the first bus improvements are introduced.
- The Zone would fund the bus network in the future and deliver the space needed for ambitious walking and cycling improvements.

Key features of the London-style bus network and active travel improvements are:

- New bus routes, additional orbital and express services to key sites across the city, and a huge increase in services for villages and towns across the travel to work area.
 - Buses supported by flexible services known as Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) – which you can book that picks you up from near your home, such as the popular Ting service currently being trialled in West Huntingdonshire.
 - Longer operating hours from 5am to 1am and more frequent services - 6-8 buses every hour in the city and from market towns, and hourly rural buses.
 - Flat fares to make public transport cheap and accessible for all; with passengers paying £1 to travel in the city and £2 in the travel to work area.
 - Options for new cycling routes in the city and connections between villages and the wider active travel network, including the 12 Greenways routes.
 - Improvements to public spaces to make Cambridge more 'people-centric'.
- All vehicle movements into, out of and within the proposed Sustainable Travel Zone (STZ) would pay a flat daily charge between 7am and 7pm on weekdays.
 - There would be discounts, exemptions and reimbursements for some, including those on low incomes and blue badge holders.
 - The money generated by the Zone, which would not be fully introduced until 2027/28, would be ringfenced to provide better buses and other improvements to the transport network.

Next Steps/Recommendations

1. To send our response (via email) to the consultation to meet the 23 December deadline.
2. To send our response to Suffolk County and West Suffolk District to insist that they also engage with this process picking up the points that we raised and to integrate with any eventual scheme in terms of transport services and potential funding.
3. To request urgent action from:
 - a. the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority to provide an extension of the current bus services and funding beyond the end of March 2023.
 - b. Suffolk County Council to improve the current services now operated by Stephenson's and develop those in future (in conjunction with any GCP access scheme).

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Draft response to the consultation:

Response to “Making Connections consultation” from Newmarket Town Council, contact Cathy Whitaker, Townclerk@newmarket.gov.uk

Essential inclusion of Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds: We are pleased to see that the area under consideration includes and recognises the significance of the connectivity required along the Newmarket / Bury St Edmunds corridor and surrounding villages. We would like to see joint working with Suffolk County Council particularly in the light of the potential devolution deal which would hopefully provide additional funding for transport.

Necessary improvements to current bus services: Given the trauma of the recent withdrawal of bus services 10, 11 and 12 we support necessary improvements to the hastily introduced replacement bus services as outlined in the proposals providing increased frequency, longer operational hours (including Sundays) and cheaper fares. **As the current (CPCA) bus contracts and funding are only secured until April 2023 we urge authorities to extend these whether the Making Connections proposals proceed or not.**

Park and Ride, We support the proposals to expand the park and ride spaces and the extension of the operating hours of the buses that link the car parks to the city centre enabling them to be used in the evening.

Hubs, DRT supported: We support use of hubs and the development of Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) particularly to improve links to Newmarket and surrounding towns and access for rural areas to essential services, education, employment and leisure.

Re-instatement and improvements of railway links: Noting that the Cambridge South railway station is included in the map another railway connection of benefit would be re-instatement of the Snailwell and Dullingham Loops to re-connect Newmarket to Ely (and now Soham) by railway. Also Newmarket station car park is inadequate and leads on on-street parking so could this be better developed as a transport hub (noting that some previous railway buildings and the parking area adjoining the site are currently in commercial use).

Franchising of service operation: We feel it is essential that services are protected from the potential risk of key company dependence such as Stagecoach operating commercially rather than reliance on them maintaining required services.

Whilst congestion and environmental impact undoubtedly needs radical proposals for improvements we have listed below some of the reservations, comments, questions raised by our Councillors regarding the Making Connections proposals, but we would emphasise that significant improvements to transport services are needed regardless of any eventual scheme that may or may not be approved or implemented.

Timing of implementation: How realistic is the timing of the proposals? It is essential to have the improvements and infrastructure in place before any prospect of charging. Would these improvements in themselves reduce congestion sufficiently and increased bus usage enable bus companies to operate overall commercially (or at a reduced level of subsidy) and thereby reduce the need for or level of Zone charging?

Funding: If there are cost overruns in constructing new routes and setting up then how will these be met? If not all the routes can be improved how will they be prioritised? Will that compromise the overall scheme itself? Are there alternative / additional funding sources such as CPCA (direct funding or a transport precept), Suffolk County devolved agreement, Government or Commercial for elements of the scheme (such as the

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Government for cycling improvements, income generated from solar panel coverage of car parks and other assets as per current pilot at Babraham Road Park and Ride.

Scheme running costs and charges: The proposals are promulgated and dependent on the Zone charges so if this scheme is more successful at discouraging travel in the Zone then income reduces so how would any shortfall be met as this presumably could mean reduced services and / or increased charges? And charging could be seen as the thin edge of a wedge (such as Dartford Crossing now £2.50 previously £1, M6 Toll now £7.80 originally £2.50, etc).

Other financial impacts: Have these been factored in e.g. reduced vehicles will reduce parking requirements so presumably reduced income to Cambridge City Council with financial impact on Council tax payers?

Heavy reliance on buses and bus running times: Will operators have sufficient buses and drivers (which seems to be an issue even currently) and is 5am to 1am realistic / necessary / reliable / cost-effective? Will the services be operated commercially / under franchise or a mix? (see our comments regarding single operator dependency).

Zone hours/other measures: 7am to 7pm seems excessive particularly where vehicles have to enter the Zone so surely congestion could be reduced by also using other measures such as staggering school hours, specifying time slots for deliveries.

Zone discounts / residents: The Zone is a large area so it may not be convenient or practicable for residents, disadvantaged, disabled or others identified in the Equalities Impact assessment (including due to weather, journey time, carrying loads) for someone to walk, bike or even use a bus so if someone is travelling just in this area should that not be recognised with appropriate discount / exemption? Or something like a residents' annual pass? This is perhaps a significant issue with Addenbrookes included in the Zone.

Impact on and responses from workers / shoppers / visitors: One would expect there to be justifiable apprehension from shops, businesses, etc although maybe the scheme would make it more attractive for those to come to the City. Could further pedestrianisation be incorporated into the scheme? How is support or otherwise for the scheme measured / factored in? If support is insufficient then how could the proposals be modified with a view to still improving services, i.e. a plan B?

Electric vehicles: It is not clear in these proposals how increasing number of electric vehicles will be accommodated in future planning within the area or at Park and Ride sites.

https://consultcambs.uk.engagementhq.com/making-connections-2022/survey_tools/making-connections-2022-survey