Greater Cambridge Partnership:
Making Connections Youth Engagement

Internal report: JFG Communications in partnership with Cambs Youth Panel on behalf of WSP / Greater Cambridge Partnership

January 2022

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1. Introduction

This report sets out the findings of an engagement session with the Cambs Youth Panel in January 2022, focused on travel within the Greater Cambridge area.

JFG Communications were jointly commissioned with WSP, as part of the Cambridgeshire Professional Services Framework, to engage young people in a focus group as part of the _Making Connections_ consultation, which ran from November to December 2021.

2. Method

Cambs Youth Panel

JFG Communications worked with Cambridgeshire Youth Support Service to establish a partnership with the Cambs Youth Panel. Cambs Youth Panel is an independent, voluntary society whose members are engaged in supporting the community and consulting with local authorities to provide a youth perspective.

Membership of the panel is free. Members must be between the ages of 11 and 18 and live or attend education in south Cambridgeshire, defined as the districts of:

- South Cambridgeshire
- East Cambridgeshire
- Cambridge
- Huntingdonshire

Working with the panel reduced the need for recruitment and reduced the risk of 'no-shows'. It also provided an established group that were comfortable in each other's presence and with the facilitator, enabling a more candid and free-flowing discussion.

A virtual workshop lasting one-hour was held on Zoom on Wednesday 12th January and attendees were rewarded with a £50 amazon voucher. Parental consent had been granted as part of membership of the youth panel and reporting is anonymous to protect the personal information of participants.

The session was facilitated by Phil Priestly, Lead Adult Facilitator of Cambs Youth Panel, with 10 members of the panel. Nick Sanderson, JFG Comms, attended as an observer. Neil Poulton, WSP, provided an opening presentation and answered questions from participants, on behalf of GCP, in the opening 15 minutes before a facilitated discussion for the following 45 minutes.

The objectives of the session were to understand:

- What makes moving around the Greater Cambridge region a positive experience for young people?
- What makes this a negative experience for young people?
- How can we improve travelling around Greater Cambridge for young people? What would help more young people to take the bus or walk or cycle? What do you think of two ways to free up road space and raise money to invest in better bus services

and more cycling and walking infrastructure – a road charging zone, or additional parking charges?

Participants
- Participant 1 (30mins from Cambridge by bus)
- Participant 2 (City Centre)
- Participant 3 (Haverhill)
- Participant 4 (Cambourne)
- Participant 5 (Littleport)
- Participant 6 (City fringe)
- Participant 7 (City Centre)
- Participant 8 (lives 'a while' out)
- Participant 9 (Cambourne)
- Participant 10 (Cambourne)

3. Summary of Findings

Feedback from the session has been synthesized according to the themes of the Making Connections consultation, including the bus network, private vehicle use and charging options, and walking and cycling.

1 Bus network

1.1 Reliability

- The general consensus regarding buses is that they are slow and unreliable, with many participants concerned about how long bus journeys take. Participants reported that buses are consistently late or cancelled and driver breaks cause delay without explanation, e.g.:
    - Participant 1 (half hour away by bus): *"[The drivers] arrive late every morning, and that's two consecutive days I've been late for school now. Then they, out of nowhere, have a break and go out and have a smoke, when I'm stressing, I'm going to be late."*
    - Participant 9 (Cambourne): *"Sometimes the bus is right there, you can see it, and it's 'oh, the bus isn't leaving now. We're having a break'. Getting to school is a bit of a nightmare."*
- Slow journeys and poor reliability were reasons cited for aspiring to drive, e.g.:
    - Participant 9 (Cambourne): *"I want to drive…I get the bus into town every day, every single day…It should in theory take 40 minutes, but I know for a fact I am on the bus for at least an hour and a half every day, just one way. There's nowhere for me to park at school, but [driving] would just make a lot easier because the amount of time I spend on a bus is painful."*
- Most used an app to track buses but one participant stated this is dysfunctional, with buses disappearing from the tracker if late:
    - Participant 9 (Cambourne): *"It's risky because half of the buses do not arrive on time… and when it reaches the time the bus is supposed to be there, if the*

bus is late it just gets rid of it. It just goes off the app, you can't track it anymore because then it's not live. Sometimes it will tell you the bus is delayed…but if it passes the time the bus is supposed to be there it just disappears."

1.2 Frequency and operating hours

- A commonly cited issue for this, living in more rural areas, was the infrequency of services on buses (and trains), particularly off-peak (after 5pm).
- Some felt buses were adequate within certain time frames, but bus travel became a problem early or late in the day, with infrequent services leaving them to be stranded and feel vulnerable while awaiting another service, or having to call for a lift from a parent, e.g.:
  - Participant 3 (Haverhill): *"I'm quite happy with [thus buses in peripheral areas] …it's just the fact that there's a cut-off point where if you don't get in you're going to be sat in Cambridge for another hour and it's not going to be a fun experience especially that time at night."*
  - Participant 3 (Haverhill): *"Stagecoach is handy in the Haverhill area, but late at night…it's really hard to get a good bus back… at least past five sometimes. It's hard to get a bus within certain time periods, so if it gets desperate we get the train back to someone else's house or get picked up. So big time issues is what usually hampers me when I go to Cambridge."*
- One participant commented on how frequency is a particular issue when a journey was made up of multiple connections:
  - Participant 5 (Littleport): *"We catch the train to Ely, to then catch the train to Cambridge. Or there's a bus we can catch to get to Ely to then get to Cambridge. Both the train and the bus are every hour. We leave it until half past the hour because our trains leave at 8 past. You can't say 'oh, let's go out, let's do this' unless you've planned it as you have to check the train times and everything…[if I had a car] I think I'd be out a lot more."*
- Participants concurred that infrequency (of both bus and train services) prohibited spontaneity, which they really valued, e.g.:
  - Participant 8 (lives 'a while' out): *"[The trains] are not the most frequent thing in the world. We have one train in each direction every hour… it's inconvenient. If I want to go somewhere by train, I've got to have it in my mind at the start of the day: 'OK, I've got to get this train', otherwise it gets too late and I have to leave it for another day. They're not frequent enough to be able to just turn up and grab a train."*

1.3 Disabled users

- A participant with mobility issues spoke of the stress and exhaustion they associated with taking public transport versus a car:
  - Participant 5 (Littleport): *"Using public transport with mobility issues is extremely daunting and although lots is put in place so people with disabilities, both mental and physical, can access the bus service, actually it's tiring, it takes a long time, it's quite a lot to be able to manage. Sometimes*

using the bus is all you're physically able to do so by the time you have used the bus that's it. So actually using a car is a lot more practical, a lot less stressful, just much easier."

1.4 Interactions with drivers

- Multiple participants reported they often encountered indifferent or rude drivers, even towards disabled users, which makes the experience of using buses even more unpleasant:
    - Participant 9 (Cambourne): *"[For Participant 10] this morning they just didn't lower the thing and she just had to climb on the bus and the bus driver just sat there and watched her do it. You can have people who make it a nice experience and sometimes it's just horrible. That's how I start and end my day, right, so it's going to make or break my mood to be around other people."*

1.5 Cost

- The cost of bus travel was mentioned as an issue, although the student pass was viewed very positively. One participant who lived just outside the Cambridge travel fare zone stated her frustration that they paid a lot more than if they lived a couple of stops further along:
    - Participant 9 (Cambourne): *"I'm lucky enough to have a student pass so I can use the Stagecoach buses, but because I live just outside in Cambourne where Stagecoach is allotted the area of Cambridge it's extra. And that is really expensive and I know a lot of people that can't afford it."*

1.6 Environmental impacts

- Multiple members of the group displayed an environmental consciousness, whereby they considered the environmental impacts of how they travelled. However, there was a common perception that buses they used weren't much (if at all) better for the environment than cars:
    - Participant 4 (Cambourne): *"It's constantly on my mind that I get up in the morning and get on the bus and think 'this isn't great for the environment'…Consciously thinking everyday about how I'm getting to school has been a big thing for me because I used to walk to school every day…although it's not been a motivator for the way I get transport because I either go by car or go by bus, I think, well I don't know the facts, but they are relatively similar because the school buses aren't good for the environment."*
    - Participant 8 (lives 'a while' out): *"For all I know [taking the bus] could be worse for the planet. The bus I take is absolutely ancient and probably run on elephant tusks."*
- Participants reported they did not have the luxury of choice, and they travelled by bus as that was often the only practical way to travel, rather than being able to make choices based on the environment. There was a common view among participants

that practicality and efficiency was the most important consideration for deciding their journey mode:

- o Participant 8 (lives 'a while' out): *"I use public transport because it's the only way I can get places without people getting me a lift. I get a bus to school because it's the one way I can get to school. It's an hour and a quarter I spend travelling to school if I get the bus, versus less than twenty minutes if I took the car. I take it begrudgingly. It's not a fun experience, it's not a quick experience."*
- o Participant 9 (Cambourne): *"You choose to get the bus because we don't have a choice. Like [Participant 4] said, there's no choice there. But also, it's kind of a lucky dip: sometimes you're going to have a nice experience of the bus – but it can be anything from the bus to the driver being horrible to you [that changes that]."*
- The implication was that buses needed to rival the practicality of a car for individuals to start making travel decisions based on the environment. A car user summed up this sentiment:
  - o Participant 10 (Cambourne): *"Although I feel guilty about using the car it is just so much easier…If [buses] were more reliable, practical, just a nicer experience…I think a lot of young people would be incredibly willing to switch to the bus service. If awareness was made to say, 'it is more friendly to the environment and more carbon neutral than using a car' I think more young people would get behind that."*

2 Motor vehicles and road user or parking charging options

2.1 Fairness

- There was concern from a couple of participants over the costs and fairness of pollution or congestion charge on those who can't afford cleaner vehicles:
  - o Participant 1 (half hour away by bus): *"There's going to be people who can't really afford it, and they're already buying a less affordable car for themselves and paying extra taxes for that and plus they will have to pay extra money to travel in certain areas."*
- There was also concern over the impact of costs to disabled users in particular, especially those who may not qualify for a blue badge:
  - o Participant 5 (Littleport): *"Has it been thought about that some people are disabled, both mentally and physically, social anxiety and stuff not being able to get public transport and stuff, and also disabled people have less of an income. Personally I've got family who are disabled and they have less of an income and aren't going to be able to pay these charges. I think it's a bit inconsiderate."*
  - o Participant 10 (Cambourne): *"Having the congestion charge might help police it, would just be quite difficult for people who can't use the bus, particularly for me as I don't qualify for a blue badge…if that's what you're using to prove it."*

2.2 General cost of driving

- One participant expressed concern over the high cost of car use, particularly in relation to parking and petrol prices, and how charge measures would add to these costs:
    - Participant 9 (Cambourne): *"Driving is already really expensive, so adding more expense to that: no thank you."*

2.3 'Pull factors' not there

- Participants commented that public transport improvement has to come well in advance of deterrent – that the bus service needs to be a suitable alternative to car use, e.g.:
    - Participant 8 (lives 'a while' out): *"If you do the push before what you're pushing them towards looks decent then you're just going to annoy people…all they're going to do is keep driving then complain more about how more expensive driving is."*

2.4 Family travel

- While most participants regularly used the bus for personal travel, when travelling with their families participants said they were often driven into town by car:
    - Participant 1 (half hour away by bus): *"If I'm going to town I'd probably go by bus as I live half an hour away…unless we are going to a grocery store type thing so we can put stuff in the car and get home. Apart from that, just the bus."*
- Some participants highlighted the seasonal variations in family car use as well as by journey purpose:
    - Participant 4 (Cambourne): *"If I'm going in on my own or with my friends I am likely to take the bus, but if I'm going in with my family I am more likely to go by car…if I'm going with friends I am less likely to buy big bags worth of stuff, but if I'm going in with family we are likely to be doing Christmas or birthday shopping. And if we are shopping that much we don't want to carry it back on a bus so would rather take the car anyway."*

3 Streetspace, walking and cycling

3.1 (Im)practicality

- Many participants who regularly use buses reported they do so because cycling or walking isn't feasible.
    - Participant 4 (Cambourne): *"To get to school and to get my education there's no place I can feasibly walk or cycle."*
- Those who did, often reported it was simply the easiest way to get around, rather than citing environmental motivations.
    - Participant 7 (City Centre): *"We don't own a car, so we are always biking or walking…I don't go on public transport because it's easier for me to bike. It's*

free, I don't have to pay for it...I don't know if it's on our minds constantly but we know that it's better for us if we are walking and biking places than driving places. It's a convenient-ish way to stay healthy."

3.2 Family

- Echoing bus users, those who primarily used bicycles for personal travel often replaced these trips with car journeys when travelling with their family, particularly during the festive period.
    - Participant 2 (City Centre): *"I only live about half a minute away from town, the city centre. If I were to go into town I would probably take my bike or something like that, but if I was going with my family, my mum and my sister, I would usually take the car. In terms of if I've got any shopping it's easier to bring back by car, so for me it's a mix of bike and car."*
    - Participant 6 (City fringe): *"If I was going with my family I'd probably go by car. But especially at busy periods like Christmas time, people coming back with tonnes and tonnes of bags on the bus or bike isn't really ideal."*

3.3 Personal safety

- A few participants cycled regularly but talked about how cycling was too dangerous on roads.
    - Participant 1: *"I recently learned to cycle but I don't want to go on the roads because I don't want to die! I don't want to be hit by something. So I'd rather go on the scooter things, but now that's cancelled."*
- Poor road surfaces were also considered a barrier to uptake of cycling.
    - Participant 2 (City Centre): *"If you wanted to encourage people to cycle and walk more, the roads in Cambridge definitely need more of an upgrade because I cycle to school everyday and the roads are pretty horrible to cycle on."*

4. Reflections and Conclusions

The group generally welcomed the opportunity to be consulted on Making Connections and were keen to be involved further going forward.

Public Transport
- The buses were generally seen as acceptable or satisfactory, given that most participants were very familiar with the system as regular users. However, there was a strong theme of a lack of choice and severe restrictions on lifestyles as a result of:
  - scope (limiting where you can go)
  - operational hours (limiting when you can travel)
  - frequencies (meaning a lack of spontaneity and freedom to travel when and where you like without risk of 'being stuck')

- Thanks to student/school concessionary passes, cost was only raised by one member who lived outside the Cambridge City travel zone, and so felt penalized by being on the outside of the zone.

- Customer service and driver interaction was also highlighted as an important influence on the quality of a journey and likelihood to use the bus regularly.

- There was a strong sense of doubt that buses were, or even could be 'greener' than other modes of travel.

- Where available and relied upon, the trains were seen as faster but more expensive, and equally infrequent. There is a risk that changing the bus network and introducing a charging scheme without coordination with the rail network will leave those dependent upon rail suffering comparatively more expensive and less frequent service. Bus services could thus complement train services

Cycling and Walking
- The idea of improved cycling and walking infrastructure was broadly popular, with one participant fond of the shared e-scooters when they were in their area (they were not confident cyclinh, but enjoyed scooting). Cycling was seen as something people did in the city, but not in the peripheries where distances were greater. One participant who lived in the city and was car-free tended to cycle everywhere, while other city residents cited a fear of riding on the road with traffic.

Car use and charging regimes
- For younger members, car use was largely determined by their parents (when carrying large amounts of shopping or travelling as a family), while older members were generally keen to learn to drive to 'break free' from being dependent upon the bus system. Highlighting that travelling as a family by public transport is likely to be more stressful, complicated and perceived to be more costly.

- Participants generally felt charging to drive to the city centre, through parking or a form of road user charging, would be unfair on those for whom public transport is poor or inaccessible.
- If a blue badge was used as the only disabled exemption, it was seen to be unfair on those with mental of physical disability who do not qualify for a blue badge.
- There was also concern that a pollution-based charge would easily be accommodated by wealthier people, placing the burden on those on lower incomes who were more reliant on their cars. Buses were also seen as a key source of air pollution.

Next steps
- The group and coordinator are generally keen to continue being engaged in the project and expressed an interest in viewing and responding online with regards to their local area and bus services.
- This would serve to provide a useful reference group for the project who do not need to be briefed anew each time on the overall project. However, it should be noted that the group may suffer 'consultation fatigue' and over time, the amount of scrutiny and challenge they provide to a project, and people they are increasingly familiar with, could wane. This suggests a continued additional need to engage with other young people from across the region moving forward.
- We would suggest continued involvement with the youth panel through the ongoing phases of Making Connections to provide a youth perspective and challenge to the project team.
- As regular users of the bus and those who inherit our future environment, youth stand to be strong advocates for positive change.

Appendix 1. Topic Guide

Objectives

- **What makes moving around the Greater Cambridge region a positive experience for young people?**
- **What makes this a negative experience for young people?**

To prompt discussion:
1. What sort of modes of transport do you use at the moment?
2. What are the key locations that you travel from and to?
3. What impacts on their choice of what mode of transport to use?
   a. Cost of tickets, ease of applying for concessionary schemes
   b. Not being able to drive yet
   c. The impact of the journey on the environment
   d. Location of route and destination
4. What impacts on your experience – whether a journey is a positive experience one?
   a. Across modes:
      i. Journey speed
      ii. Journey time reliability
      iii. Information provision
      iv. Interactions with other road/street users
      v. Feeling safe
      vi. Comfort of journey
   b. On public transport:
      i. Staff interactions
      ii. Interactions with other passengers
      iii. Regularity of services
   c. On own transport – cars, bikes, scooting:
      i. Location of parking – how near can you get to your destination?
      ii. Traffic and congestion

5. **Changes**

- **How can we improve travelling around Greater Cambridge for young people? What would help more young people to take the bus or walk or cycle? What do you think of two ways to free up road space and raise money to invest in better bus services and more cycling and walking infrastructure – a road charging zone, or additional parking charges?**

To prompt discussion:
1. Do we need to change things in Greater Cambridge?
2. How can we change things to make young people's journeys better?
3. What changes should be avoided, what might make things worse?
4. What would make you more likely to use the bus?
5. What would your ideal new bus network look like and be like to use?
6. What would make improvements to walking and cycling and public spaces?

7. What would make you more likely to walk and cycle?
8. How could we encourage more young people to walk and cycle?
9. How could charges be implemented in order to pay for improvements to the transport network? What would be the advantages and disadvantages for young people?