

GREATER CAMBRIDGE CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY ON CONGESTION, AIR QUALITY AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT: FOLLOW UP ONLINE WORKSHOP

SEPTEMBER 2020



Photo credit: B. Herzog (GCP)



GREATER
CAMBRIDGE
PARTNERSHIP

involve

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?"¹ 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 after a year and to be kept updated. In September 2020, GCP worked with Involve to convene a follow up workshop for those assembly members who had indicated they would like to stay in touch.

The following sections of this report detail the reflections of assembly member participants in that workshop. Where points raised in this session appear to reinforce key themes from 2019 these have been highlighted. Looking across all the discussions, the following priorities stand out:

- COVID-19 reduction in traffic and improved air quality showed what is possible and maintained participants' priority on:
 - traffic reduction measures
 - shifts to less environmentally damaging transport
 - measures to stop reverting to the car and maintaining a people (rather than car) centred approach
 - underpinning drivers of sustainability, climate change and the environment.
- Maintaining a strong focus on public transport investment and its viability in changing circumstances particularly safety and ways to adapt provision to maintain services.
- The COVID-19 crisis enabling the opportunity to do more, not less – especially for public transport
- Continued focus on walking and cycling infrastructure and addressing new safety concerns that come from less traffic and different modes of travel.
- Opportunities for reducing congestion, improving air quality and providing better public transport raised by implications of changing work, travel and land use patterns. This included support for :
 - the vision of the 15-minute city / community.
 - homeworking
 - last mile delivery given the rise in online shopping
 - an integrated, holistic approach linking economy, health and climate
- Think bold but act local. Improving small things that don't take huge budgets but have a big impact on wellbeing

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

Background to the one year on workshop

Agenda

The aim of the session was for GCP to:

- Provide an overview of progress on recommendations one year on from the assembly;
- Hear assembly members' thoughts and reflections on short and longer term priorities, particularly in light of COVID-19.

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 two hour zoom session held on 22nd September from 6.30-8.30pm.

An invitation and follow up reminders were sent to the assembly members who had indicated that they wanted to stay in touch (46 people), this included provision of advance test calls for those less confident on the Zoom platform. In addition, a token £10 Love Cambridge card was offered for those that took part.

In total, 14 assembly members (30%) signed up for the session with 12 (26%) participating in the evening workshop. The two non-participating members sent their apologies but had been called away for personal reasons.

From those attending the mix was as follows:

	Participants
Gender: Female	9
Gender: Male	3
Location: Cambridge	7
Location: South Cambridgeshire	2
Location: Wider Travel to Work Area	3

Whilst welcoming those members that participated, we have considered what factors may have affected uptake to the session. Without a full evaluation it is difficult to say, but may include:

- The notice given for the session (the initial invitation was sent out on 3rd September giving participants c 2.5 weeks' notice) – a better response was seen to a more personalised email invitation and we recommend this would work better for future communications.
- The online nature of the event – though invitees were asked about any computer access issues and offered support to participate, this may have dissuaded some.

- Invitations coming from GCP rather than Involve through whom initial contact and liaison about the 2019 citizens' assembly had come (GDPR requirements had meant that participant data had been deleted off Involve systems).
- No phone contact details data available which meant a "ring round" was not possible, only communication via email.
- Was a £10 Love Cambridge card enough incentive to participate in a two hour call?
- Timing – the session was scheduled for 6.30-8.30pm on a specified day – this may have been problematic for some especially those with childcare/ caring responsibilities.
- Ongoing pandemic implications on people's lives.

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.
- The session was held over two hours and therefore is very much top of mind considerations and views.



Photo credit: B. Herzog (GCP)

Assembly Member Reflections

Short term priorities

Participants heard from speakers (see Appendix 1 for agenda) on progress on recommendations and the impact of COVID-19 for the Greater Cambridge area. There was a short time for questions of clarification before participants split into three breakout groups for a discussion on their views on short term priorities, initially reflecting on their experiences of transport, congestion and air quality through COVID-19. The following is a summary of the key points made by participants.

There were a range of views and experiences within the groups around transport, congestion and air quality from lockdown to date. Overall, it appears the assembly's recommendations still hold true though there was a noticeable focus on:

- Observing what COVID-19 has shown is possible in relation to traffic reduction and air quality – but with concerns that this is now reversing, and a call for active management before the people default back to the car.
- The need to maintain priority on public transport but with adaptations in a changing world, particularly with fluctuations in travel demand and patterns.
- A continued desire for focus on cycling and walking provision.

The following is a collation of the key themes from the group's first breakout discussion, along with bullet points from the facilitator notes of conversations. Differentiation between themes that came out as priorities for action and those that were more observational are noted. Reading all the text gives a fuller insight into the discussion.

Priority & Observation: COVID-19 reduction in traffic and improved air quality shows what is possible

Participants observed the improvements from traffic reduction, in relation to air quality, health and travel times, which served to maintain their priority on traffic reduction measures.

- Positive experiences and noticing the traffic reduction and the improvements in air quality being 'good for lungs' and safety in crossing the roads. Enjoying how clean the air was and how quiet it was.
- It gave an experience and demonstration of how it could be.
- How fast a commute to work could be, enabling a better work/life balance with less hours wasted travelling to work.
- The lockdown showed the implications for children's health of transport, congestion and air quality in the Greater Cambridge area.
- *"How strange it was when you had to stop and wait for a car – getting used to them not being there."*

Observation: Noticing wildlife – during lockdown

Along with traffic reduction people had noticed the connection with their environment.

- Wildlife coming out more and being more in touch with nature for example seeing foxes at night.
- Hearing birds singing.

Priority: Managing new traffic /pedestrian safety concerns

Observations from participants on safety concerns caused by less traffic and different modes of travel led to a priority being expressed for managing these new challenges, particularly in a way that kept pedestrians safe.

- It was observed that less traffic resulted in more speeding and increased movements of delivery vehicles, especially in narrow suburban streets where they posed a danger to children.
- The return of traffic from full lockdown flagged concerns about safety aspects and additional measures to make roads safer.
- A particular concern cited was the rise in electric scooters and safety aspects for walkers.

Priority: Continued focus on walking and cycling

Cycling and walking were seen as priorities, reinforcing one of the key themes from the 2019 assembly. *[2019 vision priority - Be people centred – prioritising pedestrians and cyclists]*. An emphasis on provision for the pedestrian and walking in particular was noted.

- Cycling more because traffic is less.
- Focus [for GCP] of effort should be on walking first and then cycling.
- Short term finance – not just cycling investment but well-lit streets are needed too.
- The group thought it important to keep pushing cycling and walking – to make something good come from the situation.

Observation: Cycling – up or down?

- On the one hand there was a sense that decreased traffic made the roads quieter and safer for cycling with children. On the other hand, a sense that cycling was used as it was a faster mode of transport (pre-Covid in Cambridge), but with less traffic maybe people will choose to drive rather than cycle.
- Cycle journeys felt safer as there were no 'scary places' though there was a sadness that if there is less public transport this might mean a move to more cars.

Priority: Addressing public transport dilemmas

Public transport issues were dominant in discussions and reinforced key vision priorities from 2019 around the provision of public transport [2019 vision priorities: *Provide affordable public transport, Provide fast and reliable public transport*]. Safety was a new aspect of people's requirement to use public transport. But overall participants wanted priority to be put on how to maintain public transport viability.

Issues around bus use focused on:

- **Safety & comfort** – feeling safe on the bus was a key concern; some just did not see it as an option currently. This ranged from the non-enforcement of mask wearing (especially in the early stages of lockdown) through to suggestions of further measures to enable safety and social distancing on buses (and trains) – for example by having the Perspex shields, less capacity or greater ventilation. One participant suggested this is an opportunity for innovation – there will be future pandemics so design public transport with that in mind. Other suggestions included staggering times so buses were not as congested.
 - Safety concerns on public transport had led some previous users to avoid using it completely in favour of their private car, or to consider buying a car, at least for use in the shorter term.
 - *“I haven't left the house – only for medical reasons and then using a taxi or public transport out of the question.”*
 - However, one participant had mostly stayed home, but when they did go out felt safe using buses as there were barely any people on them.
- **Quality of service** – concerns were raised about the decrease in the quality of service as changes to bus routes meant previously regular commuting journeys undertaken now took much longer, despite there being less traffic. Public transport needed to be reliable. Again lack of service was driving some people back to using a car.
- **Air quality** – one participant noticed with disappointment the buses queued up in city with engines idling and felt both buses and taxis needed to be more mindful of their contribution to air quality.
- With the easing of lockdown there was growing concern about the apparent moves away from public transport to car use, especially as the government narrative appeared to be to avoid public transport.
- It was felt there was a need to encourage more public transport use through it being attractive, cheap, regular and safe.
- There was some agreement that digital technology booking and managing journeys through an app like 'Go Bus' could help reduce journey times, congestion and pollution though these will require proper funding.
- There was an overall sense that people feel even more strongly about investing in public transport – a concern that public transport could die out and would go on a downward slope if investment stops. Some participants saw solutions, but the

way public transport is planned needs to be rethought “..will need more buses but stagger the times, so not too congested”

- There was a questioning in terms of how public transport in Greater Cambridge should be funded post COVID so it could be run as a tax-funded public service, like in some European countries, rather than by private contractors with shareholders.

Observation & Priority: Supporting changing work and travel patterns

Participants observed and experienced changing work, travel patterns, choices and uses. It was another example of showing what was possible. Priority focused around measures to facilitate home working.

- Noticeable from participants was how the pandemic had changed people’s work travel patterns, choices and uses.
- It has shown that people can work from home and that had reduced congestion, but also public transport use.
- There was a suggestion of investment in remote working strategies and decent broadband to facilitate home working.
- Some considered that people should be encouraged to go back to the workplace, primarily for social reasons and because not everyone can work from home in terms of space, support, the nature of the job or the need to escape!
- Shift from ‘outskirts’ of city for work and ‘insskirts’ of city to live (rather than other way round) - this has big strategic implications for travel, transport and where investment needs to take place

Other priorities:

- Blocking off Mill Road was noted to have caused reactionary attitudes, but it was felt these needed managing and 12-18 months to bed in – a need to learn from examples elsewhere. *[2019 key message - Consider trials/pilots and phasing]*
- Focus on “last mile delivery” needs attention given the rise in online shopping in order to reduce congestion and air pollution – this needs to be more joined up as part of a transport strategy. *[2019 supporting measure – Establish a heavy-duty depot outside of Cambridge, with last mile delivery through electric van/pedal power].*
- Need to shift to transport that causes less environmental damage – e.g. electric bikes but make them affordable. *[2019 supporting measure - Encouraging the use of electric bikes]*

Longer term priorities

Participants heard from speakers (see Appendix 1 for agenda) on long term directions for mobility and core themes from the citizens' assembly. Back in their three breakout groups, participants used the broad themes of: space for people (more space for walking, cycling and enjoying Greater Cambridge), clean air and zero carbon (tackling pollution and becoming more sustainable) and better public transport for everyone (reliable, affordable and accessible network) to explore views and priorities for longer term ambitions. The following is a summary of the key points made by participants.

Overall, it appears that all themes were important and interrelated. It was hard to unpick the three areas with sustainability seen as a central/ all-encompassing thread as it covered public transport and space for people and clean air and zero carbon.

There was, however, a lot of emphasis on the role of public transport and that not being forgotten.

Priority: Public transport investment and changes needed in a changing world

Public transport was put to the fore, echoing: the vision priorities and key messages from the 2019 assembly. *[2019 vision priorities - Provide affordable public transport; Provide fast and reliable public transport. Key messages - Improvements in public transport need to come first]*. In addition the top supporting measure from the 2019 assembly *[2019 supporting measures - Introduce a mayoral franchise for buses]* around franchising was raised again, with comment that the private model approach was even more challenged by the pandemic/post pandemic needs. The discussion highlighted ways public transport needs to adapt to the changing travel patterns.

- There were comments around the need to focus on how public transport works and how it is run, with a sense that the franchise model doesn't work for people or the planet. It was felt that Stagecoach, as mentioned in the assembly, was an inhibitor to progress and the pandemic has exacerbated that and the private model equals slow change: *"by time get round to it the planet is lost – need action now"*.
- One group thought the biggest problem is climate change, which means public transport and reinstated rural transport networks will be vital in any response.
- Whilst working patterns had changed, it was noted that if only 30% of working can be done remotely, public transport still needs investment - *'if you don't build it now, it will be felt 10-20 years away and we won't do it later, when there is no GCP money'*.
- One person suggested it was about lifestyle – the ability to travel where I want without driving, to move more freely – which requires safe, reliable public transport.

- But there were suggestions that the pattern of provision might have to change – small or bigger buses for example.
- Thinking about public transport in Greater Cambridge prompted views that with more working from home there will be reduced demand for long journeys (e.g. by train). What is likely is more cars around market towns, due to people relocating as they now work from home (what was a theory, now a reality). It was thought local public transport networks need supporting to reduce such additional car use. The view was that HS2 type projects were wrong, and use of public funds is more appropriately applied in future to local networks. Birmingham and London are already well served with trains.
- The need was raised for public transport to be safe and a call for GCP to consider emerging lessons from others like New Zealand.
- Capacity and frequency of public transport services would be ongoing challenges that need to be met.
- Where people want to use the buses / Park and Ride there were specific suggestions that would make it more attractive:
 - buses cleaned / enhanced cleaning protocols
 - use sprays used for airline on buses
 - more flexible provision to meet local needs
 - needs to be more comfortable inside and equipped for working remotely to attract commuters to use them. Longer length buses currently available may allow more space but not so comfortable.

Priority & Observation: Respond to implications from changing working, land use and transport patterns

Participants observed the many changes that were happening and what that might mean for the future in relation to travel and congestion; seeing both the opportunities for change and measures to address increased congestion from for example online deliveries.

- There was a sense that things are very unpredictable at the moment – that transport and land use might be fundamentally changing – for example people not visiting town centre shops, having things delivered through online shopping, changing working and leisure patterns.
- The changed circumstances prompted the group to consider the implications of more working-from-home, Londoners moving to the area alongside those working from home in Cambridge moving further out of the City. It was thought that these would be drivers for more public transport demand, especially for recreational use at weekends (bearing in mind that some current increased car use stems from people being told to get in their cars and get back to work).
- The ‘15-minute community / city’- this was seen as a helpful unifying message / vision about keeping local. This also included creating work-place hubs where people can work from without having to travel for miles. It also needs to be part of a mental health strategy too – where people can feel connected and not isolated.

A strong feeling from one member was that there has to be local testing sites for COVID, so people do not have to drive/ travel so far.

- Concerns were raised about planning controls being swept away and housing development not taking the environment into consideration – and leading to increased congestion. A strong feeling from one member that there needs to be push back by local councillors / GCP to ensure local people have a voice.
- There was also an overall concern in one group that HS2 is a waste of money and should have been put into local public transport infrastructure or done much earlier and it's causing so much damage to woodland etc.
- So many delivery vans creating a lot of congestion/emissions. This needs to be coordinated to keep the volume down - focus on the edge of town and then have final mile using cycle delivery companies. Again, a general feeling there needs to be an overall strategy for this and a need to work with these businesses as it will not happen by itself. *[2019 supporting measures - Establish a heavy-duty depot outside of Cambridge, with last mile delivery through electric van/pedal power & key message - better integration and co-ordination of transport across Greater Cambridge.]*
- Managing space meant allowing space for cars and delivery vehicles, with designs to control traffic and speeding.

Priority: Seize the opportunity presented by COVID-19

Overall participants suggested the need to take action – this echoes key messages from the 2019 assembly. *[2019 key message - be brave, be bold and take action and consider trials/pilots and phasing].*

- There were concerns that COVID-19 could be used as a reason not to invest when it should be the other way around and it is important to seize the current opportunity.
- The Mill Road Bridge closure came up as an example of creating space for people, if only on a temporary basis due to social distancing. It was thought there were lessons for GCP to learn from the change, given the levels of support for and opposition to it. Perhaps this showed a need to 'bring people along' though it could also be an example of the GCP and their partners heeding the citizens' assembly recommendations and being bold. It was thought some opposition to closure tends to overestimate the contribution of through traffic to business custom where there is little or no parking. One participant thought there were lessons for GCP from places with phased or timed road closures such as Aberystwyth.

Priority: Measures to stop us jumping back into the (petrol/diesel) car

- *"We shouldn't get back to driving more"* – what measures can be put in place now to restrict this – suggestions included car clubs and registration number plate restrictions on certain days.

- People recognised for public transport to work effectively and be viable congestion needs to be reduced, so other measures to keep cars off the roads were suggested.
- Install more charging points for electric cars (link to clear air and zero carbon)

Priority: Walking and cycling provision

Priority on walking and cycling echoed vision priorities from 2019. *[2019 vision priority - people centred – prioritising pedestrians and cyclists].*

- Need to repurpose roads to free up space for walking and cycling, sitting/eating out and allotments.
- Need to reduce congestion for public transport to be a viable option. So, electric bikes need to be more accessible (by subsidy?) alongside infrastructure and long-distance bike paths to make the investment in an electric bike pay off (link to clean air and zero carbon). *[2019 supporting measure - Encouraging the use of electric bikes]*

Additional Messages for the GCP Joint Assembly and Executive Board

Overall, participants did not raise any challenges to the previous messages from the 2019 citizens' assembly. Discussions throughout the session appeared to particularly corroborate the following:

- Provide affordable public transport (vision)
- Provide fast and reliable public transport (vision)
- Be environmental and zero carbon (vision)
- Be people centred – prioritising pedestrians and cyclists (vision)
- Mayor to franchise buses (supporting measures)
- Encouraging the use of electric bikes (supporting measures)
- Establish a heavy-duty depot outside of Cambridge, with last mile delivery through electric van/pedal power (supporting measures)
- Plant trees and hedges to absorb carbon
- Be brave, be bold and take action (key messages)
- Improvements in public transport need to come first (key messages)
- Consider trials/pilots and phasing (key messages)
- The question of growth and planning (key messages)
- Better integration and co-ordination of transport across Greater Cambridge (key messages)

All the feedback was raised as key messages, however in finishing their breakout sessions, participants were asked about any concluding or additional key messages they wanted to convey to GCP (and others).

Where not covered above this included:

- Don't forget climate change - which should be a driver to community design and more public transport use.
- Think bold but act local. Improving small things that don't take huge budgets but have a big impact on wellbeing – examples include getting on with planting more trees. *[2019 supporting measure – plant trees and hedges to absorb carbon]*
- Control electric scooters – expectation that they should be managed more actively as different modes mix.
- Approach all the above in an integrated, holistic and strategic way – it needs to link up economy, health and climate.
- Bear equality in mind when considering the implications of transport management for groups such as children and senior citizens, aiming to save space for people over cars and promote health.

The COVID-19 crisis is an excuse to do more, not less – especially for public transport

- Now is the perfect time to consider the public transport system afresh and make positive changes, especially where funding models have to change.
- Public transport innovation was needed – providing more and/or redesigning it, and making it safe for the future.
- Keep investing in public transport- don't let this go as it will be a downward spiral (like in the US). Make sure it is an attractive alternative; otherwise people won't make the shift from cars.

Support for the vision of the 15-minute city / community and ensuring local people have a voice in the changes

- There was a strong feeling from some assembly members that government has swept away planning controls particularly in relation to housing which will impact on congestion/ environment /and the surrounding infrastructure needed. GCP needs to be cognisant of the way land use and travel patterns are changing and what that means for its work and supporting approaches like the 15 minute city/communities. *[2019 key message – the question of growth and planning]*
- Planning authorities, who are members of GCP, need to ensure local people have a voice and to influence housing developers to ensure that housing development keeps and creates green spaces / trees and manages environmental impact.
- There was a call for more vision around the changes prompted by the current situation (including more people working from home) and the promotion of 15 Minute communities - 'lovely places to live' with ready local access to facilities like schools, shops, recreation and jobs; requiring less need for travel, these proper little communities can be linked by public transport.
- Keep a close eye on the way in which use of land is changing.

- Working remotely is here to stay, think about remote working strategy, including work-place hubs and mental health considerations.
- Ensure time is spent talking to people who are using the systems locally.



Photo credit: B. Herzog (GCP)

Appendix 1: Outline Agenda



Greater Cambridge Partnership: Citizens' assembly member follow up workshop

Tuesday 22nd September 18:15 for a prompt 18:30 start until 20:30

Zoom details will be emailed to participants on the afternoon of 22nd September.

If you have any technical queries/ questions in advance of, or difficulties during, the call please call Alasdair McWilliams on (number provided to participants)

The session will be facilitated by Suzannah Lansdell from Involve.

Outline Agenda

Time	Agenda item
18:15	Call opens for participants. Make sure you have what you need to be comfortable – a quiet space and a drink/ snack Do join early to get familiar with the technology and say hello!
18:30	Meeting starts: Welcome, introductions and ways of working for this call
	<i>Recommendations progress and impact of COVID-19 – presentations & questions of clarification</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress to date on citizens' assembly recommendations – Peter Blake, GCP • The impact of Covid-19 on Greater Cambridge – Isobel Wade, GCP • COVID-19 opportunities and challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Video input: Steve Melia, UWE ○ Reflections: Andrew Carter, Centre for Cities
	<i>Breakout discussion – reflections on recommendations and short term priorities</i> Citizen assembly members will break into smaller groups with a facilitator for a group discussion.
	<i>Shaping the future - Presentation & questions of clarification</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shaping the future – key themes for the longer term – Isobel Wade, GCP • Video input: Jillian Anable, Institute for Transport Studies, Leeds University
	<i>Breakout discussion – reflections on longer term directions, opportunities & key messages</i> Citizen assembly members will break into smaller groups with a facilitator for a group discussion.
	What next and way forwards
20:30	Workshop ends

Appendix 2: Who was involved

Involve

The Involve Foundation² 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.

GCP approached Involve in August 2020 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 weekend's 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. 46 members agreed to this and were invited to this follow up session.

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

Eleanor	Gerda	Jackie
Jeanne	Naomi S	Naomi T
Sachin	Sally	Sue
Tim	Val	Zarah

From Greater Cambridge Partnership:

- Beth Warmington, Isobel Wade, Peter Blake and Peter Stanhope

Speakers:

- Andrew Carter, Centre for Cities
- Jillian Anable, Leeds University
- Steve Melia, University of the West of England (UWE)

Facilitation:

- The session was facilitated by Suzannah Lansdell, Lizzie Adams, Steve Robinson and Liz Goold from Involve.

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² www.involve.org.uk/

