UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
Pro-Vice-Chancellors' Office

D A Cardwell ScD FREng
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Strategy and Planning)

Rachel Stopard
Greater Cambridge Partnership,
PO Box 1493,
Mandela House,
4 Regent Street,
Cambridge
CB2 1BY

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Greater Cambridge Partnership – Making Connections University of Cambridge Response

Dear GCP,

Making Connections: Response from the University of Cambridge

There is no question that bold steps are needed if we are to arrest the rapidly deepening climate and biodiversity crisis. Indeed, the University has committed to delivering against its science-based target by 2048 and is delivering a range of measures to meet this ambition in areas such as transport, energy transition, biodiversity gain and more.

It is clear that in order to deliver against their climate ambitions, the University and its regional partners cannot continue with the status quo as far as the existing transport system is concerned. It is in this context that the University welcomes the progress being made by the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) to deliver an integrated transport solution, including affordable bus journeys, to address the climate and biodiversity crisis and social inequalities that the region faces. The University is therefore very pleased to be afforded the opportunity to respond to the latest City Access - Making Connections consultation.

There is no doubt that in order to function, the ecosystem of the University, staff, students and the City need an effective and sustainable transportation system. Since the transportation system serves everyone in the City, it is imperative that the University and the City work together to find a solution. In our previous Making Connections consultation response in December 2021 (available here), we highlighted a number of key principles as well as areas for further development to ensure that the transport system offers a seamless and integrated solution to the needs of all who are part of this ecosystem. At the same time, any transition to a new, more environmentally sustainable equilibrium has to keep in mind

The Old Schools
Trinity Lane
Cambridge CB2 1TN

Tel: + 44 (0) (1223) 765692
Fax: + 44 (0) (1223) 765693
Email: David.Cardwell@admin.cam.ac.uk
www.cam.ac.uk

the immediate impact on our staff, who, with their many needs and constraints, are poised to both benefit and be hindered in their travel to and from work. We, therefore, support, in principle, the proposal put forward by the GCP but with qualifications we have previously raised. Specifically, we support the GCP's commitment to:

a. Significantly improve the frequency, duration (5am-1am), affordability (£1/£2 per journey) and sustainability of public transport before the introduction of any road user charge. We also expect the enhancements to transport infrastructure, including but not limited to Park and Ride capacity, to be completed before the road user charge is introduced. We would expect a transparent effectiveness review to be conducted to ensure the improvements meet expectations.

b. Adjust the final proposal in line with the feedback received during the consultation, in particular the road user charge, timing, charging zone and exemptions/discounts.

c. Balance the wider sustainability goals including equity considerations and Cambridge's need to remain an attractive and vibrant economic centre.

Whilst our travel insights data (detailed below) suggests that a large proportion of our staff already travel by public transport or walk/cycle to work, some staff have expressed concerns about the immediate impact of any road user charges. In this context the University recommends that:

a. the enhancements to transport infrastructure including but not limited to Park and Ride capacity are fully completed before any road user charge is introduced; and

b. Before the GCP proceeds with any road user charge, a review, , which is fully transparent and gives all those affected across the GCP the opportunity to consider and comment on that review is carried out to ensure the improvements in the bus services meet expectations.

Travel Insights – Staff and student travel habits and needs

The University's staff and student travel surveys for 2022 suggest that travel and working-from-home habits are starting to settle, and we are now able to better understand how these have changed since 2019 and the impact that this is having.

The following provides a summary of the key headlines, and we will share further insights as they become available to help inform proposals as appropriate.

- The vast majority of students and over 60% of our staff use sustainable modes for their journey to work. However, for those who live outside of Cambridge, this percentage reduces, and we anticipate that in the future more staff will be travelling from outside of Cambridge.

- For staff travelling into Cambridge many have a limited public transport offer that is reliable. Therefore, improvements to services, increased frequency, reliability and operating hours, including the increased capacity at the park and ride sites, are all to be welcomed.

- Currently, approximately 20% of our staff have caring responsibilities and whilst over 50% of those staff travel by active modes, and we are aware that a proportion of those with caring responsibilities currently drive.

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- Whilst we recognise that a large proportion of our staff and students could directly benefit from the proposals, we are also acutely aware that a proportion of our staff could be adversely affected due to a range of often interwoven needs, in particular those on the lowest incomes.

The remainder of our response provides feedback to the consultation questions and highlights a number of areas that the University believes need addressing to deliver the proposals and the desired changes in travel habits.

Bus Services and Capacity

The proposals to improve the bus network across the region are fundamental; however, recent changes to bus services have shaken public confidence. We believe that the long-term success of the proposals requires a new approach to delivering a secure bus network, one that our staff and student can rely on to plan their lives around. We strongly encourage the GCP and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to advance the proposals for a new governance structure through franchising.

As proposals progress, assurance is needed that not only will there be an increase in the number of public transport journeys but that there is sufficient capacity to accommodate the desired increase of users at key employment sites such as West Cambridge, the Science Park and CBC. It is also imperative that there is a pipeline of skilled staff, vehicles and electric vehicle charging infrastructure available to ensure its future success. Public confidence in the GCP's credibility in delivering bus service improvements will be crucial in this process.

The proposal to offer cheaper ticketing across the network is imperative and supported. This should include integrated ticketing across different operators, thereby providing a more seamless and affordable travel experience.

We also recognised that the reduction in traffic across the network will support the University's bus service, and we will continue to work with local authority partners to complement the proposals.

Walking and Cycling (Active Travel)

Walking and cycling are the preferred modes of travel for a majority of students and over 40% of staff use these modes of travel for their journey to work. The large infrastructure projects being delivered through both the greenways and the cycle plus proposals are welcomed; as are the ambitions to deliver a range of improvements to support a significant uplift in the number of people walking and cycling through increases in cycle parking, and improvements to footways and spaces for people.

We welcomed the proposals to reallocate road space to support increased active travel modes across the transport network. A 50% reduction in peak-time traffic would enable the provision of a safer and cleaner environment for walking and cycling.

However, the consultation documents provide limited detail on which we can comment; therefore, we look forward to working with the GCP and other partners to develop these proposals further.

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Specific areas that we welcome further development on include:

- Reallocation and design of space within the urban environment that supports active travel and micro-mobility.
- Solutions for deliveries and freight consolidation and the role of micro-mobility.
- Significant micro-mobility parking and storage infrastructure.
- Improved quality of space and surfaces.

Sustainable Travel Zone and Revenue Generation

The University accepts that a revenue stream is needed to support the wider city objectives of enabling sustainable growth and reducing traffic and pollution. The proposals for a Sustainable Travel Zone would charge those who cause the most impact on air quality, quality of place and the functionality of our City, and generate an income to support the wider package of measures. A comprehensive package of support will be needed to help people transition to a new way of travelling, including individuals, communities and businesses.

A clear agreement that public transport and active travel infrastructure has reached an acceptable level must be in place prior to the introduction of any charging scheme.

Central to the success of the Making Connections package is ensuring that the whole of the greater Cambridge area would benefit from proposals to achieve a vision to support sustainable growth and protect the health and well-being of our communities. We, therefore, support a whole-city approach. Without this, we cannot achieve the essential transport systems that our community deserves. Much time and resources have been spent to maximise the city's transport network; however, what we need now is a different approach, a bold approach.

The University, like many other organisations with multiple sites and activities, generates a significant number of trips on the city's transport network. We recognise the need to consider both need to travel and mode of travel, and we are delivering ways to maximise the efficiency of our own organisational impact on the network through a reduction in the number of trips and by transferring as many as possible to more sustainable modes.

Feedback from our staff has highlighted that whilst the largest portion are likely to directly benefit from the proposals, a number will experience significant impact and particularly those with complex travel needs on lower incomes. Therefore, we expect exemptions or clear mitigation measures for those most in need, and look forward to receiving further information.

Specific vehicle and activity types we would welcome further considerations for include:

- Agricultural vehicles and other specialised vehicles used for estate management.
- Demand Responsive Transport and similar mass transit services.
- Vehicles conveying clinically sensitive equipment/materials
- Emergency medical vehicles

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- Medical care related travel.

Further consideration and next steps

As proposals progress, we encourage the GCP and other regional partners to work together and we would welcome reassurance on the following key areas:

Franchising and co-ordinated approach to public transport service delivery across the region to ensure that the recent experience of bus service being withdrawn cannot happen in the future. The Cambridge community needs a reliable bus system that they can plan their daily lives around, knowing that they will be able to reach their destination.

Monitoring and Measuring Success. As previously stated, the University does not advocate the implementation of charges prior to significant and demonstrable improvements to public transport, cycling and walking routes and facilities across the city. We would encourage the GCP and partners to establish a programme to monitor and measure the success of transport improvements as they are implemented to ensure they are having the desired impact – before any road charging scheme is implemented.

Behaviour Change. To enable people to transition to a new way of travelling as the transport system evolves, a comprehensive package of support will be required. It is recognised that for some, the transition to a new way of travelling will be simple, but for others, additional support and advice may be required.

We would therefore encourage the GCP to provide a package of behavioural change support for individuals, communities and businesses to understand the choices available. This should include measures such as employer travel plans, personal journey planning services, real-time information and guidance on what services are available and how to access and use them.

Overall, and in line with previous consultation responses, the University welcomes the package of measures proposed by the GCP in the Making Connection's consultation. It will ensure that Cambridge remains a growing, evolving and sustainable centre of excellence and will support existing and future investment by the University and others. It will enable the city region to nurture its industries and will facilitate a further expansion of its knowledge-based economy while retaining the high quality of life and place that underpins our city and supports its standout economic success. It will ensure the spread of access to Cambridge's many opportunities to communities across its hinterlands and is essential for the University and the local authorities to deliver on their proposed commitments in the years and decades ahead.

We fully support and remain committed to the overriding ambitions of the GCP and other city partners to provide a connected, inclusive, and affordable transport system that is fitting for our city and our communities. This task is more important than ever if we are to sustain Cambridge's pace of growth and ambitions for sustainability.

We believe that the opportunity to change the transport offer in Cambridge should not be missed and that future generations will be thankful for decisive action to deliver these proposals.

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If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the points raised in this response, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

Professor David Cardwell
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Strategy and Planning)

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