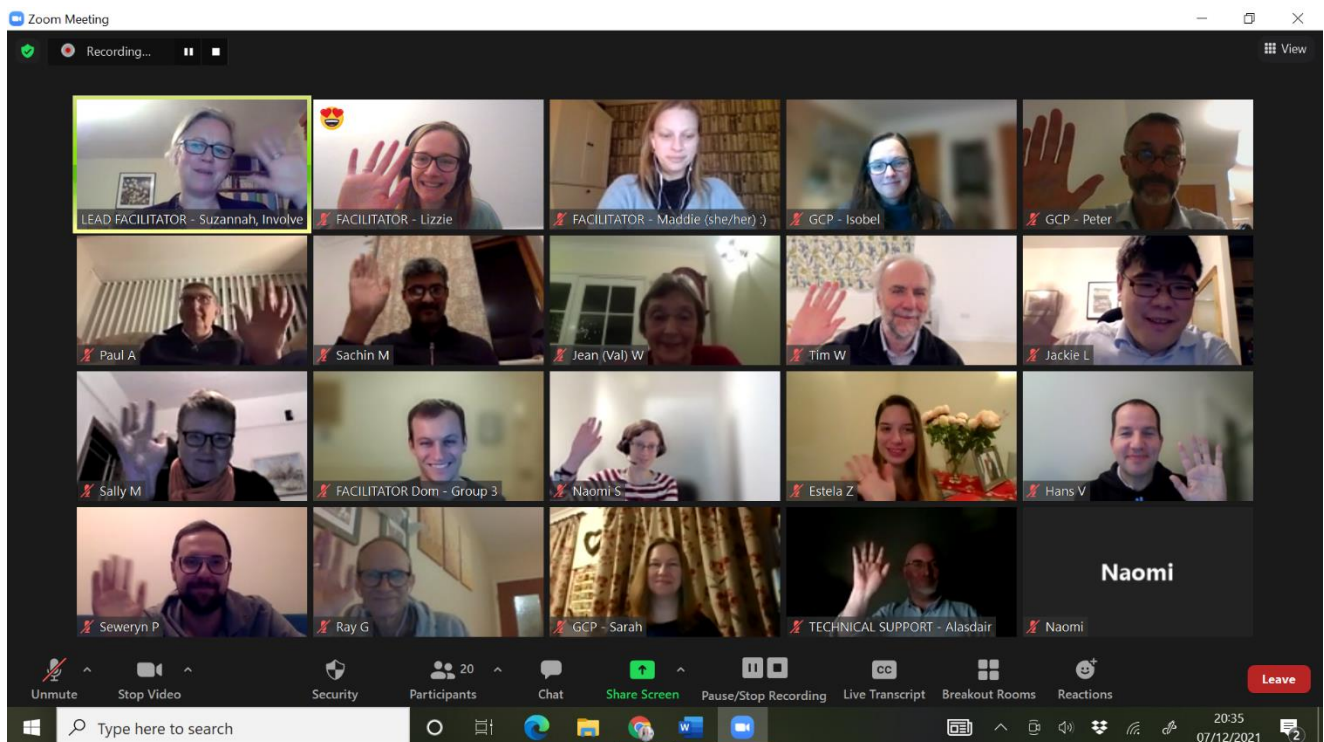


# GREATER CAMBRIDGE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON CONGESTION, AIR QUALITY AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT:

## SUMMARY REPORT OF DECEMBER 2021 FOLLOW UP ONLINE WORKSHOP

JANUARY 2022



## Executive Summary

In the autumn of 2019, Greater Cambridge Partnership held a Citizens' Assembly to consider the question: "How do we reduce congestion, improve air quality and provide better public transport in Greater Cambridge?"<sup>1</sup> This brought together a mini public from across Cambridge, South Cambridgeshire and the wider travel to work areas to hear evidence about these issues, discuss and deliberate before voting and delivering key messages.

There was a call from assembly members to hear feedback on progress. In September 2020, GCP worked with Involve to convene a follow up workshop<sup>2</sup> for those assembly members who had indicated they would like to stay in touch. In December 2021 a further reconvening of workshop members took place. The timing was planned to coincide with the Making Connections consultation<sup>3</sup> which was live at the time, with participants able to consider the proposals being made through it in terms of public transport improvements and raising money to pay for improvements.

This report is a summary of the conversation and reflections of assembly members at the December 2021 workshop.

Looking across all the discussions, the following key points stand out:

- Overall participants welcomed the changes that have happened since 2019 and cited a number of specific improvements including greater infrastructure provision for walking and cycling, road closures, public transport service and cost, bike storage and electric buses. However, they still see room for improvement for example in making cycling routes less fragmented. They recognised that making changes is hard!
- Frequency, reliability/consistency, and affordability were seen as the key ingredients needed to shift people from the car to the bus and to enable public transport to be the best option for people in a range of usage circumstances.
- Participants saw the experience of using buses had to be a great experience, even transformational in terms of comfort and service.
- COVID-19 is still impacting take up of public transport.
- Charging is unlikely to be popular with some. GCP should accept that and be honest, upfront and clear in messaging of why it is needed and which charging approach is deemed fairest.
- Participants emphasised the importance of fairness as the key consideration in the design of any charge.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.greatercambridge.org.uk/city-access/greater-cambridge-citizens-assembly>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.greatercambridge.org.uk/city-access/greater-cambridge-citizens-assembly/gcca-workshop-2020>

<sup>3</sup> <https://consultcambs.uk.engagementhq.com/making-connections-2021>

- Some initial discussion seemed to favour a pollution charge, but on further consideration most participants switched favour to a congestion charge. Fairness and achieving congestion goals over the longer term were drivers for this.
- Key groups seen to be affected by a charge and considered for exemptions and discounts included: families, carers, disabled people and those pregnant. People also raised the idea of discounts for car sharing/maximum occupancy.
- Structuring any charging scheme with public transport provision needs to encourage shifts in behaviours away from the car – for example using public transport should be more affordable than using the car, even for families. Ways to encourage car sharing in combination with park & rides were suggested.
- Continue to focus on walking and particularly cycling provision and the infrastructure to support that, noting that more buses pose different safety risks for cyclists.
- Wider issues of planning were raised in terms of the need to consider the transport implications of residential and business growth.

Whilst appreciating that this workshop had a limited agenda; overlaying some of the themes raised with those from the 2019 Citizens' Assembly, the following appear to come to the fore:

The Citizens' Assembly vision priorities seemed to hold firm, particularly in relation to messages around:

- Provide affordable public transport
- Provide fast and reliable public transport
- Be environmental and zero carbon
- Be people centred – prioritising pedestrians and cyclists
- Be managed as one coordinated system (e.g., Transport for Cambridge)
- Enable interconnection (e.g., north/south/east/west/ urban/ rural).

Key messages from 2019 which rang true through the comments and observations in the workshop included:

- Be brave, be bold and take action – in recognition that change can be hard, for the GCP and Councils to be upfront in the messaging around any charging scheme – what it is for and why it is needed.
- Improvements in public transport need to come first – including the affordability, frequency and reliability of services.
- Fairness is a key principle – this drove many of the points and considerations of discussions on the design of a charging scheme.
- Communication, education and behaviour change – in relation to a public transport system and charging scheme that moves towards a behaviour change away from the car.
- The question of growth and planning – in terms of acknowledging the scale of planned growth and the impact on future congestion.

# Background to the 2021 workshop

## Agenda

The aim of the session was to:

- Reflect on progress and priorities since the 2019 Citizens' Assembly
- Gain insight and reflections from assembly members on the Making Connections consultation proposals, in particular:
  - Important features in better public/sustainable transport proposals.
  - Considerations in the design of any future charging scheme– in particular the impact on different people.

For a copy of the Agenda see Appendix 1 and who was involved see Appendix 2.

## Invitations and Participation

Due to ongoing social distancing requirements the workshop was designed from the outset to be an online 2.5 hour Zoom session held on 7<sup>th</sup> December from 6.15-8.45pm. The invitation was sent to the assembly members who had indicated that they wanted to stay in touch (43 people) with GCP on progress on the recommendations made from the 2019 Assembly.

In total, 19 assembly members (44%) signed up for the session with 12 (28%) participating in the evening workshop. A number of the non-participating members sent their apologies.

Those who participated came from Cambridge, South Cambridgeshire and the wider travel to work area.

A number of plans were put in place to help maximise participation, in particular:

- GCP sent an initial email to members asking for 3 dates which would be their preference, eventually deciding on a date/time that was suitable to the greatest number and mix of participants.
- Invitations were sent out 7 weeks before the session and reminders were sent to encourage participation.
- Participants were asked about any computer access issues and offered Zoom support to participate.
- A £50 voucher to thank participants for their time was offered.

As GCP do not hold the phone numbers of participants a ring round before the workshop was not possible which may have helped boost final numbers and participants.

## A note on the findings

The following conclusions are drawn from the facilitators' notes taken during the breakout sessions – similar views were grouped and then themed for ease of reading. They give an insight into participating assembly members' views and reflections. It should be noted that:

- This is a self-selected group and does not have the robustness of representation that the original Assembly had. However, what makes this group unique is that they bring the considerations of evidence, knowledge and experience from the 2019 Assembly into their reflections.
- The session was held over 2.5 hours and therefore is very much top of mind considerations and views.

# Assembly Member Reflections

## Reflections on progress and priorities since 2019

*Participants heard from Isobel Wade (Assistant Director, Sustainable & Inclusive Growth, GCP) who gave an overview of activities since 2019 relating to assembly member recommendations from the Assembly. Copies of the presentation and video can be found at <https://www.greatercambridge.org.uk/gcca-workshop-2022>*

*Participants split into two breakout groups and discussed their views on progress made by GCP and their current priorities*

*The following is a summary of the key points made by participants.*

## What are you pleased by and disappointed by in terms of progress?

Overall participants could point to a range of improvements in the area that they were pleased with, though unsurprisingly there were often similar points on the same topic where further improvement was still expected:

### Cycling/ walking/ active travel infrastructure

Participants commented on a range of improvements they had seen in the areas making cycling, walking and scooting easier and more integrated. This included: Histon Road, the Abbey Chesterton Bridge/ part of the Chisholm Trail over the river connecting north and south; resurfacing of roads and the introduction of e-bikes and scooters.

*"I cycle every day and see improvements in cycle infrastructure" (Participant)*

However, they also noted that routes for cyclists were still seen as fragmented and not joining up or continuing (e.g. Caxton both positive in terms of new cycle route but still

having to join the bypass). It was noted that popular roads had not been resurfaced leaving lots of potholes.

### Public transport – cost and regularity, journey time and frequency

A number of points were raised about public transport including that positively the cost has stayed the same, regularity has improved and the introduction of the electric buses.

*"..had first ride on e- bus so that felt like progress!" (Participant)*

Despite comments on regularity improvements, others cited increased journey times due to increased number of stops (e.g., 905 or 305). The park and ride still felt infrequent though noting COVID-19 may still be impacting on that. Parking was seen as being very expensive which was ok as it serves as a disincentive to drive, but not when the alternative of frequent and affordable buses was not available.

### Road closures, congestion & air pollution

Road closures were observed as interesting to see and had increased safety , making it easier for cycling and walking (e.g. Nightingale Avenue and Storeys Way). It was observed that the flow of traffic had improved at certain times. But congestion was still seen as a problem with bottle necked traffic trying to go around Cambridge and air pollution still being an issue.

### Depots & Park and Ride

It was noted that Madingley Road Park & Ride had installed bike storage boxes recently that were available for everyone and a good idea. Depots for deliveries were also noted as a positive and something that had been prioritised by the Assembly. However, it was observed that depots were too close to town and noise from those will still impact on the centre

### Safety for cyclists

Whilst seeing improvements in infrastructure, participants noted that there was still more that needed to be done in terms of clearer bike routes and the new factor of e-scooters in particular sharing the bike space on roads/bike lanes had increased safety concerns.

### Franchising

Franchising the buses had been a priority for the Assembly, so no change on that front was a disappointment for some. The point made was the need for routes to reach and benefit people, rather than run for profit; and that profitable routes should also subsidise those less well used routes:-

## Priority issues that assembly members still want addressing

Having discussed what they were pleased and less pleased by in terms of progress, assembly members reflected on the priority issues that they still wanted to see addressed. These included:

- Safety for cyclists – this covered addressing fragmented cycle networks through to people being dissuaded from cycling due to the amount of traffic raising safety concerns. In addition, e-scooters were seen as adding to safety concerns.
- Franchising buses.
- Reducing the need for travel.
- Reducing parking – seeing this as a need but a challenge.
- Road closures – were seen as good, but not going far enough.

*“Mill road bridge not having cars was great but that being undone shows how hard change is” (Participant)*

- Density of traffic – in particular as it impacts on cycle safety
- COVID-19 impact dissuading people to take public transport – especially if they are busy services.

## Sustainable transport proposals and charging scheme design

*Participants heard from Peter Blake (Transport Director, GCP) about the current plans in the Making Connections consultation on sustainable travel, better public transport and the need for funding to enable improvements. Copies of the video of the presentation and video can be found at <https://www.greatercambridge.org.uk/gcca-workshop-2022>.*

*Participants split into two breakout groups and discussed their views on important features in a better public/sustainable transport proposal and factors to consider for the design of any future charging scheme.*

*The following is a summary of the key points made by participants.*

What features for you are most important in a better public/sustainable transport proposal? What will it need to have to make it work for you/others?

Public transport: Hours of service, service reach, frequency & reliability  
Participants welcomed the proposals for a more comprehensive bus system and service. For themselves and others they saw the need for:

- A greater range of hours of service to connect with later trains from London or to enable those working shifts to use the bus. This would enable a break in the

reliance on driving. An example was given of understanding routes for health care professionals, so that those finishing shifts can use public transport to get home rather than having to rely on the car.

- Frequency of services
- Reliability of service, so that it is the option to take even when you have an appointment or train to catch.
- Reach of services to take people to areas not currently served well.

Overall, the emphasis was on finding ways to make public transport more appealing for all, to attract people away from cars and to public transport. There was excitement at the opportunity to transform the current system and to tailor it to the different needs of different users, but that it really has to achieve that transformation to shift behaviours.

*"...it has to be transformative - my experiences of buses is they are dire - relied on them when pregnant but would frequently walk an hour instead of getting bus as it took the same time - if it's not transformative then people will only use bus routes when you have no choice" (Participant)*

#### Public transport: Cost and affordability

Prioritise cost and affordability along with frequency. The sense was that if the public transport offering isn't cheap and frequent enough it is unlikely to be the right offer for people instead of using their cars. Affordability for big families was mentioned and that currently driving is likely more cost effective.

#### Public transport: A better experience

Participants also raised the overall experience of public transport needing to be a more pleasant one. This ranged from comfortable seats, having Wi-Fi on the buses so people can work or listen to podcasts through to the app (e.g., TING) to provide a more responsive service. There was recognition that not all passengers may currently have the technical awareness for these app-based features.

#### Interplay between more buses and cycling / walking safety

Some participants were concerned about the raised risk for cycling and walking from an increase in buses. There was a suggestion for bus drivers to cycle the city to see what it feels like.

*"Cycling next to double decker buses is terrifying . ." (Participant)*

#### Recognising the impact of COVID-19

Woven throughout comments was hesitation of using public transport due to COVID-19. Whilst no specific suggestions to overcome this were made; it was more a recognition that it is and will continue to affect uptake onto public transport in the current climate.



## Planning

Points were raised about planning for where people work (more workplaces close to homes) to reduce travel and ensuring that places further out of Cambridge are connected through safe cycle routes. In addition, the reality and awareness of growth in Cambridge was raised and the Local Plan proposed growth. There was a sense this may not be widely known or considered in people's views on current measures (i.e., that congestion is only going to get worse)

## Selling the need for change

Some raised the need to sell a transformative approach to the public and why it is needed particularly in terms of the growth of Cambridge.

*"I wonder how much public understands what the future of population of Cambridge is - need to publicise the problems we're facing - it's growing so much .." (Participant)*

A charging scheme is likely to have impacts on different people in different ways. What should GCP be mindful of when designing a scheme and considering those impacts?

The following are a range of points made generally and specifically about a charging scheme design.

## Focus on fairness and a charge to shift the behaviour change away from car use

Participants weighed up different charging options. One view participants took was that a pollution charge would be less equal as people on higher incomes would be more likely to be able to afford electric cars and therefore be exempt from a pollution charge (and continue driving/ causing congestion). Conversely, that people on lower incomes may have the most polluting /less efficient cars and therefore carry the burden of the charges.

Participants wanted GCP to think about the fairness of options for those on lower incomes.

A "frequency of use" / "using the space" charge was seen to be fairer, rather than a charge based on the level of pollution; whilst recognising that incentives to move to cleaner vehicles would also be welcome.

Some participants raised that big companies in Cambridge should also be contributing to the funding of the transport system – it shouldn't just be the employees or those on lower incomes that struggle, but to consider a tax on the companies.

## Provide exemptions/ discounts for those on low incomes/vulnerable/ based on ability to pay

Points were made to consider those on low incomes or financially vulnerable through some sort of exemption or discount. It was felt many people living in Cambridge will be

able to afford charges for their cars, but some will struggle a lot. Within this was recognition that families might also be more dependent on the car and again ability to pay should be considered.

A point was also made that those who are on lower incomes may also not benefit from reduced charges on cars as they may not have a car. Others thought the price of a car can be quite low and the point was that those on lower incomes are likely to have older and more polluting cars and therefore more financially impacted by a pollution-based charge.

### Get public transport to be the best option for people

Related to the point about likely negative opinions on charging, the message was to focus on making public transport cheaper than driving into the centre and find ways of making the benefits of the public transport offer outweigh the negatives of any charge.

The suggestion was that people would want to do the right thing and that would be achieved by a combination of an attractive transport offer which has reduced journey times and cost, and is greener and predictable. It was suggested to bring to the fore in messaging a more holistic outcome of using public transport which is not just about money but more time with family and health benefits.

### How to guarantee income?

Participants raised questions about how different charging schemes might bring in income to fund improvements. Points raised included:

- If a pollution charge is chosen, that will provide income, but will dry up if people stop driving in.
- If car parking charges are put up, it is a disincentive for people to come in and then that income will dry up.
- A congestion charge was seen as likely to guarantee a regular funding stream to sustain public transport improvements in the longer term.
- A suggestion was to go for the charge that brings in most income, with the caveat that there was still an emphasis on fairness when considering a decision on this.

### Accept it will not be popular for all

Some participants raised that most people would be unhappy with any charging measure and were there different ways to raise funds– e.g., like a community type charge or via council tax bills depending on ability to pay? GCP clarified that this route would not be sought as the charging scheme is about trying to change behaviours not just making an income. A participant echoed that the scheme should not be seen as profit making.

There was a sense that opinions will be negative, but if designed right to not disproportionately impact people on lower incomes then it should be more acceptable.

## Who might be most affected and how?

The following groups of people were considered likely most affected by a charging scheme:

- Families outside Cambridge who need to come into Cambridge.
- Car owners.
- Park and ride users - if the cost is still high for the bus trip.
- Traders – those that need to move around a lot, depending on the type of work they do will be impacted by the type of charge.
- Carers.
- White van drivers.
- Disabled people.
- Those who are pregnant

## What could be put in place to help those affected?

Suggestions from this discussion included:

### Adjustment suggestions

- Look at family income-based adjustments
- Blue badge holders might be charged but need to make sure it's discounted
- Ensure that the public transport option is more affordable to encourage people to use it. Examples relating to the Park & Ride included:
  - charge per car on park and ride instead of per person.
  - look at Norwich Park & Ride where 1 adult pays and children go free.
- Consider systems similar to Railcard discount offer – e.g. “2 together” railcard for example.
- Explore ways to encourage car sharing:
  - Can car sharing to the park and ride trigger a discount on the park and ride fare?
  - Need to try and get people to car share or leave cars outside of town.
  - Surely it's better if families drive in with 4 in a car rather than just 1 in a car - you can have set lanes where people have more people in the car e.g. Toronto model.
- In relation to creating a scheme that works, for general or adjustments it needs the infrastructure to make it work properly – it will be bureaucratic, but it should be possible to tailor a system to people's needs.

### Messaging

Through the discussions participants raised several points relating to the messaging around public transport and charging. Points raised included:

- The need for a charging scheme should be clearly made and with zeal and leadership by the GCP and the Councils. It was suggested this needs to convey the benefits for Cambridge of reducing congestion in light of growth projections .
- There is a danger that a system could quickly become complicated and positive messaging is needed to make any charging scheme clear.
- Buses can be quite drab and there is a need to share a positive message around using them and the benefits of saving time and money. There was a sense that once people experience a more attractive option from the bus this will drive change. Case studies such as from Harrogate were suggested as a good example of a high-quality bus service.
- A point was raised that a charge that says “congestion” will get people annoyed, a pollution charge might be more appealing due to the interest and support for tackling climate change. Countering this and a key message was that GCP should be upfront it is a congestion charge. Congestion is what is trying to be reduced so tell people that is what it is and why a congestion-based charge is a fairer choice for people.



# Appendix 1: Outline Agenda



**GREATER  
CAMBRIDGE  
PARTNERSHIP**



## Greater Cambridge Partnership Citizens' Assembly member workshop

Date: Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2021: Time 18:00 –20:45

- Zoom details will be emailed to participants at 5pm on 7<sup>th</sup> December
- If you have any technical queries/ questions in advance of, or difficulties during, the call please call Alasdair McWilliams (number provided to participants)
- The session will be facilitated by Suzannah Lansdell from Involve.

### Outline Agenda

Time	Item
18:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants to join the call and check their connection, zoom basics</li> <li>• Once online, participants can grab a drink /snack/ whatever you need to be comfortable for the workshop.</li> </ul>
18:15	<b>Welcome, Agenda and Getting Started</b>
	<b>Presentation: Progress update since the Assembly</b> – Isobel Wade, Assistant Director Sustainable & Inclusive Growth
	<p><b>Breakout group discussions:</b> Introductions and reflections on progress since 2019 and priority issues</p> <p><i>Citizen assembly members will break into smaller groups with a facilitator for a group discussion.</i></p>
	<b>Presentation: Sustainable travel and better public transport proposals and the need for funding</b> – Peter Blake, Transport Director
	<b>Questions of clarifications</b>
19:25	Break/ stretch
	<p><b>Breakout group discussions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is important in a better public/sustainable transport proposal</li> <li>- Thoughts on the design of a charging scheme and impacts</li> </ul> <p><i>Citizen assembly members will break into smaller groups with a facilitator for a group discussion.</i></p>
	<b>Feedback from breakout groups</b>
	<b>Way Forwards &amp; Next steps</b>
20:45	Workshop ends

## Appendix 2: Who was involved

### Involve

The Involve Foundation<sup>4</sup> is a UK-wide public participation charity. Involve ran the Greater Cambridge Citizens' Assembly in 2019- facilitating and designing the process by which the assembly members learnt, considered and came to recommendations about the topic. Involve also ran the online session with assembly members in September 2020.

GCP approached Involve in September 2021 to facilitate a follow up workshop with assembly members. This report is the output from that session.

### Participants

53 members of the citizens' assembly completed both weekends' work in 2019. At the final weekend assembly members were asked if they would like to stay in touch with progress and pass on their contact information to enable GCP to do this. 43 members agreed to this and were invited to this follow up session. 19 assembly members signed up for the workshop with 12 participating in the session on the evening of 7<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

Thank you to the assembly members who participated in the event:

Estela	Tim W
Jackie	Ray
Johannes (Hans)	Sachin
Naomi S	Sally
Naomi T	Seweryn
Paul	Val

From Greater Cambridge Partnership:

- Isobel Wade, Peter Blake, Sarah Prentice and Alasdair McWilliams

Facilitation:

- The session was facilitated by Suzannah Lansdell, Lizzie Adams, Dominic Ward and Madeleine Gough from Involve.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.involve.org.uk/](http://www.involve.org.uk/)