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Dear Mr Bellamy

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Draft Bus Strategy: response from the University of Cambridge

There is no question that bold steps are needed if we are to arrest the rapidly deepening challenges surrounding the public transport services in the region that are currently being experienced. There are many, but they include, the closure in part of the Cambridge busway, reduced services due to driver shortages and operator costs, and the uncertainty over the short-term funding support for services both regionally and nationally resulting in loss of services locally.

Indeed, the University has committed to extending its own service, the Universal, which includes the delivery of 9 new electric buses for the start of a new extended contract this summer. Despite the many challenges on the network and at considerable additional costs. The Universal service currently transports approximately 60,000 people per month around Cambridge and has now reached pre-covid patronage levels.

It is clear, however, that in order to deliver against their sustainability ambitions, the University and its regional partners cannot continue with the status quo as far as the existing public transport system is concerned. It is in this context that the University welcomes the progress being made by the CPCA to develop this Bus Strategy, which not only aims to address the climate crisis but also the deepening social inequalities that the region faces. The University is, therefore, very pleased to be afforded the opportunity to respond to the CPCA's consultation.

As you will be aware, the University is a major employer in the Cambridge region employing around 12,500 staff, of which over 70% continue to commute on a regular basis from both within the City and from the greater Cambridge hinterland, many of whom are reliant on public transport for all or part of their journeys. For many, their door-to-door journey times are in excess of 1.5 hours due to congestion on the highway delaying public transport services and poor connectivity between travel modes.

The region's bus services, and more broadly public transport is in crisis, creating poor connectivity which is impacting the productivity and health and well-being of our staff and students and the environmental quality of our operational sites.

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The University recognises that changes to the way people travel are dependent upon the provision of realistic opportunities for public transport services, walking and cycling connections as well as supporting infrastructure and improvements to the use of technology. Therefore, our response aims to address the questions raised within the consultation and provide an insight into the University's key transport priorities, which are aligned to those set out within the consultation document as well as a number of areas we believe will require further development.

The University welcomes the ambition set out within the **Vision and Aims** of the draft Bus Strategy and the acknowledgement that the benefits of a successful bus network should support communities in a number of ways including health and well-being, safety, access to employment and education as well as providing for other essential and social trips.

Delivery model - The proposals to improve the bus network across the region are fundamental, however, recent changes to bus services have shaken public confidence. The greater 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 and to ensure that the recent experience of bus services being withdrawn cannot happen in the future.

We believe that the long-term success of the proposals requires a new approach to delivering a secure public transport network. We strongly encourage the CPCA to advance the proposals for a new governance structure through franchising.

In addition, we look forward to further information on the cost of delivering the strategy with a clear timeframe for delivery.

Bus Services and Capacity. As proposals progress, assurance is needed that not only will there be an increase in the number of public transport services but that there is sufficient capacity to accommodate the desired increase of users (doubling of patronage) at key employment sites such as West Cambridge, the Science Park and CBC as well as key residential sites together with the acknowledgement that orbital connectivity in urban areas will also need consideration.

It is also imperative that the **public transport industry is supported**, that there is a pipeline of skilled staff, vehicles and electric vehicle charging infrastructure available to ensure its future success. Public confidence in the CPCA's credibility in delivering bus service improvements collaboratively and in partnership will be crucial in this process.

It is acknowledged that the CPCA have overall responsibility for the development of the Bus Strategy and the University welcomes that **partnerships and a collaborative** approach has been identified within the strategy. However, the University also believes further work is required to deliver the interdisciplinary benefits through working with a broader range of partners across functions as well as organisations including the private sector. We would welcome further information within the strategy to ensure that the interdisciplinary approach to delivery is recognised, as are the roles of other partners to ensure that our rural and urban communities can benefit from a '**World Class'** public transport service. We would particularly welcome further details included within the Bus Strategy in the following areas:

- **Technology and innovation -** Considerable work has been undertaken in recent years by regional partners to develop and embrace emerging technologies to support bus services which include smart signals, green bus phases, as well as support for passengers by embracing audio and visual information within the buses and at bus stops and interchanges. We would also welcome recognition of the role of semi and fully autonomous vehicles within the Bus Strategy as well as SMART charging.

- **Accessibility and Equity -** It is essential that as many people as possible feel physically able, confident and comfortable using public transport. A standard minimum specification should be developed for operators, including measures such as low floors as standard, visual and audible stop warnings, at least one wheelchair space per bus and buses equipped with ramps.

- **Infrastructure and facilities -** Fundamental to delivering a public transport network is the infrastructure to support the services as well as facilities for users at interchange points whether a simple bus stop or travel hub. Further work is also required to enable operators to transition to electric and other low/zero carbon vehicles. It is, therefore, imperative that a strategic charging network is developed to support all operators across the different public transport service provisions.

  Acknowledging that much of this will be developed in partnership with both public and private organisations, the University would welcome greater understanding within the Bus Strategy of how this will be delivered in a cohesive and integrated way and the role of the CPCA in overseeing implementation.

- **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 CPCA to work with partners 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.

- **What does success look like** - The Bus Strategy identifies the need for an evidenced-based approach which is welcomed, however, there is very little information within the draft Bus Strategy. In order to meet this commitment the CPCA should set out clearly the baseline from which the strategy has been developed and what metrics will be used to measure its success both in terms of outcomes and impact.

Overall, and in line with previous consultation responses, the University welcomes the proposals set out in the CPCA's consultation on its draft Bus Strategy, whilst also acknowledging that there is still more to do to ensure that we deliver the ambition of a 'World Class' transport system.

An improved public transport system will ensure that Cambridge remains a growing, evolving and sustainable centre of excellence and will support existing and future investments 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 a sense of 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 Combined Authority and other regional 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 offered in Cambridge should not be missed and that future generations will be thankful for decisive action to deliver these proposals.

Yours sincerely

Graham Matthews