

The Greater Cambridge City Deal

Submission concerning the Histon Road initial consultation on better bus, cycling and walking trips.

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The Greater Cambridge City Deal (the City Deal) have invited views on initial ideas for better bus, cycling and walking trips along Histon Road as one of a number of proposals being brought forward to try and address the anticipated growing demand for travel and mitigate against increased congestion as the Greater Cambridge area develops.

We appreciate that the Draft Local Plans for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire are predicated upon the provision of 33,000 new homes and 44,000 new jobs by 2031, with substantial, committed development to the north of Cambridge including Northwest Cambridge, Darwin Green, Orchard Park, Waterbeach and, further into the future, Northstowe. There are also housing allocation sites along Histon Road itself (R2: the Willowcroft site near Aldi) and the R1: former Swiss Laundry site (near Carisbrooke Road). Reference numbers: Cambridge City Council – Cambridge Local Plan 2014: Proposed Submission, July 2014.

Both in terms of current congestion, and the likely increase in future travel demand along Histon Road, the City Deal, with the funding of a Transport Infrastructure Investment Programme as a key component, is there to support the growth planned for in the Draft Local Plans, including the impact upon Histon Road. We also accept that South Cambridgeshire is very much part of the City Deal package with regard to transport movements into and out of Cambridge and that the city cannot be seen in isolation.

We believe that a combination of effective, interlinked City Deal schemes, within, around, and through the city are necessary if the City Deal is to deliver improved transport movements and alleviate congestion. We do not think there is just one solution to the challenges that the city faces. Alongside the City Deal, we also support major rail investment, building on the delivery of Cambridge North station, the potential for a rail station at Addenbrooke's, the rail line to Oxford, and a station for Cherry Hinton / Fulbourn.

The City Deal Joint Assembly examines schemes for consideration by the City Deal Executive Board and there has been cross-party approval for a range of proposals put forward, including Histon Road and Milton Road, along with the funding required. Other schemes considered include: the A428 / A1303 Better Bus Journeys Scheme; A1307 Haverhill to Cambridge transport improvement concepts; the Western Orbital – alongside the M11 with the potential to link Northwest Cambridge and the Busway to Southwest Cambridge / Addenbrooke's and the Biomedical Campus / Busway, including a southbound bus priority slip road from Junction 11, M11; the Chisholm Trail cycling route and five Cross City Cycling routes; 'Smart Technology City Management' and the City Centre Access Study, including measures to reduce city centre traffic and restrict use of the inner ring road at peak times.

We also acknowledge that further City Deal proposals will be brought forward, including more Park and Ride sites serving radial routes currently without such provision as well as improving existing sites. Enhancing Park and Ride sites and making them more attractive to use will be a significant element with regard to future City Deal proposals. We note the planned A14 upgrade, and the provision of a Park and Ride site to the northwest of Cambridge would be an important consideration in encouraging alternative modes of transport to alleviate the likely future pressure upon Histon Road in particular.

Enabling alternative transport movements along radial routes such as Histon Road are part of the overall package and it is therefore unfortunate that the Histon Road initial consultation, and indeed the Milton Road initial consultation, have not, in our view, been properly set within the strategic overview, giving the impression that the Histon Road and Milton Road proposals have been put forward somewhat in isolation. We hope that the further round of consultation provides more strategic context.

Histon Road - general points

As councillors for Arbury Ward and King's Hedges Ward, and having listened to the views of residents local to Histon Road, attended residents' association meetings, public exhibitions with City Deal Project Officers, and having been part of the North Area Committee Special Meeting concerning City Deal proposals currently out to consultation, we wish to make the following comments on the details of the Histon Road proposals.

Our comments are put forward on the basis that this is the initial consultation. We will be seeking a meeting with the City Deal County Council Officer team following this stage of the consultation to discuss our initial responses to the detail of the proposals as put forward at this point.

We note that the proposals are intended to address congestion during peak hours. However, two elements of the proposals – the first being no entry into Victoria Road from Histon Road except for buses and cycles turning left and cyclists turning right, and no right turn into Histon Road from Victoria Road except for buses and cycles; and the second being to ban a right turn into Warwick Road – are permanent features and we are doubtful as to whether either are necessary outside peak hours. We also note comments by Officers during the consultation process that a combination of the 'Do Something' and 'Do Maximum' proposals, as well as alternative proposals, will be considered.

Histon Road / Victoria Road junction

We note that the infrastructure intended to improve the bus service along Histon Road is predicated upon reconfiguring the Histon Road / Victoria Road junction, giving priority to the Busway B service and its continuing journey turning left from Histon Road down Castle Street. No doubt this is partly based on the predicted increase in bus service Busway B to 14 services per hour (future peak, one direction) from the current peak, one direction, of 7 services per hour. In contrast, the Citi 8 is predicted to increase to 8 services per hour (future peak, one direction) from the current peak, one direction, of 3 services per hour (not 4 services per hour as stated in the WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff Draft Options Report / Draft Stage 1 Report (September, 2015)).

As mentioned earlier, apart from concern over the necessity for preventing a left turn, except for buses and cycles, into Victoria Road from Histon Road outside peak hours, the increased Busway B service, alongside general traffic approaching from the northwest along Huntingdon Road that no longer has the option to use Victoria Road, will add significant pressure to the Castle Street / Chesterton Lane / Northampton Street / Magdalene Street junction. Without serious consideration of the impact upon this junction, including a review of how the Ring Road would function and an analysis of the need for further bus priority measures that would have to include the Ring Road, Chesterton Lane / Chesterton Road, and bus journeys into the city centre, there is likely to be a major bottleneck at the Castle Street / Chesterton Lane / Northampton Street / Magdalene Street junction.

If there is no access to Victoria Road from the west, except for cycles, and no right turn into Histon Road from Victoria Road, except for buses and cycles, alternative routes for residents and businesses in the Victoria Road area will, unless there are mitigating measures, either result in a major impact upon Hertford Street and Alpha Road, residential streets that are not designed to take a significant increase in traffic, or require the use of Gilbert Road, Milton Road, and Mitcham's Corner to access Victoria Road from the east. Another alternative that has been suggested, using Akeman Street and Stretten Avenue, is not feasible given the narrow nature of these residential streets. Consideration would also have to be given to mitigating 'rat-running' through Benson Street and Canterbury Street to access Histon Road from Huntingdon Road.

Whilst reducing the number of heavy vehicles using Victoria Road may be welcomed by many residents, the concerns of businesses in Victoria Road that require service delivery vehicles and larger vehicles to access their businesses would at least be partly met by allowing off peak access to Victoria Road from the west (Histon Road). We also note that the narrow nature of Victoria Road only allows a relatively short length of filter lane to allow buses and cyclists to turn right into Histon Road and traffic queuing along Victoria Road to turn left into Histon Road will, if the proposal went ahead, very likely delay buses before they reach the right turn filter lane.

Whilst the initial traffic modelling using PARAMICS a 'micro simulation tool' (WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff Milton Road & Histon Road Corridors – Initial Modelling Summary Note, December 2015) does analyse the impacts at the Victoria Road / Histon Road / Huntingdon Road junction as well as the impact upon the Mount Pleasant / Castle Street junction, the Castle Street / Chesterton Lane / Northampton Street / Magdalene Street junction is not considered and clearly a more robust traffic modelling analysis, available before the next consultation round, is required so that the best outcomes can be demonstrated. Traffic modelling also needs to take account of the Mitcham's Corner Master Plan concept and the potential impact on Victoria Road as well as consideration of the existing HGV night-time weight restriction concerning Victoria Road.

Victoria Road to Rackham Close junction

The narrow and primarily residential nature of this section of Histon Road is better suited to advisory cycle lanes and the retention of on street parking, albeit during off peak hours. Older residents, those with health needs, and those with mobility issues would benefit from having at least off-peak access to parking in Histon Road. There are also a significant number of houses in multiple occupation where access during off peak hours would avoid adding pressure to nearby side streets.

Businesses currently benefitting from Pay and Display bays would expect to have them re-provided although viable alternatives are limited. The short section of road alongside Burgess House (indicated as Burgess Close on the consultation document) and Linden Close were previously identified as available to re-provide Pay and Display bays. However, there are proposals to formalise the existing informal residents' parking arrangements for the flats between Histon Road and Bermuda Road that would preclude the siting of Pay and Display bays.

Linden Close residents may consider inclusion in the Benson Residents' Parking Zone, that also covers the existing Histon Road on-street parking along this section of Histon Road. Pay and Display bays could be re-provided along the section of Linden Close adjacent to the Histon Road junction. If the remainder of Linden Close was to be incorporated into the Benson Residents' Parking Zone, then speculative parking by commuters, visitors to the Lucy Cavendish accommodation at the corner of Linden Close and Histon Road, and by Domino's Pizza drivers, would be mitigated. However, given that Histon Road residents, as part of the Benson Residents' Parking Zone, would be able to use Linden Close if part of an expanded Benson Residents' Parking Zone, consideration should be given to dividing an expanded Benson Residents' Parking Zone, perhaps into East and West, to alleviate the impact upon Linden Close.

This may also help ensure that, whilst there may be the capacity overall to absorb the loss of on-street parking during peak hours from Histon Road in the Benson Residents' Parking Zone, a division into East and West would encourage residents living in the western part of the Benson Residents' Parking Zone to park there, given previous analysis suggesting that much of the existing capacity is in the western part of the Benson Residents' Parking Zone. Residents living within the eastern part of the Benson Residents' Parking Zone, and along Histon Road, would at least have access to parking nearer their homes.

We note the report from SKANSKA (Technical Note: Histon Road / Milton Road Parking Surveys, 10th December, 2015) reviewing private vehicle parking, including analysis of side road capacity to accommodate additional parking. However, with regard to Histon Road, and with reference to the points above, we are concerned that the 'selected street' analysis is incomplete – for example, not all streets were reviewed on an hourly basis, the full length of adjacent side streets were not always surveyed, and there appear to be errors such as the Public Parking near Aldi where 80 bays are mentioned (Table 2 of the report). Approximately half of these bays are signed as dedicated to Aldi and should not be considered as public parking. Therefore further analysis is required and options concerning parking and any other parking restrictions that may be considered will require consultation with residents at the next stage. We also support the integration of City and County Council parking management,

Rackham Close junction to Gilbert Road / Warwick Road junction

We support the introduction of raised cycleways either side of Histon Road along this section of the street. We note that the height would be 25mm above the carriageway with a splay kerb (camber at 12.5 degrees angle to the carriageway) allowing cyclists to safely join the carriageway if necessary as well as allowing vehicles to mount the cycleway if, for example, allowing an emergency vehicle through. We agree that the segregation provided by the raised cycleway and splay kerb would improve safety and encourage more cycling.

We also support the raised access junctions with regard to side streets along Histon Road, facilitating pedestrian use and also, in this section of Histon Road, complementing the raised cycleways at the junction with Rackham Close, access to Aldi / Iceland, junction with Akeman Street, and the junction with Winsor Road. We note that the splay kerb allows for ease of access for vehicles turning out of side roads into Histon Road as well as for residents with a vehicular access across the footway and raised cycleway.

Gilbert Road / Warwick Road junction

We are concerned about the proposal to ban the right turn into Warwick Road from Histon Road. There is the potential capacity at this junction to enable general traffic to queue and turn right as well as to continue along Histon Road and turn left into Gilbert Road without impeding the through-flow of buses. Smart traffic signalling would also facilitate bus priority at this junction.

If the right turn were banned at this junction, the obvious alternative for vehicles approaching from the north to access Mayfield Primary School, as well as the southern part of the McManus Estate, would be Carisbrooke Road, likely to result in a considerable increase in traffic through what is essentially a quiet residential area.

Gilbert Road / Warwick Road junction to Carisbrooke Road junction

We firmly believe that radial routes into and out of Cambridge are not simply transport corridors but are streets where people live and trees and verges are an essential part of the environment contributing to the residential amenity. Whilst the southern part of Histon Road has limited opportunities in terms of retaining and enhancing green space, the western side of Histon Road from the Gilbert Road / Warwick Road junction to the Carisbrooke Road junction has around 30 trees and an extended length of verge. The proposals include an inbound bus lane along with raised cycleways and footways, widening the overall carriageway and footway to 16 metres. If these proposals continue to be put forward, and whilst there is the width to accommodate these proposals, the replanting of trees alongside the footway utilising a root cell system, compact modules designed to work within confined or difficult treepit space and ensuring that roots do not spread under the carriageway, is important in retaining the environmental amenity.

We also recommend that the installation of a pedestrian crossing, located near the pedestrian access from Borrowdale and serving the nearby bus stops either side of Histon Road, goes ahead. This crossing was put forward by Arbury councillors as a Local Highways Improvement bid in the 2014-2015 LHI bidding round, and listed as an approved project for 2015-2016.

Carisbrooke Road junction to Chancellors Walk / Roseford Road junction

In the previous section we questioned whether the inbound bus lane would continue to be put forward in the proposals. This is because 'Do Something' and the 'Do Maximum' options differ in that the 'Do Maximum' option requires land outside the highway to accommodate bus and cycle lanes. In addition, the narrowing of Histon Road 'corridor' northwards from the Carisbrooke Road junction reduces the capacity to accommodate a bus lane.

The proposed bus lane would be compromised were it not possible to acquire land along the eastern side of Histon Road from a point nearly opposite to Carisbrooke Road to a point opposite Chancellors Walk. If the inbound bus lane was not continuous throughout its length (as proposed in the 'Do Maximum' option), we do not think the bus lane would be effective.

Chancellors Walk / Roseford Road junction to King's Hedges Road junction

Following on from the previous section, if the bus lane was not continuous throughout its length ('Do Maximum' option) the most sensible alternative may therefore be to control the flow of incoming vehicles utilising smart traffic signalling to prioritise buses, including use of a section of bus lane at a point between the city boundary and the junction with King's Hedges Road – where unallocated land within the highway boundary provides the capacity to explore these options. This capacity could also be further utilised to accommodate the flow of traffic in relation to the Darwin Green / NIAB spine road.

Further consideration should also be given to smart traffic signalling and bus priority where the Busway B service leaves the guided busway near the approach to the King's Hedges Road junction heading towards Histon Road. In combination with smart traffic signalling facilitating the through-flow of buses along the section of road between the King's Hedges Road junction and the city boundary, this would mitigate the impact upon buses that would otherwise queue further down Histon Road behind vehicles waiting to turn right into Blackhall Road, Brownlow Road, and Chancellors Walk.

Other considerations

Introducing the 30mph speed limit just south of the King's Hedges Road junction should be considered rather than retaining the existing point where the 30mph speed limit is indicated (approaching the city boundary).

If traffic were allowed to turn right into Warwick Road then consideration could be given to preventing a right turn into Carisbrooke Road, lessening the traffic impact upon the McManus estate.

Bus operators have to be further engaged in the process, not only in terms of their analysis with regard to the Histon Road proposals and other City Deal proposals within, around, and through the city, but in terms of their commitment to interventions that are designed to encourage the use of buses. This includes measures such as the use of smart contactless ticketing that facilitates more efficient bus services.

The confined nature of Histon Road along much of its length does not lend itself to the introduction of 'floating' bus stops.