



Cambridge Area Bus Users

Working for bus passengers in and around Cambridge

Response to

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Bus Survey

1. Frequency, reliability, journey time, hours and days of operation

- 1.1. At shorter than 10-mins headway, frequency is more important than running to timetable. This is dependent, however, on ways of preventing 'bunching'. Our members have, on occasions, noted as many as four vehicles on a city route (with a notional 10-minute headway) 'convoying'.
- 1.2. The longer the headway, the more important reliability (ie running to timetable) becomes (see also 3. below).
- 1.3. Passenger satisfaction with reliability and journey-time may be dependent upon various factors:
Is accurate real-time information available about arrival times?
Does the timetable allow for peak-time congestion?
Does the timetable allow too much 'slack' at off-peak times, resulting in waits at timing points.
Are the reasons for timing-point waits communicated to the passengers by the driver?
Does the bus take a direct route to destinations, or circulate through locations where few passengers board or alight, or which would be better served by a local, connecting service?
(See 4.1. below.)
One example of unacceptably extended journey times is the Busway B route which acts as a limited-stop service from central Cambridge to St Ives, then acts as a local service around Huntingdon's Oxmoor estate, before reverting to a limited-stop service to Peterborough.
- 1.4. Rural residents complain that evening events – cultural, social and even late-night shopping – cannot be accessed by public transport as there is no bus home.
- 1.5. This (1.4.) applies from most out-of-city settlements on Sundays and, even within the city, service levels are poor or non-existent after 17:30 on Sundays.
- 1.6. There is little co-ordination between bus operators and leisure providers to ensure that attendees of shows and events can access a bus journey home.
The timetabled departure may be just a few minutes before the end of an event. Delaying departure, whilst of clear social benefit, means that bus operators would be failing in their duty to run to timetable. Moreover, the bureaucracy involved in applying to the Traffic Commissioners for multiple one-off timetable variations militates against such sensible adjustments.
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority should be pro-active in bringing together bus operators, and leisure providers to seek solutions.
- 1.7. Employment in the health and service sectors is 7-days/week. Many rural residents cannot access such employment on Sundays and Public Holidays.
- 1.8. In some cases, bus services are not suitable for rural students traveling into Cambridge for college (reliability, cost, journey length and times), to the point that we have received reports of students having been forced to drop out of college, for example, in Burwell, 12 miles outside of Cambridge. (Not all post-16 educational establishments have dedicated student transport.)
- 1.9. For some villages there is not even a travel-to-work journey and return.

- 1.10. Frequency on many rural services is hourly or less, which means that residents have to plan their activities around bus times, which is stressful and often simply not possible, particularly in relation to start and finish time for employment.
- 1.11. The impact of [1.4.](#) [1.5.](#) [1.6.](#) [1.7.](#) [1.8.](#) [1.9.](#) and [1.10.](#) above is twofold:
 Citizens without use of a private motor vehicle may be excluded from full participation in society – culturally, socially and for employment.
 Additional private vehicle movements are created, potentially over all seven days of the week, and including at peak times. When public transport is unavailable for some intended journeys, private transport is often used on *all* journeys. Eg employees may opt to commute by car for *all* shifts if 7-day/week bus services are not available; theatre goers will, of necessity drive in (as well as out) if there will be no bus home. This additional use of private vehicles causes traffic congestion, adding to bus journey times and adversely impacting on reliability.

2. Accessibility

- 2.1. Buses are now Disability Discrimination Act compliant for those with physical disabilities.
- 2.2. Provision for people with hearing or visual disabilities and hidden disabilities is generally poor. (See also [3.3.](#) [3.6.](#) [3.11.](#) [3.14.](#) and [6.1.](#) below.)
- 2.3. Neither Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority nor Cambridgeshire County Council seems to have any role in disseminating information about *Journey Assistance Cards* developed with the bus industry trade body, the Confederation of Passenger Transport. We could only find [information on the Stagecoach website](#). Recognition of and acceptance of *Journey Assistance Cards* ought to be part of the role of all bus drivers in the Combined Authority area and a requirement on supported services.
- 2.4. The *Sunflower Lanyard, for people with hidden disabilities* and their families, acts as a discreet sign for staff that additional support or help may be required. The lanyard scheme is gradually being adopted by train operating companies – currently used by LNER and c2c – and many high street retailers. It would make a useful adjunct to other schemes for accessibility on bus services in the Combined Authority area.
- 2.5. Some bus stops are poorly accessible for people with disabilities. Difficulties include:
 Bus stops sited on a muddy verge, or with no connection to a footway, particularly in rural locations;
 Bus stops accessed across a cycle lane (a.k.a. bus stop bypasses, ‘floating’ bus stops) with no clear right of way for pedestrian passengers;
 ‘Floating’ bus stop islands not having sufficient space to manoeuvre a wheel chair;
 Bus stops with no shelter or seating, particularly in rural locations, disproportionately disadvantaging the infirm and elderly;
 The lack of pedestrian-priority (zebra/pelican) crossing access between Drummer Street bus station and Emmanuel Street for passengers changing buses, nor across Emmanuel Street at its junction with St Andrew’s Street, nor across St Andrew’s Street itself near the bus stops. See also the comments at [4.2.](#) below about buses pulling in at the wrong stop owing to congestion.
 Bus stops at Cambridge (city) station are sited an unacceptably long distance from the station exit, with routes serving similar locations stopping at bus stands spaced an unnecessarily long way from one another. This creates a barrier for intending passengers with physical or visual disabilities.
 Note: the above points about poor accessibility also apply to the disincentives to bus use experienced by able-bodied passengers and to those with young children.

3. Journey information

- 3.1. There is a lack of comprehensive bus travel information (routes, times and fares) at key locations, particularly Cambridge city centre, Cambridge (city) station and Addenbrooke's.
- 3.2. The lack of fares information at bus stops, impacts adversely on dwell-times, as passengers enquire about 'best value' fares. See [5.2.](#) and [5.3.](#) for our proposed interim solution and [5.9.](#) for our proposed long-term solution.
- 3.3. The lack of fare information displays, coupled with the lack of assistive T-loop on-board technology makes accessibility difficult for passengers with impaired hearing.
- 3.4. A significant proportion of stops lack any timetable information, some even lacking a bus stop flag. Even where there is a timetable case, timetables may not be up-to-date, particularly in rural areas. Cambridgeshire County Council supported routes (on behalf of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority) are the worst offenders for missing flags and timetable cases.
- 3.5. Information about supported routes, served by minor, independent operators is poor.
- 3.6. The implementation of bus stop Real-Time Passenger Information (RTPI) covers far too few stops, with few in rural locations, and only a small minority of installations having assistive technology for passengers with visual disabilities.
- 3.7. RTPI is, too frequently, inaccurate.
- 3.8. There are a confusing '57 varieties' of smartphone apps to aid journey planning, which include: Stagecoach's own app, showing real-time information solely for Stagecoach services; MyBusTrip* app (run by Vix on behalf of a consortium of local transport authorities, including Cambridgeshire County Council / Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority) showing a mix of real-time and timetable-time information for all operators; MotionMap*, showing RTPI, the app version of Smart Cambridge's Real-Time Bus Map, partly funded by the Greater Cambridge Partnership; Moovit, showing only timetabled information.
- 3.9. * We wonder why two different apps are currently receiving public funding from bodies of which Cambridgeshire County Council is a constituent member.
- 3.10. The Vix system which generates inaccurate RTPI at bus stops generates the same inaccuracies on the MyBusTrip app.
- 3.11. A registered-blind member has reported that the Vix MyBusTrip app is not compatible with her smartphone's built-in assistive technology. She thus has difficulty knowing when to make the short walk to her home stop for a 20-min frequency service which is often subject to delays. This seriously impacts on her quality of life.
- 3.12. One, single, accurate RTPI smartphone app should be heavily promoted locally, showing all operators.
- 3.13. Consideration should be given to working with other metro mayors, with TfL and the DfT to make use the [DfT's prototype bus open data service](#) (tested by transport authorities and operators) to develop and promote a smartphone app showing RTPI for all bus/tram/light rail operators, nationally.
- 3.14. Too few buses have on-board audio-visual announcements. This creates a barrier to travel for people with hearing or visual disabilities, and with hidden disabilities (agoraphobia, autistic spectrum) making bus journeys fraught with anxiety.
- 3.15. At a meeting in spring 2019 with a senior county councillor and officer we were informed:
"Some years ago the county council took the decision that publicity for services provided commercially should be the responsibility of the commercial operator and that the county

would not provide such publicity solely for the benefit of a commercial operator.”

It is our view that this policy is no longer fit for purpose (if, indeed, it ever was) and should be urgently reviewed.

- 3.16. There is no excuse for the level of partial and inaccurate information currently provided by the county. One outstandingly bad example is [The Busway News](#) webpage.

Busway closure between Histon & Orchard Park Spur 21 June to mid-January

posted 21 June 2019 (last updated 29 October 2019)

Due to A14 Bridge works the Busway will be closed between Histon (Cambridge bound stop) & Orchard Park Spur from 21 June until mid-January. The Maintenance Track will re-open on 31 August 2019.

Buses inbound towards Cambridge will use the commercial services bus stop on Cambridge Road, Histon (outside Anglia Fireplaces).

Routes B & P will continue down Histon Road, Cambridge calling at the commercial stops near to Kings Hedges Road.

Route A will re-enter the Busway at Kings Hedges Road and call at the Orchard Park east and west stops. Passengers will need to board the north stops at these locations to go towards Cambridge and the south side to head towards St Ives. [Accessed 10/01/2020 11:30]

Notes:

The quoted page was last updated 29 October 2019.

Service P, operated by Whippet, was withdrawn in August 2019.

The closure dates for closure of the Busway have since been extended with a further closure of the access/cycle track [as reported in the Cambridge Independent on 19 December 2019](#).

- 3.17. Radically improved journey information is essential for visitors and newcomers to the international city which Cambridge has become. This should be for all operators and all modes, under the oversight of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.

4. Network connectivity, network expansion and interchange

- 4.1. Innovative connecting services ought to be trialled, in order to eliminate indirect, meandering, routes for longer-distance services. Connections would, however, need to be guaranteed from frequent to infrequent services, and drivers advised accordingly.
In this context, it will be interesting to see if Stagecoach's introduction of the new 5/5A/5C Cambridge area timetable will achieve their stated objective of improving reliability and whether advertised connections will be held. It is unfortunate that Stagecoach are not advertising connections from the 5A/5C services onto Busway services at Longstanton P&R.
- 4.2. Cambridge (city) station is well-served (but see remarks at [2.5](#) above) as are Cambridge city centre and Addenbrooke's. However, St Andrew's Street and Emmanuel Street frequently become congested, with buses setting down and picking up at the wrong stops. We have had reports from a non-sighted member of missing her bus home because of this. Better provision is required. See also the remarks about the difficulty of changing from buses terminating at the bus station to a service for Addenbrooke's at [2.5](#) above. It is a moot point as to whether the Drummer Street bus station bays are put to best use. More provision is needed. Smaller vehicles will not solve this. See [6.4](#) below.
- 4.3. Stagecoach's X5 service, which is well-used by shoppers and commuters from St Neots (and is registered as 'normal stopping' with the Traffic Commissioners) terminates in Cambridge on Parkside (alongside the – pre-booked only – National Express services) an inconvenient location, at some considerable distance from the city centre.
- 4.4. The Grafton Quarter is poorly served, with few services now using the (inadequate) Grafton bus station. There is a lack of signage to stops on New Square, for Busway services, and to Napier

Street for routes 3, 11 and 12. Stops for routes 1, 2, 4, 8 and 9, are sited at an unacceptably distant location on Victoria Avenue. This is also the case for inbound stops for routes 5 and 6 on Jesus Lane, there being no equivalent outbound stops for these services.

- 4.5. Whilst Cambridge North station has good services from Chesterton (citi 2) and the Busway services (with planned improvements to the latter in early 2020) there are no connections from settlements/districts where the private motorist would consider this the most accessible railhead:

Orchard Park, Arbury, Kings Hedges, Histon village centre, Cottenham, Fen Ditton, Quy, Bottisham, The Wilbrahams and The Swaffhams.

- 4.6. The major (and expanding) settlement of Cambourne lacks a direct bus service to any railway station.
- 4.7. Addenbrooke's / Cambridge Biomedical Campus lacks direct services from out-of-city settlements to the west, north and east of Cambridge save the Busway A service and the thrice-daily (not Sundays) service H.
- 4.8. A number of privately-contracted services, such as those to ARM and to the Genome Campus would be potentially attractive to other passengers, particularly those who might occupy otherwise empty seats on the return journey. Cambridge Area Bus Users would like to see the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority investigate the feasibility of integrating these services into the public network.
- 4.9. Mayor Palmer is on record that his vision is for integrated public transport, and sees the Cambridge Autonomous Metro as part of this. Cambridge Area Bus Users would urge collaboration with bus operators and employers to improve integration and connectivity of existing modes (bus and rail) not only as worthwhile in itself but as valuable experience for integrating future modes.

5. Ticketing – publicity, cost, purchase methods, '57 Varieties' and inter-availability

- 5.1. The ability to purchase tickets through smartphone apps and/or by contactless bank card (as offered by Stagecoach and Whippet) which includes the ability to purchase e-tickets before boarding, is a benefit to intending passengers and reduces dwell-time at stops.
- 5.2. The ability to purchase a range of popular tickets, at static machines, installed at major destinations (including P&R sites, Addenbrooke's and the city centre) would be a valuable aid to speeding boarding, ahead of our preferred long-term solution. (See 5.9. below.)
- 5.3. Static machines would need to be card-only for security reasons. A 'CamRider' card (rechargeable on-line or with cash at PayPoint stores) would be a solution for those passengers without a suitable contactless bank card.
- 5.4. Ticket costs are opaque and poorly publicised. (See also [3.1.](#) [3.2.](#) and [3.3.](#) above)
- 5.5. Passengers taking the same journey, on the same route, pay radically different fares:
a cut-price 'promotional' fare from Cambridge (city) station to the city centre or Addenbrooke's, valid only on the one operator;
a 'DayRider' fare valid only on Stagecoach services;
a 'Day Rover' fare valid only on Whippet services;
a 'PlusBus' rail-fare add-on (valid on all operators in Cambridge city);
a (cheaper) 'PlusBus' rail-fare add-on with Railcard discount (also valid on all operators in Cambridge city);
a County-sponsored 'Multibus' ticket valid only on those operators who have signed up, but not on Busway services (not even on normal sections of road) nor Stagecoach's X5.
These, latter, are regarded as 'premium' services, despite the X5 being frequently served by standard double-deck vehicles owing to the unreliability of the coaches, and the Busway B

route acting as a local service around Huntingdon's Oxmoor estate. (See [1.3.](#) above.) County do not even require operators of Council-supported services to issue or accept the 'Multibus'. (Dews aren't on the list, for example.) This ticket needs urgent reform.

Where Park & Ride services make intermediate stops, the return fare to the city is (illogically) greater, for a shorter distance, than from the Park & Ride site.

- 5.6. There is a steep rise in fares between a single inner 'DayRider' zone (£4.50) serving (eg) Histon and the outer 'DayRiderPlus' zone (£7.00) serving (eg) Cottenham. This makes bus travel prohibitively expensive for many rural residents. Moreover, an outer zone weekly 'Megarider Plus' ticket is the same price whether the service runs 5- 6- or 7-days/week.
- 5.7. Few tickets are valid for multiple bus operators nor for multiple modes.
- 5.8. Whilst it is possible to purchase a walk-up rail and 'PlusBus' ticket to travel from (eg) Norwich to (eg) Bar Hill or Fulbourn, no walk-up ticket for the reverse journey (eg starting at Bar Hill) can be purchased.
- 5.9. A multi-operator, zonal ticketing system, using contactless bank cards (and a 'CamRider' card) with daily capping (as with TfL services in London) would reduce dwell-times, and take the anxiety out of finding the 'best-value' fare.

6. On-board experience

- 6.1. The vast majority of drivers are friendly, welcoming and helpful. Where this has not been the case, operators have acted. Drivers have been re-trained or have left the job. Operators are to be commended on this. However, more training is needed for assisting visually-disabled passengers, in particular answering the enquiries as to which service they are driving, especially when the intending passenger does not appear to be blind.
- 6.2. Newer vehicles with higher-quality seating, as introduced by Stagecoach and Whippet, have been well-received and have helped bus travel to escape its previous spartan image.
- 6.3. Independent operator A2B is to be commended for updating their fleet with good-quality second-hand vehicles for use on contracted services. But see [7.4.](#) below.
- 6.4. The importance of finding a seat at peak-times implies larger vehicles operating throughout the day. The expense of maintaining two bus fleets – larger peak-time vehicles and smaller off-peak vehicles – together with the associated 'dead' mileage and driving costs could not be justified. See, however [4.1.](#) above.
- 6.5. External cleanliness appears to be as good as can be achieved; the expense of withdrawal of vehicles solely for external cleaning during the day, could not be justified.
- 6.6. Internal cleanliness, whilst not bad, could be improved by employing litter-picking staff to board vehicles in layover bays and at key termini (eg Addenbrooke's, P&R sites, Drummer Street bus station).
- 6.7. On-board route and stop information – particularly audio-visual information – takes some anxiety out of travel for those with disabilities. (See [3.14.](#) above.) This should be subjected to accelerated roll-out.
- 6.8. Similar considerations apply to Journey Assistance Cards ([2.3.](#) above) and the Sunflower Lanyard ([2.4.](#) above). Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority should work with operators to ensure widespread information on these schemes and driver-training on acceptance.
- 6.9. Where on-board wi-fi is provided it can be unreliable (vulnerable to the same 'not-spots' as are smartphone users) and suffer from contention issues (many users accessing the service). Whilst this is currently a commercial decision for operators, it may not be worth adding to vehicle specifications under any future partnership or franchising scheme.

- 6.10. A greater provision of on-board USB charging points would be welcome, regardless of on-board wi-fi availability.

7. Vehicle quality, emissions and new technology

- 7.1. There have been significant investments in vehicles by Stagecoach, Whippet and A2B, meaning that most vehicles entering Cambridge are at to least Euro V NO_x and PM₁₀/PM_{2.5} emissions standard and many are Euro VI.
- 7.2. Comfort has improved radically in recent years (see 6.2. above) as a result of investment and of 'cascading' of (particularly ex-Busway) vehicles onto other routes.
- 7.3. Appropriate bus stop design is essential for passengers with disabilities (particularly wheelchair users) to easily board and alight the newest 100-seat double-door Stagecoach Busway 'Megadeckers'.
- 7.4. It is unacceptable that the latest round of Cambridgeshire County Council tenders (on behalf of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority) specifies that any bus which does not come into Cambridge only has to meet Euro III emissions standards, whilst anything that enters Cambridge only has to meet Euro IV. Improving on that specification could give a 'quick win' for air quality.
- 7.5. However buses are unlikely to be the major source of NO_x and PM₁₀/PM_{2.5} emissions, in the city centre, owing to the tighter testing regimes for heavy Euro VI diesel engines vs the Euro 6 diesel car/van – the bus engine is producing fewer NO_x and PM₁₀/PM_{2.5} emissions than the nearby diesel taxis and delivery vans. The focus should be on an Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) such as that enforced by Transport for London (TfL) which applies to all vehicles, including TfL-contracted bus services.
- 7.6. Whilst NO_x and PM₁₀/PM_{2.5} emissions are of immediate concern for respiratory health, cuts to CO₂ emissions will be essential to tackle climate change. Even a diesel bus is helping, in the interim – one loaded bus can take 75 private cars off the road.
- 7.7. It is good to note that Stagecoach will be trialling a small number of hybrid vehicles. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority should work closely with all operators to gain experience of electric, fuel cell and other low-carbon modes.
- 7.8. The Combined Authority should also work closely with electric power generators and distributors to ensure that there is sufficient capacity for overnight charging and for opportunity charging at selected termini.
- 7.9. A feasibility study on trolley-bus technology (as widely used in large mainland European towns, and, previously, in many UK towns and cities) over selected routes should be considered.

Richard Wood
Secretary, Cambridge Area Bus Users
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