Corporate Plan, Medium Term Financial Plan and Mayoral Precept consultation

Campaign for Better Transport response to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority consultation

15 January 2024

About Campaign for Better Transport

Campaign for Better Transport is the national charity working across England and Wales to make transport better, greener and fairer. Our vision is for all communities to have high quality, sustainable transport that meets their needs, improves quality of life and helps protect the environment.

Our response

Campaign for Better Transport strongly supports the proposals to increase the Mayoral precept to fund additional bus services and to provide more frequent bus services on a number of existing routes. We further welcome the engagement by Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) with local communities inviting suggestions and ideas for improved bus routes that is part of the separate initiative to this consultation.

Buses are central to enabling people to access education, employment, vital public services and recreation. This is particularly the case for people who are unable to or struggle to afford access to private cars, such as young people, older people and people on low incomes. We believe every community should have access to at least minimum level of local bus service provision. With a significant proportion of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough of rural character, it is less viable to provide commercial bus services to such areas, meaning that public funding is needed to ensure a minimum level of service provision exists.

It is the duty of both central and local government to ensure sufficient funding is available for local buses. We therefore support the proposal of increased ringfenced funding through the Mayoral precept, in addition to the Bus Service Improvement Plan funding, to support the delivery of a better bus network. Increasing bus provision and bus use benefits all residents, whether bus users or not, in terms of reduced congestion, air pollution and carbon emissions. therefore, there is a good case for a mayoral precept as a way to spread the financial burden more evenly across all households.

In this context, we welcome the review of 19 local authority supported bus services as part of the Bus Network Review and the proposals to retain and improve these services. We fully support the need to dedicate sufficient funding for socially and economically necessary services and recognise the benefits this brings. However, the very high costs for a small number of routes (such as the cost of £124.83 per passenger on bus route 7A) need to be addressed in order to ensure good value for money. The best ways to do this in the medium term is to conduct a more thorough review the bus network as a whole, while implementing additional measures to significantly increasing bus passenger numbers.

On the former, supported bus routes need to be reviewed in the context of the whole bus network. Some tendered services seem to serve relatively short routes where there are gaps rather than

consideration being given to how underserved areas can be integrated into the commercial network. We recognise there are regulatory barriers to local authorities' ability to supplement commercial routes, such as the de minimis rules. Ultimately, some form of greater public involvement in bus planning and delivery is needed to help deliver better co-ordination and improvement in bus services across CPCA. Franchising is one way to achieve this, and to examine how more profitable routes can cross-subsidise those that need to be supported, and we look forward to further consultation on this. However, there are a range of models that need to be considered, such as Enhanced Partnership Plus, gross cost franchising, partial franchising and municipal bus companies.

Secondly, we welcome CPCA's bus strategy objective of doubling bus passenger use by 2030, but more detailed plans are needed for how this will be achieved. One measure in this regard is the welcome proposal to reduce the cost of bus fares for under-25s. This would not only relieve the financial burden on young people and their families but also could play a useful role in establishing bus use as a norm in future generations. In addition:

- There is a need for better marketing and information about bus services, and local authorities and community organisations should be encouraged to actively publicise bus services in their area. One example relates to bus route 29 where it has been reported that there is an absence of information about the route's existence in the hospital served by the bus route. It is also reported that the 29 route buses do not serve the main hospital entrances, as Stagecoach buses do, but instead turn on the outskirts of the huge hospital estate. This route also has its terminus Serpentine Green, which is described as the leading Peterborough shopping destination, with over 35 high street and top branded fashion shops, finest restaurants and cafes. Yet the section of the shopping centre's website that provides details of how to get to it does not mention the bus services available.

- There is a need for bolder ideas about integrating bus fares and ticketing products, such as multi-operators ticketing and contactless capping and travelcards. This would make it more affordable to use buses and easier to switch from one bus route to another.

- As highlighted at the Transport and Infrastructure Committee on the 15 November 2023 there is a need for better transport infrastructure in many places, including investment in new bus shelters.

- Ultimately, CPCA should aim to encourage more people to switch more journeys they might drive to buses. For car owners, it might be easier and more convenient to use the car than consider other options, unless there are factors which make them do so. Measures such as reviewing parking charges provision and charges should therefore be considered alongside investing in bus improvements.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views to this consultation and we would be happy to elaborate on any of the points made.