



Submission to Cambridgeshire Local Plan Consultation

29 January 2026

1. Background

- 1.1. Cambridge Connect, established in 2015, has contributed to local planning consultations for over a decade, in particular on public transport and sustainable development issues.
- 1.2. Widespread support exists for our proposals. They have twice been publicly supported by the regional transport authority, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, first under Mayor James Palmer in 2017, and recently by Mayor Paul Bristow in 2025.
- 1.3. We have made numerous submissions in public consultations, including for specific schemes and for more general local and regional transport plans. Many of these submissions are available on our website (www.cambridge-connect.uk).

2. The need for mass rapid transit

- 2.1. Local transport systems are failing to meet current needs and are completely inadequate to support the scale of growth in the Cambridge region, both historical and planned. Moreover, planned busway schemes are highly unlikely to deliver sufficient modal shift to address the practical needs of mobility, alleviate congestion, improve air quality, strengthen the economy, or make an effective contribution to addressing the enormous challenges of Climate Change.
- 2.2. The Local Plan should state unequivocally that an integrated mass rapid transit network is needed to support sustainable development within the region. This mass rapid transit network needs to be designed and delivered as an urgent regional priority to address pressures of growth and meet economic, social and environmental goals.
- 2.3. The Local Plan should acknowledge that its radius (for local government administrative reasons) is too small to cover the functional travel to work area, and as such is an inadequate basis for a regional mass rapid transit system. The development of Greater Cambridge over the next 10-30 years will inevitably require quick, cheap, reliable, safe public transport connections to surrounding towns, not least Huntingdon, St Ives, St Neots / Tempsford, Ely, Newmarket, Haverhill, and indeed Peterborough. Imminent reorganisation of local government should go some way to meeting this weakness in the draft Local Plan, although the current planning authorities could anticipate and seek to address the deficiency.

3. The need for a clear delivery strategy

- 3.1. The draft Local Plan identifies a Strategic Priority to “Plan for transport, water, energy and digital networks; and health, education and cultural facilities; **in the right places and built at the right times** to serve our existing and growing communities.” This is an aspiration, not a strategy. There is a need to define what is meant by the ‘right’ places and times.
- 3.2. Cambridge Connect believes a strategy with a timeline for phased construction should form part of the Local Plan. More practical commitment needs to be made to building the infrastructure necessary to support a growing population and economy, and increase regional productivity. The infrastructure must be capable of handling growth and of being a genuine alternative to the private car. International and local evidence shows that buses and busways alone are unlikely to deliver improvements on the scale required.
- 3.3. Financing mechanisms should form part of the strategy, showing how it will be funded and delivered. For example, the Local Plan could set out a strategy for introduction of mechanisms such as a Visitor Accommodation Supplement (“Tourist Tax”), Land Value Capture, Workplace Parking Levy, Tax Increment Financing, and a Cambridge Green Infrastructure Bond, etc. A combination of these mechanisms could raise sufficient capital to invest in delivery of an integrated mass rapid transit network.
- 3.4. We therefore welcome provision in the draft Local Plan to “require developments to contribute towards the cost of these transport schemes”. However, the Local Plan needs to be more imaginative and consider a wider range of financing options, as this lies at the core of delivery of transport improvements.
- 3.5. The strategy needs to be specific about the spatial plan – ie about clusters and corridors of growth – and how they will be facilitated and supported in a practical and sustainable way by the transport network.

4. The need for ‘high quality’

- 4.1. Transport Policy 2(b) (Section 10.8 of Local Plan) of the draft Local Plan notes the importance of ‘high quality public transport’, citing the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway as an example. The draft Local Plan aims to ensure “... major developments are supported by **high quality public transport** linking them to Cambridge city centre and major centres of employment”.
- 4.2. Compared to the light rail networks supporting numerous cities throughout Europe, the Cambridge busways, both existing and planned, do not qualify as ‘high quality’ public transport. They do not have the capacity, comfort, frequency, reliability and attractiveness to

be considered 'high quality' public transport. In particular, they fail to provide the core of the city with rapid and reliable public transport services, but are subject to severe constraints imposed by inner city roads and congestion.

- 4.3. The existing and planned busways also suffer from the major weakness that they are not integrated, or joined up. Nor do they extend into the core of the city. This lack of multi-modal and spatial integration greatly extends overall journey times, and acts as a serious disincentive to people in their decisions about use of public transport.
- 4.4. Bus services in our region are poor to mediocre. This is reflected in the abysmal record of ~8% modal share of journeys made by bus. The overwhelming majority of the public choose to use other means, mostly the private car, which remains a better option despite congestion.
- 4.5. Overall, busways have failed to deliver significant modal shift at the scale required. Overall public transport use share in the Cambridge region has not improved since the busways were built over 20 years ago. Congestion has grown, and the busways have failed to keep pace.
- 4.6. The Local Plan should be realistic about the poor to mediocre quality of the public transport network and services in the region, and recognize this is a significant reason why people choose to drive private vehicles, congestion persists and productivity is unnecessarily depressed.
- 4.7. High quality matters. It is essential to change behaviour and drive modal shift. Public transport must be a genuine alternative to the private car, and must be attractive, frequent, reliable, fast, affordable, spatially and multi-modally integrated, and practically accessible.
- 4.8. There is a large body of evidence and practical examples throughout Europe demonstrating that frequent and reliable light rail mass transit, which is of genuine high quality, attracts more people out of cars and is more successful at generating much-needed modal shift.

5. Cambourne, C2C and Girton Interchange connections

- 5.1. We note the scale of existing and planned development in Cambourne, and the proposal for a new rail station as part of East-West Rail (EWR).
- 5.2. Cambridge Connect strongly supports EWR. However, we suggest Cambourne could be better served by light rail mass transit linking to Cambridge City and the central rail station. The route we propose follows parallel to the A428 via the Girton Interchange / Eddington / West Campus, and would provide a twenty-minute journey time into the city.
- 5.3. Routing EWR into South Cambridge via a more southerly direct route that avoids Cambourne would save many hundreds of millions of pounds. These savings could be directed to finance the light rail connection. We encourage the Government, local authorities and EWR to consider this option.

- 5.4. Light rail mass transit would offer Cambourne residents more and better quality options for local public transport than a heavy rail station in the town. For example, it would enable links to Cambridge City, Eddington, the West Campus, Cambridge Central Station, Cambridge South, Addenbrookes and Cambridge Science Park. The light rail link would make existing heavy rail stations in Cambridge easily accessible to Cambourne. In contrast, an EWR station offers local travel options limited to only heavy rail stations.
- 5.5. The Local Plan should include a policy stating that further transport improvements should, to the extent practicable, be aligned along existing transport corridors as the first preferred option. This policy would help reduce or avoid continued fragmentation of the countryside and Green Belt by new transport infrastructure where this is not necessary.
- 5.6. Cambridge Connect opposes the C2C route on both strategic and environmental grounds.
- 5.7. Strategically, new public transport connections to Cambourne should be via the Girton Interchange, which should be a major regional travel hub. There is broad consensus that all-ways connectivity at the Girton Interchange is needed and beneficial. The Local Plan should include a strategy to bring this forward in collaboration with Highways England.
- 5.8. Moreover, a further and major strategic weakness of the proposed C2C busway is that it terminates at Grange Road, neither in or near to the city centre. The lack of integration across the city will suppress demand and serve to perpetuate poor uptake of public transport.
- 5.9. Environmentally, Cambridge Connect opposes C2C destruction of habitat at Coton Orchard when there are viable alternatives, including use of the existing transport corridor of the A428. The GCP has failed to consider alternatives properly when selecting the C2C route.

6. Southern biotech campuses, CSET and Haverhill connections

- 6.1. We note ~6000 new homes planned for near Abingdon (A11/A1307) and ~ tripling of size of the Babraham Research Campus development area. We also note developments at Granta Park, the Genome Campus at Hinxton and other developments south of Cambridge, including expansion of the Cambridge Biomedical Campus. We strongly support transport improvements to meet these needs.
- 6.2. We oppose CSET on the grounds of its route along the Granta River valley via previously undeveloped rural land. We note the global ecological importance of regional chalk streams, of which the Granta River is a prime example, and believe the development will unnecessarily compromise the Granta River environment and rural Green Belt landscape.
- 6.3. A viable and less damaging alternative transport option exists nearby on the ready-made former rail corridor leading to Granta Park / Haverhill.

- 6.4. Adoption of the former rail line as the core route to Haverhill could serve both the new housing at Abingdon, the Babraham Campus, Granta Park sites, *and* the Genome Campus with associated new housing development using frequent and rapid shuttle services.
- 6.5. Within the life of the Local Plan (or soon after) this type of shuttle service is likely to become autonomous and could operate 24-7, providing excellent service to the campuses. The local population would be served more effectively because the former rail route would be centrally located to all of these clusters of development.
- 6.6. Moreover, many of those working at the southern biotech campuses reside in Haverhill (~14% of the CBC workforce), which provides much-needed housing at relatively lower cost. Current public transport links are poor, and reinstatement of the former railway route could provide the necessary rapid transit link.
- 6.7. Reinstatement of the former rail line to Haverhill would cause less environmental damage than CSET, for it avoids the need for several major bridges over the River Granta, generally avoids the flood plain and central river valley, and aligns along a previous transport route.
- 6.8. Cambridge Connect's work has shown that the former rail line is a viable and practical alternative, including through the villages of Great Shelford and Stapleford. Reinstatement of the route should be incorporated into Local Plan objectives.
- 6.9. The spatial scope of the Local Plan is too narrow, and should extend to include Haverhill within the functional and economic sub-space of Cambridge. There are important economic, social and employment linkages with Haverhill that should form part of the Local Plan. Integrated planning would better serve and facilitate the planned growth in the southern corridor of Cambridge, so vital for the economy, not only in the region, but also for the UK.
- 6.10. The GCP CSET busway will be inadequate to serve the scale of growth and developments planned in the southern sector of Cambridge. By the GCP's own calculations, the CSET busway would be operating at capacity on opening, which is grossly inadequate for meeting local needs and the future. The Local Plan should acknowledge this and revise the spatial transport strategy to focus on reinstating the rail line to Haverhill. We believe this should be as light rail, although detailed cost / benefit studies of the range of options (such as tram-train and heavy rail) are needed.
- 6.11. The rail line to Haverhill would better serve local communities in Great Shelford, Stapleford and Sawston because it is aligned closer and therefore more accessible to the heart of these residential and commercial centres.

7. The need for a tunnel

- 7.1. A tunnel is needed within Cambridge City centre to enable an integrated network of mass rapid transit connecting all parts of the city together and with the hinterland. It will connect

together all three campuses of the University and Colleges into a modern, closely integrated unit, and link with Cambridge commercial, scientific and industrial hubs.

- 7.2. Mass rapid transit through the city centre is practically impossible on the surface. City density, heritage values, environmental assets, and the practical constraint of crossing the River Cam combine to severely constrain delivery of mass rapid transit in Cambridge without a tunnel.
- 7.3. While comparatively expensive, a tunnel overcomes the constraints, and also allows a more pedestrian and cycle-friendly environment at the surface by placing heavy transport infrastructure underground within the city centre.
- 7.4. The Local Plan should consider how mass rapid transit can be spatially integrated into the historic city, and at a minimum should review international case studies for strategic guidance.
- 7.5. A tunnel is only likely to be viable for mass rapid transit such as metro or light rail. Buses and busways will never attract finance for a tunnel.
- 7.6. In anticipation that a tunnel is vital to an integrated Cambridge mass rapid transit strategy – which we suggest is the case – then further substantial investment in busways is misplaced.
- 7.7. Numerous studies over many years have supported this conclusion (e.g Cambridge Futures, Mass Transit Options Study, CAM reports, Cambridge Connect and university academic technical reports etc). The Local Plan should include consideration of a city tunnel in its strategic vision.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1. The Local Plan is a wide-ranging and complex document, and we have highlighted a number of priorities for attention in relation to the need for improvements in public transport.
- 8.2. Cambridge Connect has collaborated with a wide range of organisations and individuals over a sustained period of more than ten years to develop a model mass rapid transit network for the region that could meet many of the needs identified above (Figure 1).
- 8.3. The Government and local authorities have signaled the importance of mass rapid transit to support economic growth of the region in a number of ways. They have established the Cambridge Growth Company, which is already working on mass transit analysis. The Local Plan should recognise mass rapid transit as a strategic priority to support our region.
- 8.4. However, the Local Plan should be more forthcoming about the weaknesses of current regional governance structures and systems. The muddle and overlapping roles of the local District and County councils, the Greater Cambridge Partnership, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, the Cambridge Growth Company and the intended Cambridge Development Corporation are not conducive to coherent planning. The duplication of competences is costly, complicated, confusing and undemocratic. These arrangements impede delivery of improvements.

- 8.5. The Local Plan should acknowledge that a range of technologies exist for practical delivery of mass rapid transit suited to Cambridge. While the Local Plan mentions busways, light rail should also be identified as a strategic priority for consideration because it remains the only proven, affordable technology that has the capacity, reliability, attractiveness and ability to drive modal shift on the scale needed to meet Cambridgeshire mass rapid transit needs.
- 8.6. The Local Plan should recognise that busways alone cannot meet these objectives in the long-term. Nor are busways adequate to support the scale of growth experienced to date, let alone identified in the Local Plan for future development.
- 8.7. The Local Plan should acknowledge that the existing busway strategy cannot provide a long-term, sustainable and enduring solution to Cambridgeshire’s needs for public transport.
- 8.8. The Local Plan should give unequivocal support for development of a fully integrated transport network, including for mass rapid transit which is capable of supporting the current and future economic, social and environmental needs of the whole of our region.

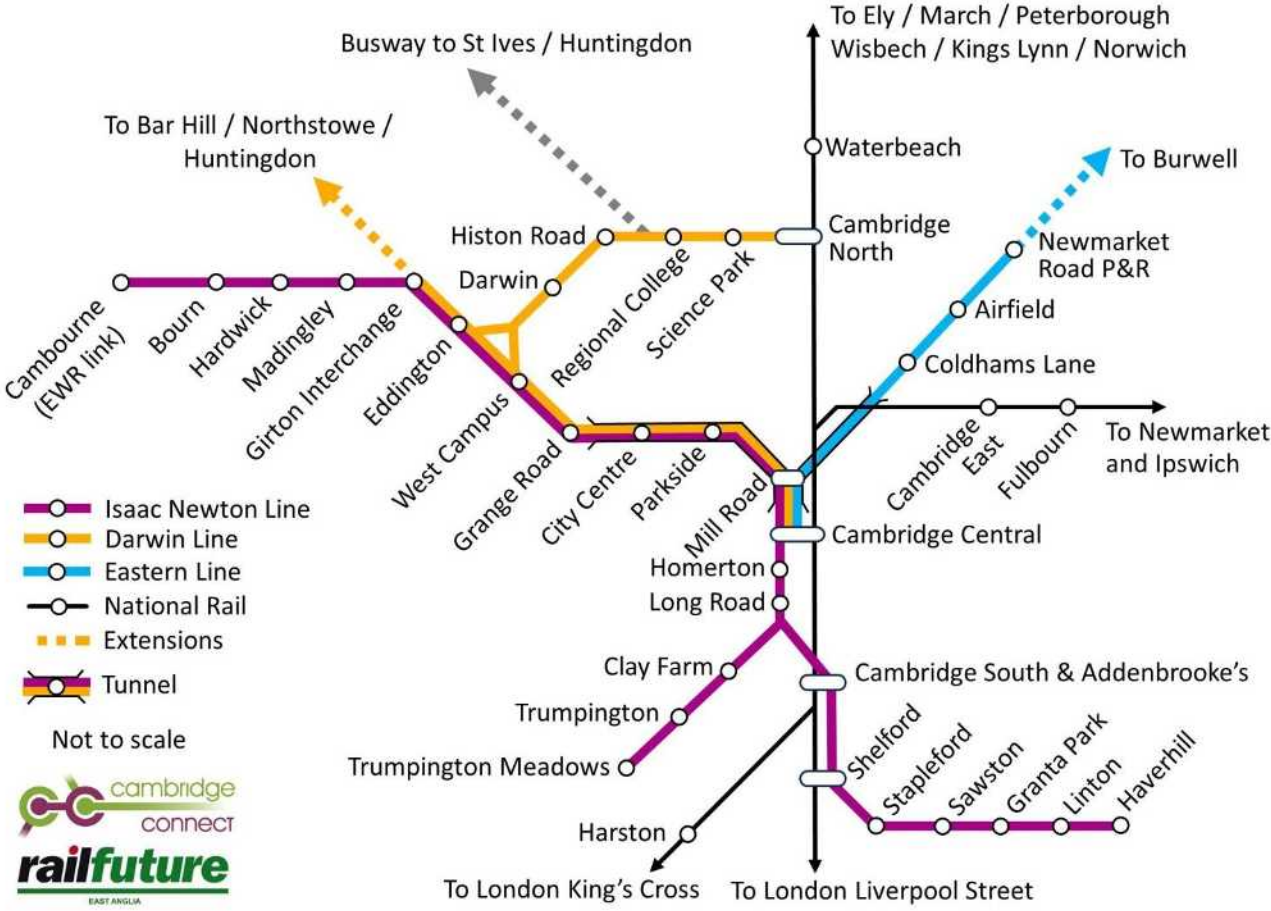


Figure 1: Schematic of the Cambridge Connect (developed in collaboration with Railfuture East Anglia) scheme for light rail mass rapid transit in the Cambridge region.