
CambridgeshireTransportCommission

Independent Transport Commission

Report for Cambridgeshire County Council

Executive Summary

Full Report Available at www.cambstransportcommission.co.uk

July 2009

1. The Independent Transport Commission was set up in the wake of controversy surrounding Cambridgeshire County Council's outline proposal for resources from the Government's Transport Innovation Fund (TIF). The Commission is independent of, but reports to, the Council and has a remit to review the TIF bid, make suggestions about whether, and how, the proposals should be modified, and assess whether there are any other effective ways of reducing congestion in the Cambridge area and thus securing the County's future prosperity.
2. The Commission has taken both written and oral evidence from a wide range of individuals, groups and organisations across the County. We received over 1130 responses to our online survey and have held 15 public hearings with 53 different organizations represented and 119 witnesses in total. Throughout we have tried to operate with maximum transparency; all our hearings have been held in public and all evidence submitted to us is available in full on the Commission's website.
3. It is hard to see any letup in the development pressures in and around Cambridge in the coming years. Cambridge is one of three points on a so-called 'golden triangle' that covers London, Oxford and Cambridge, a small area of the country within which about a third of the country's GDP is generated. More importantly, because of the concentration of leading universities, research facilities, new industries, entrepreneurs and political power within the 'golden triangle' and the area immediately surrounding it, it is almost certain this area will be where the UK is most likely to develop its post-industrial economy successfully in the decades ahead.
4. Evidence presented to the Commission shows both Cambridgeshire and Cambridge are expected to accommodate a large number of new homes and new businesses in the years ahead. This growth has significant implications for future traffic and congestion levels. The County Council's modelling suggests a sharp increase in trips generated, particularly in the Cambridge travel to work area, but also on many inter-urban roads. Whilst such modelling can only ever be indicative, it is certain is that Cambridgeshire and Cambridge face continuing growth in traffic, with the consequence that City roads and major highways such as the A14 will become more and more congested.
5. Against this background, it is imperative that central Government provides the resources for the necessary infrastructure to allow this new economy to develop to its maximum potential. The case for Government financial support for infrastructure is, in our view, stronger in Cambridgeshire than elsewhere, because of the County's economic importance to the UK economy and the plans for housing growth of 30 per cent or more.
6. Traffic congestion is a fact of life. The only question is whether people believe potential measures to reduce congestion would be worse than the condition itself. The Commission did not find evidence of any agreed or acceptable solution to the problem of congestion within Cambridgeshire or Cambridge. Small and limited measures that did not force any individual or business to change their behaviour and/or cost any money were favoured. We believe that while such measures might be able to reduce the rate of growth in congestion, and there is evidence of significant modal shift where employers have focused on travel planning with their staff, they cannot be an effective solution to the longer-term problem of worsening traffic jams as Cambridgeshire grows.
7. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has already signalled a steep reduction in public sector capital investment after 2010. It is very unlikely transport will be spared real cuts. It is realistic to assume that unless a decision is made soon about a Cambridgeshire TIF bid,

then the money will cease to be available. Cambridgeshire thus faces a stark, time-limited, choice. Either it can produce a TIF bid that commands reasonable local public support and which can also convince the Department for Transport that its conditions for bidding have been met, or the TIF resources will be lost for the foreseeable future. If this were to occur, the County and its residents would have to deal with congestion and transport needs within their existing (probably reduced) budgets.

8. The details of the TIF outline proposal are summarised in Appendix 2 of our report. Broadly, Cambridgeshire County Council's bid followed the Government's rules and made proposals for major public transport, cycling and road improvements alongside a proposal to introduce congestion charging. The cost of the various proposed schemes is about £500 million, a sum vastly greater than any Government would be likely to give a Council for transport improvements in most circumstances.
9. The Commission noted that there was general support from witnesses for the TIF investments and recommends the TIF improvements are fully implemented, subject to more work on the public understanding of how bus and other upgrades will affect them. The Government need to be aware that the existing proposals for transport improvements are the very least that could be delivered so as to have any hope of convincing the residents of Cambridgeshire that they might, in the longer-term, accept a congestion charge.
10. The Commission particularly endorses the TIF proposals radically to improve the existing cycling facilities in Cambridge and also to provide new dedicated cycle lanes. Overall, Cambridge and its surrounds should become a European exemplar city for cycling.
11. Road building is not the wrong solution to all traffic and transport problems, particularly in rural parts of the County. We believe the A14 and other schemes should be completed, though with the view to reducing congestion not generating substantially more traffic. Other means of improving roads in Cambridge will be required ranging from junction improvements to – in the longer term – a possible charging regime.
12. When the impacts of transport improvements are effective and understood, it would be possible to move on to some form of congestion charging. But if broad assent to reform is to be achieved there needs to be a full public understanding of any proposed charging system and of the new transport alternatives. There would, we believe, be merit in a trial for a specified period before any final decision to keep congestion charging is made. Residents, those who work in the City and visitors will have to be convinced the proposed new world would be better than doing nothing.
13. It is not appropriate at this stage – several years before possible implementation - to make specific proposals for a congestion charge regime. However our extensive consultation suggests some pointers to the issues to be addressed in relation to discounts and exemptions. Our overall view is that if the scheme is to achieve its maximum effect as a demand management measure, exemptions and discounts should be restricted to a minimum and should contribute to the success of the scheme.
14. A case was made for a change in governance arrangements with the introduction of an Independent Transport Authority (ITA). The Commission is not persuaded that this is necessary, the County Council has the powers already, but it is crucial that the County, City and South Cambridgeshire Councils share a vision for transport, and that the Joint Transport Forum, which should be a vehicle for that, works coherently and engages effectively with employers in the Greater Cambridge Partnership.

Recommendations

1. Cambridgeshire County Council **submit** a full **TIF bid** to secure resources from Government to make **improvements to cycling, walking and public transport**, broadly in line with the proposals set out in Appendix 2 to our report.
2. Cambridgeshire County Council inform the Government *that it has not ruled out* the introduction of a **congestion charging regime**, but that it accepts the clear evidence that **such a regime would be unacceptable without a programme of investment**, including the **TIF investment proposals, A14 widening and Chesterton Station** and in any case no such scheme should be introduced without further public information and consultation, and **not before 2017** at the earliest.
3. Cambridgeshire County Council should **explain its position**¹ to the public with a view to establishing an **agreed, publicly-supported approach** for the revised TIF bid. Such support would be a crucial element in **convincing the Government to modify** its original stance.
4. Cambridgeshire County Council invite the **Greater Cambridge Partnership, Cambridge City Council** and **South Cambridgeshire District Council** to **work together** to shape the investment programme for transport improvements in and around the City and to encourage a **community approach to modal shift** with public and private partners (the Transport Partnership for Cambridgeshire).
5. The **Transport Partnership for Cambridgeshire** should:
 - ◆ Develop the approach to **travel planning** already adopted by some major employers and the Travel to Work Partnership, and seek to apply it across the local economy.
 - ◆ Identify indicators for the **measurement of congestion** at critical points in the network as a means for regular monitoring, and to enable consideration of the future **trigger point** for consultation on the details of a congestion charging regime.
 - ◆ Develop proposals for the **management of buses** in Cambridge City, so as to accommodate more buses while respecting the historic urban fabric of the City.
 - ◆ Work with bus operators to develop **better transport information** - printed and computer-based - and a **smart card approach to ticketing**, to encourage public understanding, ease of boarding and shorter dwell times.
 - ◆ Work with the police to improve **understanding and enforcement of traffic and parking regulations**.
6. The County Council give **explicit assurance** about its intention to ensure that the **significant transport issues** in the **wider County** are addressed alongside TIF investments associated with Cambridge, and that both **LTP investments** and **revenue** arising from a **charge scheme** can be **applied to these priorities**.
7. The County Council consider the **evidence** put before the **Commission** and recorded here, in seeking to **build a local consensus** to make the case for Government resources. In particular, people need to **understand how changes** to public transport will **benefit** them. The Commission considers that the **case for resources** is **powerful** and the **prospect of community engagement high**. There is a real possibility that Cambridgeshire could become the outstanding **UK exemplar of sustainable economic growth**.

¹ i.e. As in (i) and (ii) above.