

Big issues for the Cambridge area

Notes from the discussion session at U3AC meeting of 18 October 2017

(Jane Phillips and Richard Synge)

Transport

Discussion followed up on Professor Peter Landshoff's summary of current transport suggestions for the Cambridge area.

In the context of the ongoing dramatic increase in employment, especially around Cambridge city – and the urgent need both for more housing and for improved transport provision in surrounding areas – the organisational and financial challenges of reaching widely agreed priorities and decisions were broadly acknowledged.

Several key ambitions for the 30+ years to 2050 were identified as desirable for both Cambridge and its surrounding areas, including: (i) Preservation of the city's historic centre, in part (a) by enforcing an eventual exclusion of private vehicles from a well-defined area, and in part (b) by the increasing use of Park and Ride sites as hubs from which to develop a more effective public transport network; (ii) The development of improved links to nearby towns, such as a new rail link between Cambridge and Wisbech; (iii) Changing commuter behaviour, with increasing use of cheap public transport helping to reduce reliance on cars; (iv) Provision of user-friendly cycleways for new communities within cycling distance of the city, such as Waterbeach and Northstowe.

Coordination in planning

With new infrastructural priorities being considered and prepared on the wider regional level, there has been a widening of interest in the future of transport in and around the city and South Cambridgeshire. The Greater Cambridge Partnership has commissioned an appraisal of strategic options, with an initial report due to be published very soon. (For further information, refer to <http://www.steerdaviesgleave.com/services/local-regional-transport> and <http://www.smartertransport.uk/a-walking-tube-map-for-cambridge/>)

Current indications suggest that both the GCP and the Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority – endowed with substantial budgets – will be in a good position to access and stimulate major spending on transport infrastructure in future. The mayor of the Combined Authority can be expected to focus on improving both rail and road links within and beyond the Cambridge area.

At the same time, the constant challenge of gaining acceptance of any new proposals at the local level will clearly require an effective combination of incentives and palliatives.

Tackling congestion in the city

Preserving the historic centre of the city will require a much larger pedestrianised area than at present, effectively excluding all motorised traffic. The question is how far should it extend?

Park and Ride sites around the periphery need to increase in size, and perhaps in number.

As school transport is a big contributor to traffic congestion, there is a need for more school bus services.

Better public transport should serve the needs of those who work in the city as well as residents.

Innovatively, there is a need for less car ownership, and there is possible scope for cheaper or free transport by the use of driverless buses.

Congestion charging probably requires the provision of infrastructure first; later, the imposition of a charge could generate revenue for further investment.

Congestion on the periphery

The inner ring road easily becomes clogged, suggesting the need for an outer ring road. The A14 upgrade is unlikely to reduce commuting delays at the city's northern exit points.

With the Local Plan favouring more housing outside the city, new transport infrastructure will be essential.

Cycleways

Rental bikes, tricycles and box bikes are increasingly popular and need further encouragement, but the roads need to be safer for cyclists, especially at major crossroads and roundabouts. New cycleways need to be developed and properly maintained.