



Cambridge Area Bus Users Working for bus passengers in and around Cambridge

Transport Committee's inquiry on health of the bus market Written submission from Cambridge Area Bus Users

Although bus service deregulation under the Transport Act 1985 was intended to create a competitive market, in practice competition *in* the market – as distinct from competition *for* the market, 'franchising' – has led to consolidation of 'territories' by operators and negligible competition.

In the Cambridge area, Stagecoach are the major operator. Their focus appears to be on maximising revenue per vehicle-mile. Timetables have been changed frequently, with many city routes have a higher proportion of 'short-turn' working, (ie serving a core section of route, rather than the whole). The biomedical campus, which includes Addenbrooke's hospital and which will shortly house a re-located Papworth hospital, has seen direct cross-city journeys reduced and/or cut completely. Rural services have been re-organised and many villages have lost all services, or all except a morning city-bound service with one evening return.

Rural Sunday services are almost non-existent other than on two 'premium' routes.

The largest of the minor operators, Swavesey-based Whippet Coaches, although part of a larger group which encompasses TfL-franchisees Tower Transit, have not expressed any intention to enter the more intensive city market against Stagecoach, despite the latter's current problems with driver recruitment.¹ Whippet were, however, successful in winning (in competition with Stagecoach) a contract to run *Bus Universal*² – a 'normal stopping' service sponsored by the University of Cambridge, connecting a number of university sites, but open to all passengers. Their bid was won largely on quality, with Whippet's transport professionals suggesting improvements upon the original tender specification, including improved frequency and a Saturday service. From early October 2018 earlier morning journeys and later evening journeys will be introduced as will be Sunday working, over a section of the route.

This suggests that competition *for* the market, 'franchising', is capable of delivering significant benefits for passengers. Significantly, Mayor James Palmer's Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority has the powers to introduce franchising under the Bus Service Act 2017. The Combined Authority has established a Strategic Bus Review, undertaken by SYSTRA, which is due to report before the end of 2018.

Stagecoach East's MD, Andy Campbell, is firmly opposed to franchising³, whilst Charlie Hamilton, MD of Swavesey-based Whippet Coaches regards Campbell's opposition as the

¹ <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/stagecoach-bus-driver-vacancy-delays-14729334>

² <http://www.go-whippet.co.uk/new-route-u/>

³ <http://www.cambridgeindependent.co.uk/news/cambridge/franchise-the-buses-you-need-money-in-the-tank-1-5543557>

“view of an operator who is fearful of losing their stranglehold on a region which deserves much more from a public transport network.”⁴

Campbell has a further objection to franchising in that “Councillors in charge of franchising would be the same people who lost us 15% of our Park & Ride passengers through the ‘reverse congestion charge’ of £1 on parking [at the Park & Ride sites]”.⁵

Both operators have recently withdrawn from running some tendered services on subsidised routes that are socially necessary, regarding them as inadequately-funded. Both MDs have expressed concern about the short-term nature

A major disadvantage of how the deregulated system operates in the Cambridge area is that there is no unified bus network. There are separate networks operated by Stagecoach East and by Whippet, to which are added a hotch-hotch of subsidised services.

Similarly there is no unified, cross-operator ticketing.⁶ Stagecoach and Whippet both offer zonal day tickets. These are not valid on one another’s services, nor are the zones coterminous.

Two types of ticket offer limited cross-operator validity. The rail-fare add-on PlusBus® is valid on an inner zone on both Stagecoach and Whippet.⁷ It is, however, difficult to purchase these from unstaffed stations. A Cambridgeshire County Council sponsored ‘MultiBus’ ticket⁸ covers a wider geographical area, but is expensive. Moreover, the MultiBus ticket is a voluntary scheme, with some routes excluded. Furthermore, the revenue from these tickets ‘lies where it falls’ offering a disincentive to any operator to compete in the market by supplying late evening services.

It is the view of our group that it would be no exaggeration to say that our bus services are at crisis point.

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Richard Wood
Secretary, Cambridge Area Bus Users

[<]
CAMBRIDGE
CB[<]

House: 01223 [<]
Mobile: 07[<] [<]

Email: secretary.cabu@gmail.com

Cambridge Area Bus Users, an affiliate of Bus Users UK:

- *seeks to represent, and campaign on behalf of, bus passengers in and around Cambridge;*
- *is independent of any political party.*

⁴ <https://cbgbususers.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/response-to-stagecoach-article-v1-0-13-07-18.pdf>

⁵ <https://cbgbususers.files.wordpress.com/2018/09/notes-of-meeting-with-andy-campbell-of-cambus-9-august-2018.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/buses/bus-ticket-types/>

⁷ <http://www.plusbus.info/cambridge>

⁸ <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/buses/bus-ticket-types/multibus/>