



York Civic Trust

Comparator Case Studies for York's 2024 Local Transport Strategy Cambridge May 2024

Introductory note

This is one of nine case studies originally produced in draft in May 2021 at the request of the City of York Council. At the time the Council intended to publish a new Local Transport Plan in December 2021, and had invited York Civic Trust, through its Transport Advisory Group, to offer advice on content. The nine case studies, of cities chosen in discussion with the Council, were developed sufficiently fully to allow the Council to decide which it wished to incorporate in its Local Transport Plan. That decision was never taken, and the 2021 Local Transport Plan was never completed. In February 2022 York Civic Trust collated its advice into *A Transport Strategy for York*, Section 6 of which summarises the key messages from the nine case studies. In February 2023 the Council produced a first draft of a Local Transport Strategy. In March 2023 the Council's Scrutiny Committee on Economy and Place reviewed the nine case studies and recommended that "the Executive Member for Transport work with York Civic Trust and relevant officers on taking the report forward with two or three case studies and focus on building public buy in into medium and long term traffic strategies".

In March 2024 the Council's new administration agreed to publish a Local Transport Strategy for the city in June 2024, based on a consultation on key principles launched in November 2023. The Trust was invited to update the nine case studies, within the limited resources available to it, and to produce brief summaries of key messages for York's Local Transport Strategy. While these summaries and updated strategies are now being published on the Trust's website, it is important to stress that they have not been fully researched, and thus may not be wholly up to date.

Summary

Cambridge, like York, is an historic former market town with a tightly-defined green belt. The Greater Cambridge population is similar to York. Both attract international tourism. Both have around 30,000 university students. They also have good rail links. Many of Cambridge's city streets are narrow and congested, with historic buildings. A major difference from York is the travel pattern – only 38% of journeys to work within the city are by car or motorcycle, 32% are by bicycle.

The Combined Authority's 2023 Local Transport and Connectivity Plan offers a model for York's new Local Transport Strategy. In many ways the approach is similar, but it does include greater reference to the role of land use planning, digital connectivity and the pursuit of Vision Zero, which York might consider. It also uses the Avoid-Shift-Improve approach to strategy formulation, which might offer a useful model.

Cambridge has implemented many of the measures which York is considering. It has an impressive cycle route network, with significant protection for cyclists, including well-designed bus stop bypasses. It already has four bus gates limiting access to the city centre, and banning through movement. Its Citizens' Assembly offers a model for how York might pursue longer term public engagement. However, its recent experience with opposition to congestion charging and an additional bus gate indicate the importance of retaining public support as schemes approach implementation.

The complex, four tier, pattern of governance and the conflicts during the first Mayoral term illustrate the importance of consensus-building in the political sphere. York's governance is simpler, with the two levels of Combined Authority and City Council, but a coordinated approach with North Yorkshire and the MCA will still be crucial.

Context

Background

Cambridge is an historic city formed where historic trade routes converged on the River Cam at the edge of the low-lying fenland area. Formerly a small market and university town, the population has grown rapidly from 61,000 in 1930 to 146,000 in 2022 (ONS estimate based on UK census) of which 29,000 were students. The city has seen substantial economic growth from its university research knowledge base, tourism and from people commuting to London by rail or M11. This is reflected in the very high house prices and a 'tale of two cities' marked by extremes of income between wealthy home owners and council tenants. The Gini coefficient of 0.46 is the highest in the UK.

The city has a tight green belt and has extended into adjoining districts. New settlements have been developed on the former airfields and military bases nearby, including Cambourne and Waterbeach.

To the north, the A14 forms a bypass. This is part of the principal route from the East Coast ports to the Midlands. Cambridge and the A14 are highly congested. To relieve congestion, a guided bus route has been built along the disused St Ives railway line. A light rail project – CAM (Cambridge Autonomous Metro) - had been proposed including a cross-rail type underground railway below the city centre. There are five P&R sites.

The combination of the flat topography, the high number of students and the university's restriction on them owning cars contribute to the very high rate of cycling. 54% of the population cycle regularly: the highest in the UK. The multi-storey bike park near Cambridge Station below the Ibis Hotel has 2,850 spaces and is the largest in Europe. Two 200-space covered bike parks are located nearer the station.

The historic city centre is pedestrianised with cycling allowed on most streets. Access by blue badge holders is allowed but parking restricted to designated bays. Control is exercised by ANPR and street patrols.

There is one bus station in Cambridge and a hub at the railway station. There are two railway stations. The main one is a mile east of the city centre. Another, Cambridge North, has been built on the Peterborough line. A third, Cambridge South is proposed near Addenbrooke's Hospital.

Stansted International Airport is 30 miles to the south via M11 or rail. Cambridge Airport has developed on the site occupied and owned by Marshall's, a major aero-industry employer. In 2019, the firm announced its intention to relocate the airport and aero-business to Cranfield University, Bedfordshire - 30 miles from Cambridge, which will release a very large site for housing and employment.

Cambridge is the eastern pole of the proposed Oxford-Cambridge strategic rail corridor including Milton Keynes, Bletchley, Bedford and St Neots. Proposals for a strategic road corridor were scrapped in 2020 following residents' objections from rural Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire.

Governance

The city of Cambridge is a shire district, one of five districts in the shire county of Cambridgeshire. Cambridgeshire County Council has responsibility for highways and traffic management, while Cambridge City Council is the local planning authority. The Greater Cambridge City Deal of 2014 led to the establishment of the Greater Cambridge Partnership, which has five local partners: Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, the Business Board of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and the University of Cambridge. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough formed a Combined Authority in 2017. The city council is Labour-controlled. The population of the combined authority was 841,000 (est 2015). The population of Greater Cambridge was 158,000 in 2011.

The county council and other district councils have typically been Conservative-controlled with periodically strong Liberal-Democratic representation. In the first four years of the Combined Authority, there was considerable friction between the Mayor, the Greater Cambridge Partnership and Cambridgeshire County Council, with each pursuing different transport policies. The Mayor elected for the Combined Authority in May 2021 was a Huntingdonshire Labour councillor. Despite polling only 32% of first round votes, he beat the sitting Conservative in the second round to reach 51%. One of his first decisions was to scrap the CAM Metro for which the estimated cost had risen to £4bn. It appears that there has been greater stability in transport policy since. In the same 2021 elections, Conservatives lost their historic control of the Cambridgeshire County Council to an anti-Tory coalition.

Thumbnail of current transport provision

The main bus station is located at the edge of the city centre at Drummer Street. Bus services are provided in Cambridge by Stagecoach. Most services use the bus station and the railway station. Others are routed nearby. The guided busway – locally called the Busway – is the longest in the world. It connects Huntingdon and St Ives to Cambridge of which 16 miles is along dedicated, former rail routes. Its routes diverge at the built-up boundary to the city and converge again at the railway station before extending south to Addenbrooke’s Hospital along the route of the former Varsity Line. Cambridge has two railway stations within its boundaries. Services are operated by Cross Country, Great Northern, Thameslink and Greater Anglia. Cambridge is 55 miles from London.

Transport planning

Local transport plans

The combined authority’s first Local Transport Plan was prepared by consultants, Steer and was approved in 2020 for the period 2020-35. A new Local Transport and Connectivity Plan was approved in 2023, reflecting the new Mayor’s priorities, and based on a three month consultation in mid 2022. In his foreword, the new Mayor justified producing a new plan so soon after the previous one on the basis that “we now need a more ambitious community focused transport strategy to deliver the Combined Authority’s and partners’ priorities. Particularly the need to take action to address the climate emergency, tackle inequalities, prioritise health and wellbeing (physical and mental); and to ensure we continue to invest to deliver an inclusive, integrated, and sustainable transport network which works for us all.

The LTCP vision states that *“The transport network must put improved health at its core, it must help create a fairer society, it must respond to climate change targets, it must protect our environment and clean up our air, and it must be the backbone of sustainable economic growth in which everyone can prosper.*

And it must bring a region of cities, market towns and very rural areas closer together.

It will be achieved by investing in a properly joined-up, net zero carbon transport system, which is high quality, reliable, convenient, affordable, safe, and accessible to everyone.

Better, cleaner public transport will reduce private car use, and more cycling and walking will support both healthier lives and a greener region. Comprehensive connectivity, including digital improvements, will support a sustainable future for our region’s nationally important and innovative economy”.

Priority objectives of the Plan

The Plan has six Goals:

- Productivity, including new housing, business and tourism, employment and resilience
- Connectivity, both physical and digital
- Health, including healthy streets, public realm and air quality
- Environment: natural, historic and built
- Climate change
- Safety, including the pursuit of Vision Zero.

These relate well to York’s ten objectives, though York might usefully consider the full range of productivity factors, the role of digital connectivity and the case for Vision Zero.

Strategic approach

The strategy is based on the recommendations of the Independent Commission on Climate Report, and identifies the need for a 15% reduction in car mileage between 2019 and 2030. It uses the A-S-I framework:

- “Avoiding unnecessary travel by reducing the number and length of trips needed. We aim to achieve this through improving planning for homes, key services and employment sites, travel planning and levels of digital connectivity.
- “Shifting travel choices to more sustainable modes of transport, including public transport, walking, and cycling, away from car use.
- “Improving the operational efficiency and journey experience of our transport network.”

Broadly this reflects York’s ten policy focus areas, though it says more about the role of land use planning and digital connectivity, elements which York could usefully add. This is followed by more detailed proposals for each of the main policy areas.

The Plan concludes with sections on appraisal, funding, implementation and monitoring. The last of these includes 37 key performance indicators, though several of these are output or intermediate outcome indicators (such as modal shares); few relate directly to the objectives, and no targets are set. These are all sections which York needs to include in its Local Transport Strategy, and some of the text might be helpful for this.

In the 2020 LTP, Cambridge and the adjoining suburbs and settlements in South Cambridgeshire were categorised as Greater Cambridge and the subject of a separate LTP ‘daughter strategy’. This does not appear to have been done in the 2023 LTCP.

Other policy initiatives

In 2019 the region launched the Greater Cambridge Citizens’ Assembly on congestion, air quality and public transport. It was the first citizens’ assembly exploring congestion in the UK, and brought together 53 randomly selected residents from Greater Cambridge and the wider travel to work area during September and October 2019 to develop recommendations on how to reduce congestion, improve air quality and provide better public transport. Seven policy interventions were considered. Following five rounds of voting, closing roads to cars came out on top with 341 points. This was followed by the three road charging options, with Clean Air Zone (269), pollution charge (261) and flexible charge (259) all on similar points. Restricting parking provision received 203 points, a workplace parking levy 172 points and increased parking charges 145 points. The recommendations were presented to the GCP Joint Assembly and Executive Board in February 2020.

Progress with two of these measures is of interest. Cambridge city centre, which has a compact area of pedestrian streets, already has bus gates on four approaches: Bridge St, Emmanuel Road, Regent St (inbound) and Silver St, but the remaining access route in via Trumpington St and out via Regent St is often seriously congested as a result of high demand for a local parking facility. The County Council proposed a fifth bus gate on Mill

Road, to the SE of the city centre, in 2022 with, for the first time, an exemption for blue badge holders. It was approved in early 2023, but is still subject to a judicial review.

Proposals for a Sustainable Travel Zone were first published by the Greater Cambridge Partnership in August 2022 and was scheduled for completion in 2027/28. The scheme proposed a £5 minimum daily charge on vehicles entering the city of Cambridge from the outer ring road, increased to £10 for vans, and to £50 for heavy good vehicles and coaches. Exceptions were proposed for "emergency vehicles, disabled tax class vehicles and breakdown services", among others. Its twin aims were to reduce traffic congestion and generate finance for alternative modes. The scheme became the subject of local controversy, with 58% of respondents recording their opposition to the scheme in an official consultation. It was scrapped in September 2023.

Relevance to York

Useful lessons and pointers

Cambridge, like York, is an historic, former market town with a tightly-defined green belt. The Greater Cambridge population is similar to York. Both attract international tourism. Cycling is also higher than in other cities. Both have around 30,000 university students. They also have good rail links.

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Any aspects which make it less relevant to York

Cambridge has a far stronger economy based on technical, research spin-offs from its world-class university. Cambridge is exceptionally attractive to large-scale, inward investment and in-migration. The colleges bring considerable hard and soft influence and resources. Road congestion was earlier and more severe. The city has responded favourably to and proposed the redevelopment of former airfields and military bases for new settlements whereas York

has historically discouraged proposals for similar sites on its periphery. The River Cam is not a significant barrier.

Demonstrator new neighbourhoods

A substantial number have been developed or are proposed along or near transport corridors. One, Cambourne is eight miles to the west of Cambridge on the dual carriageway to St Neots. Built by national housebuilders on the former airfield and incorporating three historic villages, it has 4,300 houses 12,000 residents, four primary schools, one nearby secondary school, a large supermarket and doctors' surgery. The large business park includes the headquarters of South Cambridgeshire district council. Cambourne will grow to 7, 000 houses and 20,000 residents. Another, Waterbeach, a former army base to the north of Cambridge, was designated as a 'new town' by South Cambridgeshire district council in its local plan for 6,500 homes and the Cambridge Innovation Centre. Waterbeach railway station is nearby. A third at Northstowe is linked to the guided bus route.

Best practice in engagement and consultation

As outlined above, the Greater Cambridge Citizens' Assembly is a valuable exemplar is consensus-building. But the subsequent rejection of congestion charging and opposition to a further bus gate demonstrate the importance of sustaining public support beyond the initial engagement process.

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