



Cambridge Area Bus Users

Working for bus passengers in and around Cambridge

Cambridge Area Bus Users Executive Committee meeting with Charlie Hamilton of Whippet Coaches Tuesday, 14 August 2018

Present:

[Charlie Hamilton CMILT](#), Managing Director [Whippet Coaches](#) & [Tower Transformation](#)

[Cambridge Area Bus Users](#) Executive Committee members Richard Wood (secretary) and John Simpson.

Discussions:

Charlie: Future of travel in Cambridge. Can't rely on bus alone. Need to be multi-modal – bus, metro, train, car-club (eg [ZipCar](#)) cycle

Bus interest is different from cycle and car.

Charlie's vision: Integrated transport. Elected people need to have responsibility. If they fail they can be booted out at elections.

Cambridgeshire's dominant operator is Stagecoach. Difficulty for other operators to compete even for local authority contracted services. Stagecoach makes more profit here – on a smaller operation – than on franchised operations in London. Stagecoach East extracting excessive profits in Charlie's opinion.

Charlie agreed with Stagecoach's Andy Campbell about the current difficulties tendering for subsidised services – short contract periods, impossible to build ridership as passengers will not be able to rely on service remaining; allocating vehicles, and employing drivers for short-term contract poses difficulties.

Whippet's busway operations routes A and U are secure. Others may go if stable contracting (franchising) is not introduced.

Whippet's parent is Tower Transit in London. Transit Systems operate public bus contracts across four Australian states and major public bus contracts in, London, Singapore, Chile and Mexico.

Whippet was purchased to gain experience outside of London.

The business has been diversified. Whippet is the largest contractor for National Express coach services.

[Ascendal Group Ltd](#), which incorporates Whippet, is a new spin-off from the Tower Transit group, partnering with [5A1](#) whose CEO [Stan Boland](#) who was involved with Acorn. (See 2, below)

Charlie outlined five main pillars of the Swavesey business: [Mobility](#), [Finance](#), [Innovation](#), [Real Estate](#), [Strategic Advisory](#)

1. **Core mobility** – buses 'first class public transport'
2. **Corporate finance for transport** – will only work in Franchise market: Local Transport Authorities want franchising but fear they can't afford it.
 - 2.1. Most places have dominant operators who will find it easier to tender – they already have staff, depot facilities and vehicles.
 - 2.2. Difficulty for other operators to tender as they need to set up facilities.

- 2.3. Whippet/Tower's transport finance arm will buy depots on a 30 year basis and buy/lease buses on a rolling replacement programme.
- 2.4. This gives operators a level playing field for bidding for franchises, as these cost are the same for all bidders.
- 2.5. Then possible to attract many bids – there being huge leverage for any company successfully running Cambridge buses. Internationally recognised city – picture of bus with Kings College in background.

3. Technology and innovation

- 3.1. [Citymapper](#)-style demand responsive transport
- 3.2. cycle-hire
- 3.3. scooters
- 3.4. hire cars
- 3.5. Tech developers can test innovations on Whippet's fleet, 'live'
- 3.6. Charlie reckons there will be autonomous vehicles in London by 2019
- 3.7. He is planning for autonomous pods on the Cambridge busway by 2020
- 3.8. Test by April next year on southern section. Initially run in night after general buses have stopped, serving people on bio-medical campus working late shifts
- 3.9. Trial with 8 people per pod, but will increase to capacity of 16 with some standing
- 3.10. Passengers can book a pod individually, as a group, or as a standard pod-sharing passenger
- 4. **Real Estate:** transport orientated development. eg Shard, London Bridge, and Stratford.
 - 4.1. Development density coupled with high-frequency transport means people don't need cars.
 - 4.2. Residential and business property becomes very desirable. Hong Kong is another good example.
 - 4.3. Tower Transit developing above one of their depôts (rather than moving to remote location with more 'dead' running) as residents have less objection to the latest environmentally-cleaner vehicles.
- 5. **Strategic Advisory:** eg tender in Mexico to advise on integrated transport.

We raised the problem of new housing developments having no bus service until there was a critical mass of residents. This could be too late.

Charlie: Getting people to change their travel pattern is really difficult, so need to make it easier for them. Whippet were operating bus service in Eddington before people moved in. The habit of bus use can be established early.

Charlie's question to Cambridge Area Bus Users: What do you want? How can we help you?

Our answer: publicity on buses and/or shelters.

Bus users have potentially more influence than the cycling lobby as more people travel by bus into Cambridge than cycle. Whippet are considering employing an undergraduate to ride the buses and encourage a write-in campaign.

John Simpson, Richard Wood

14-21 August 2018

Revised with links to [Ascendal Group Ltd](#)'s website Tuesday, 4 September 2018 Richard Wood.