**Transport** for **All**
Access, Rights, Advice

# Greater Cambridge Partnership: Making Connections project

Report: Engagement workshops

December 2021

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# 1. Introduction

This report sets out the engagement on moving around in Greater Cambridge delivered with disabled people by Transport for All (TfA) in November and December 2021. TfA were commissioned by JFG Communications (JFG), Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) and WSP to support them to consult disabled people on proposals relating to future transport schemes.

The engagement referenced in this report consisted of one 90-minute workshop with local disabled people, and one 60-minute workshop with local people affected by dementia. Observations and conclusions based on the feedback from this engagement, and for future engagement, are also made in this report.

## 2. Engaging with disabled people

### 2.1. Stakeholders: Disabled people

Communications were sent out by TfA to promote a workshop for disabled people who live in, visit or travel through Greater Cambridge. Communication channels included e-newsletters and social media posts. Local organisations were also encouraged to invite individuals that they work with to join the workshop. A separate workshop was organised for local people affected by dementia.

Four individuals affected by dementia joined a focus group in November, held on Zoom and facilitated by TfA.

Five individuals joined a second focus group in December, held on Zoom and facilitated by TfA. They included visually impaired people, mobility impaired people, people with energy impairments and people with mental health conditions. Some people had multiple impairments. Participants were from a range of age groups, and were based in and visited a variety of urban and rural locations across the Greater Cambridge region.

### 2.2. Methodology: Workshops

The objectives of the workshops were:
- To set out the background and work to date of the Making Connections project.
- To begin engagement with key local stakeholders in relation to the project.
- To understand what makes travelling in Greater Cambridge a more or less positive experience for disabled people.
- To explore perspectives on a new bus network, improvements to walking and cycling, and potential vehicle charging options.

The workshops were facilitated by Transport for All. The first workshop was run as an informal discussion. At the start of the second workshop, a representative of WSP shared an update on the project in the form of a slide presentation. They then left the meeting to enable a full and frank discussion.

Participants in both workshops were asked questions on the following themes:

- What makes moving around the Greater Cambridge region a positive experience for disabled people?
- What makes this a negative experience for disabled people?
- How can we improve travelling around Greater Cambridge so it works best for the whole community?
- What changes do you think would make transport in Greater Cambridge more or less accessible?
- What else do you want to tell us, as well as what we have already discussed?

Participants were advised that feedback would be provided to them as to how their feedback had / would be used, in order to close the 'feedback loop'.

## 3. Summary of feedback from workshops

The feedback from both workshops has been collated and arranged around the three central themes of the Making Connections consultation.

### 3.1. Bus network

### 3.1.1. Availability
- Provision of public transport is deemed to be key in order to achieve GCP's wider ambition of reducing car use – including more reliable, more frequent and more evening/night-time running bus services. It was noted that car use in the region seems high – but this may be a consequence of the rural nature of the region combined with a lack of affordable and reliable public transport options
- Some participants reported that the pick-up and drop-off points in Cambridge for the guided busway are inconsistent in their appearance and features across different sites, and there is no clear signage to explain this
- The guided busway was praised by some respondents as an easy way to get into the city
- Some participants noted that bus frequency had reduced during the pandemic, and they hoped that buses would go back up to normal frequency soon. They noted that if one bus does not come, then there is a longer wait than normal because of the reduced frequency
- One participant felt that local private providers had picked more profitable routes, which left out some villages. Public providers then had to 'mop up' the left out locations, leading to illogical routes
- One participant reported that their local area has one bus a week, but that they have never seen or used it
- Participants commented on the locations of bus stops, some of which were far away from community hubs and services, meaning public transport is not an option for some journeys

### 3.1.2. Making journeys
- Bus stops with a shelter and seating were a key piece of infrastructure that would be welcomed

- Some respondents noted concerns about taking public transport due to other passengers not wearing face masks despite this being encouraged
- Some participants preferred to use cards or passes to get a bus ticket, while others prefer to use cash – it was agreed that offering different options was important
- The cost of buses and trains were noted to be high if someone doesn't have a concessionary pass, particularly if travelling in a group and/or with older children. It was felt that for large groups, driving into the city is a cheaper option than public transport
- One respondent reported boarding a bus with their mobility aid and finding it difficult to get a seat as the other passengers did not offer a seat. They found this stressful and difficult
- Boarding and disembarking buses was said to be worrying, as the bus might pull away from the stop before someone had sat down. When boarding, there might be a step up where respondents may need assistance or adaptations in order to board. Participants noted that hand rails, buses which can be lowered to kerb level, and time to get seated would all be welcomed to increase their ability to board. In addition, participants highlighted that some passengers may still require physical assistance even with these adjustments, and that in some cases this creates feelings of vulnerability which leads to them choosing to stay at home. Interactions with bus drivers and other frontline staff who provide physical assistance were said to be key to impacting on the experience of passengers who need assistance.
- Respondents noted that audio and visual announcements about upcoming stops and destinations on buses would help with increasing confidence to travel. This is present on some buses and most trains and is important for passengers with cognitive impairments and vital for visually impaired people
- One respondent reported feelings of being scared to use public transport in case the audio announcements aren't available, which could lead to getting stranded or not being able to continue a journey

### 3.1.3. Interactions
- Bus driver training, for supporting disabled people across impairment groups, was requested

- Respondents would like to know what training bus drivers have had so that they have knowledge of what sort of service and assistance they can expect
- Respondents reported passengers and drivers becoming impatient if someone is taking a little time to find their bus pass
- Participants noted an apparent different attitude from drivers and the public towards people with visible impairments or visible mobility aids, and those with non-visible impairments
- Others noted that a friendly welcome and a smile from a bus driver could significantly increase their confidence, and make them feel safer and happier

## 3.2. Streetspace, walking and cycling

### 3.2.1. Streetspace
- Variation in pavement quality was reported across different parts of the city and region
- More dropped kerbs would be welcomed as they help people with impaired balance to reduce risks of falling when crossing road, as well as being vital for wheelchair users. Dropped kerbs that do exist often are not placed opposite one another which means people walk or wheel in the road – this is unsafe, and sometimes impossible if a road is cobbled
- Respondents discussed whether infrastructure changes (such as requesting installation of dropped kerbs) should be reliant on individuals reporting and requesting them, or if a minimum provision should exist as standard. They further asked what accessibility audits were carried out across the region
- Decision makers were encouraged to think about making improvements to streetspace across the region, not only in Cambridge city
- A participant noted that local towns have narrow footpaths which are difficult for wheelchair users to manoeuvre along
- Improvements would be welcome to walking routes between towns and villages – it can feel unsafe to walk on roads without footpaths, and some public footways are not accessible to wheelchairs and/or are poorly signposted
- More seating across Cambridge city would be welcomed
- Respondents agreed that streetspace changes should prioritise accessibility improvements including seating and provision of accessible public toilets,

before focusing on aesthetic changes – although the value of these for public experience and perceptions of an area were noted

### 3.2.2. Cycling
- Decision makers were encouraged to explore linking up towns and villages via cycling routes, as well as public transport routes. Current routes for cycling tend to be on larger roads with up to 60mph speeds which may put people off
- These networks should be fully compliant with regulations to ensure they are wide enough for adapted cycles. It was noted that this might be a comparatively cheap option in the long run, and could also link in to park and ride schemes. This may then enable more door to door journeys using cycling, rather than needing to drive for a part of a journey
- Different cycling infrastructure was discussed, such as separated cycle lanes, shared space, and floating bus stops. Floating bus stops were reported to be confusing and daunting for some disabled people

### 3.2.3. E-bikes and e-scooters
- E-scooters were noted as a concern, particularly when ridden fast, and ridden on the pavements. One respondent noted that some riders are making a decision to use the pavements, and the reasons for this should be explored – do roads feel less safe for cyclists and scooter users, and why?
- Respondents stated that they welcome the idea of greener transport, but that it was important these devices are used safely
- The lack of sound on e-scooters was a concern, it was felt that they 'appear out of nowhere'
- Participants who are guide dog users reported their dogs flinching and 'not able to operate' following near misses with e-vehicles
- It was noted that current e-scooter designs are not accessible to all, and that a greater range of options so that more disabled people have the choice to use micro-mobility would be welcome

## 3.3. Motor vehicles and charging options

### 3.3.1. Accessible parking

- Respondents reported that there are often not enough accessible parking spaces close to key locations
- Park and Ride was said to have enough Blue Badge spaces, and the Park and Ride drivers were said to be helpful

### 3.3.2. Applying for Blue Badges

- Respondents reported facing a range of barriers when applying for a Blue Badge, such as being refused a badge after being assured on the phone that they met all the criteria, and finding the forms complex to complete. These experiences led respondents to feel concerned about seeking to reapply or applying for other concessionary schemes.
- Further, needing to apply for concessionary passes and Blue Badges online was noted as a barrier, as websites are complicated and phoning up leads to a complex menu of numbers to choose from
- Another respondent reported that they did not know they were eligible for concessions including a Blue Badge
- One respondent, who is visually impaired, noted that their Badge expired without them realising as they cannot read the date, leading to them receiving a parking fine. They noted that an automated renewal system and increased communications around renewals would help
- Another respondent noted that when they moved out of one area to another they had to apply for a Blue Badge from scratch rather than as a renewal, creating a greater administrative burden and longer application process

### 3.3.3. Charging

- A respondent raised the question of fairness – for example, if someone pays to drive into Cambridge but their own town or village is not selected for improvements, would this be fair?
- Respondents wanted to make sure that any money raised would be spent efficiently rather than passed on to profit making companies
- Linking charges to emissions was supported as it seemed to have a dual outcome of reducing emissions, although it was questioned whether this would create sustainable income

- Some respondents felt any work-related charges should be levied on businesses rather than individuals, while noting that some self-employed people who drive were likely to have suffered financially during the pandemic
- When administering exemptions for disabled people, decision makers were encouraged to reduce any administrative burden for disabled people as much as possible – for example, if Councils have a list of Blue Badge holders these people should be automatically exempt rather than needing to 'opt in' to exemptions
- As noted in 3.3.2 it was reiterated that many disabled people choose not to have a Blue Badge, or may not know they are eligible, and so a narrow exemption only based on Badges would exclude many disabled people
- Decision makers were encouraged to not 'cut disabled people out of the debate' by offering Blue Badge exemptions to vehicle charging without also going further to make bus and active travel options more accessible to disabled people

## 3.4. Additional feedback

### 3.4.1. Trains
- Respondents who use the train noted that the services feel busy, uncomfortable and unsafe in the current pandemic
- Availability of staff to assist was noted to vary between stations. If staff are not visible and available then someone needs to be confident to go and actively ask for some help
- Journey planning for train trips was said by some respondents to be easier now that up to date information is available online, however websites should be as simple as possible to navigate, and many people do not have internet access
- Cambridge central station was thought to be very busy, noisy and stressful – respondents felt they needed to be alert to avoid being knocked into
- North Cambridge station was noted to be good for accessibility for some people due to the lift, accessible parking, and availability of staff. Some respondents did not find North Cambridge accessible, for example due to the grey benches outside the station which are low level and do not have visible

contrast, and due to the longer walk to buses and taxis in comparison to Cambridge central

## 4. Observations and conclusions

Below are a series of observations and conclusions based on both the feedback gathered and reflection on the engagement process itself.

- There was a strong theme across the feedback that while the proposed changes to public transport and streetspace are welcome, it is vital this is not simply 'more of the same' – instead changes must increase accessibility of transport and streets, alongside increasing availability, choice and affordability.

- It's not possible to consider one geographical area or mode of transport in isolation from the wider area or from how transport modes interchange and interact.

- Although a wide range of organisations were contacted, and disabled people with a wide range of access requirements were involved in the workshops, some groups remain underrepresented in the feedback (as is often the case). In particular:
    o Deaf and hard of hearing people
    o People with learning disabilities.

- Additional consultation with disabled people, to supplement the findings of this report, is recommended. The disabled community is not homogeneous, and no one disabled person or organisation can speak on behalf of those who have similar impairments.

- The restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the workshops were run virtually. Whilst this will have made it easier for some participants to take part, it is not fully accessible to everyone.

- A number of the individuals that participated are keen to continue to be engaged on an ongoing basis, and many expressed an interest in responding to the Making Connections consultation online. Ongoing engagement aligns with the approach recommended by TfA (see Appendix A). However, it should also be recognised that many organisations and individuals are subject to 'consultation fatigue', with more requests for engagement than is possible to undertake, and often without any discernible impact.
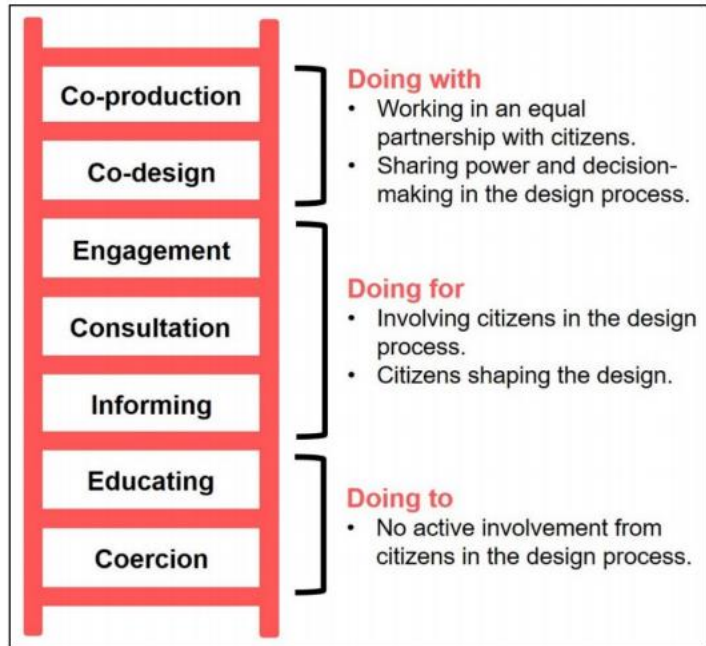
## 5. Next steps

Additional consultation at this stage and in future stages of the project is recommended. Specific engagement with the groups identified in section 4 will be helpful.

GCP are encouraged to ensure that engagement and consultation with local disabled people is a continuing conversation, with opportunities to regularly revisit views and experiences relating to moving around Greater Cambridge.

## 6. Appendix A: TfA's approach to consultation

Co-production is a way of working where service providers work in an equal partnership with the citizens they are providing the service for to design and deliver it. It sits at the top of the 'participation ladder', which describes a range of different levels of citizen participation in ascending order.

TfA believes that the co-production is the model form of user participation and should be implemented by service providers when they design new services or redesign existing services.

**Co-production**
**Co-design**

**Doing with**
- Working in an equal partnership with citizens.
- Sharing power and decision-making in the design process.

**Engagement**
**Consultation**
**Informing**

**Doing for**
- Involving citizens in the design process.
- Citizens shaping the design.

**Educating**
**Coercion**

**Doing to**
- No active involvement from citizens in the design process.

*(Diagram adapted from the New Economics Foundation's participation ladder)*