Introduction

Cambridge Cycling Campaign has been developing proposals for the Chisholm Trail, a cycling and walking route linking north Cambridge and the Science Park to Addenbrooke’s Hospital and south Cambridge, since 1998. This would more or less follow the line of the railway but also use sections of the cycle path along The Busway, with a new bridge over the river Cam between Abbey and Chesterton. The route would enable many trips to be made on foot or by bike that are currently difficult unless made by car. Cycle trips from new developments at Trumpington to the Science Park would take around 30 minutes even at a gentle pace, as would trips from Orchard Park to Addenbrooke’s. Shorter trips, on foot or bike, to open space, local shops or schools would also benefit from the route.

Both the existing and the draft Cambridge Local Plan propose to protect much of the land required for the Chisholm Trail alongside the rail corridor through Cambridge, and the Chisholm Trail is included in the Transport Strategy for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire. In January 2015 the City Deal’s board included the Chisholm Trail for prioritisation in the first five years of Greater Cambridge City Deal projects, with £8.4 million for the project approved unanimously. Since then more detailed proposals for the route have been developed. A public consultation on the proposals is being carried out (November 2015) with leaflets, public meetings and an online survey. Details are at http://www.gccitydeal.co.uk/citydeal/info/2/transport/1/transport/6

Messages of support

“The Chisholm Trail will be a fantastic cycling super-highway through Cambridge, breathing new life into the city. Whether you use it for the daily commute, getting to school or going shopping, it will provide cyclists and pedestrians with safer and quicker journeys in a pleasant and healthy environment. The Chisholm Trail will also help cut congestion and pollution and improve journey times through the city for buses and those who need to travel by road.”

Daniel Zeichner
Member of Parliament for Cambridge

“This trail creates an important link to and from our buildings on the Cambridge Biomedical Campus and encourages staff to make sustainable transport choices. When completed we will see many AstraZeneca and MedImmune colleagues opting to cycle to work and the provision of a safe and reliable way to do so gets my full support.”

Andy Williams
VP & UK Transition Leader, AstraZeneca

“Cambridge Past Present and Future has long campaigned for an improved network of high quality cycleways as a means of reducing traffic congestion. We therefore welcome in principle the Chisholm Trail.

“We also appreciate the enhanced visibility and access it will provide for the Leper Chapel and its use as a community facility. However, as responsible custodians of the Grade I site, we must balance these benefits against possible damage both to the heritage value of the Chapel itself and its curtilage, and the ecological value of the Chapel Meadows.

“We therefore are working with the County Council to carry out both a heritage impact assessment and an ecological survey, the outcome of which will determine our final decision on the best route for the Trail across our property. We are genuinely committed to its success.”

Robin Pellew Chair of Trustees
Cambridge Past Present and Future

Available route for Chisholm Trail on unused road?

“When we were negotiating the City Deal the Chisholm Trail came up as a specific example of what we could do to start transforming the transport system in Cambridge. I think ministers were impressed that we had top quality projects like this on the waiting list, just waiting for funding. In terms of people power, now reaching this landmark stage is a real tribute to the Cycling Campaign’s - and Jim’s tenacity!”

Tim Bick
Chair of the City Deal Assembly and former City Council Leader
From concept to reality

I first conceived of the 'Chisholm Trail' in the mid 1990s. I loved maps, travelled quite a lot by train, and cycling was, and still is, my main mode of transport in and around Cambridge. I realised just how much land there was along the rail corridor, and how the many main road crossings hugely inhibit pleasant walking and cycling. By examining maps and exploring, taking care not to trespass, I perceived the potential for this unloved land beside the tracks. I first wrote about this in the Campaign Newsletter in April 1998 (see: http://www.camcycle.org.uk/newsletters/17/article15.html).

The permeability that the route should give, linking housing, employment, schools, and open space, would give huge advantages even to those who prefer to walk. The main obvious beneficiaries would be those who can ride a bike but lack the confidence to make trips that might involve main roads or busy traffic. With routes beneath Mill Road bridge and a new bridge over the Cam, I saw that many trips currently made by car could then easily be made by bike.

At this stage I MUST repeat that I never called it 'The Chisholm Trail'. The blame for that must partly lie with Mark Irving, the then Newsletter editor, as well as many officers, councillors and others who have used the name over the past 15 years. Credit must, though, go to those officers and councillors who have supported the vision over those years. Clare Rankin, as the city’s Cycling and Walking Officer, worked hard to ensure that much of the route was protected via the Local Plan in 2007, and Patrick Joyce and Mike Davies of the county Cycling Team have been both tolerant and helpful, as appropriate, over numbers of years.

I’ve also described this route as a ‘linear park’. Not only will it link green spaces right across Cambridge from Milton County Park in the north to Trumpington Meadows in the south, but it will pass Ditton Meadows and go through Coldham’s Common. This wouldn’t make it a linear park, but if the opportunity were taken to ‘green up’ some areas between Coldham’s Lane and Hills Road it could better fit that description. For example, a quick explore to the rear of the flats on Rustat Avenue will show wide strips of unused tarmac that could be partly dug up and replaced with trees and other low-maintenance vegetation. Look over Mill Road bridge to the north and you can see other areas of semi-derelict land without a tree or shrub. This is Network Rail land, and some temporary buildings and a couple of redundant bits of track would need to be moved, but again, we could have a vision similar to that for the area south of Mill Road bridge. We cannot expect Network Rail to surrender the freehold on any of the route, but a standard lease as used elsewhere should provide opportunities for a segregated route, with a bit of greening, in an area devoid of such open space.

My idealistic timescale in 1998 has been tempered by reality, but the addition of the proposed underpass beneath Newmarket Road improving access to the Leper Chapel, and the opening of lost areas near Ditton Meadows adds much to my original vision.

We need to get on with making the vision a reality, such that the benefits to all our community are achieved.

Jim Chisholm

Reducing congestion

The Chisholm Trail: the technical and economic reasoning

I come from a technical and scientific background, so having a vision is not sufficient. A project needs to be feasible, and justifiable.

I remember, some ten years ago, Philip Darnton, then Chair of Cycling England, saying that you cannot justify a new cycle route because it makes existing cycle trips quicker but only because of those cycle trips transferred from other modes. Since then additional benefits, by improving health and reducing pollution, have become better recognised. This route WILL provide a huge potential for cycling and walking alternative to many journeys currently undertaken by car.

Less obviously, by reducing the number of cars on some of the radial routes it would speed up both bus and car trips and reduce pollution. This is where the most significant economic gains can be made.

In general, in a congested network a 5% reduction in flow will result in a 50% reduction in delay and a 10% one a 90% reduction in delay. As users we feel the ‘delay’ not the ‘flow’ hence the assumption that traffic disappears in a half-term week, when all that goes are the delays. Data from the County Council’s automatic traffic counters on the main radial roads shows that the morning peak flows fall by far less than 15%, yet we DO see the queues disappear.

This is why spending money on good quality cycling infrastructure in an urban area can give a better return on investment than building road capacity.

Lots of external things have changed over the last 15 years and my final paragraph of that first article written about the Chisholm Trail said, ‘With suggested extensions to the north and south it is possible that enough journeys would switch from car to bike to make significant reductions both to delays for motorists and to traffic pollution’. (See: www.camcycle.org.uk/newsletters/17/article15.html)

We do now have the routes both north and south and the increase in numbers cycling from the ‘necklace villages’ is clear. They have doubled in the last ten years. We also have the all too slow realisation that pollution from motor vehicles in urban areas is a hugely underrated issue. I’m just old enough to remember a journey in a London smog. Our current pollution may not be as visible, but the cost is at last being recognised.

The flow-delay relationship described above means that if one in twenty people find their trip is
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pleasant, as quick, more reliable and healthy, and hence start to cycle this route, we would halve the delays. This would cost just 5% of the cost of providing bus lanes on just two radial routes.

Of course in any system, especially one that involves humans, there are complex feedback loops, and we need to ensure that motor traffic does not just grow to fill the space released. That would negate the benefits to essential users of motor vehicles hence other measures will also be needed. Some of these are already detailed in the Transport Strategy for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire, and it just needs action. See:

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/info/20006/travel_roads_and_parking/66/transport_plans_and_policies/2

‘A Better City Deal for Greater Cambridge’ explores ways that systematic but modest improvements to cycling, walking, and public transport can rid our city of congestion. See: www.bettercitydeal.com/

Many European cities embrace such ideas to liberate themselves from saturation by motor vehicles. By UK standards Cambridge is already well ahead of the field. Let Cambridge be a UK example that challenges the best ones in Europe.

Jim Chisholm
About time too - says Chair of Cambridge Cycling Campaign

Seventeen and a half years. I know many people who are younger than that. I know many technologies that are younger than that. But mid-November is significant for the people who like to cycle around Cambridge. The final bit of the trail from the station to the, err..., station, is out for consultation.

I sometimes have meetings near the station, and then out at the Science Park, and then need to pop and do a bit of shopping at the Beehive. Today, the route between these places is tortuous and probably a whole load of other horrible words that begin with t.

Tortuous means full of twists, turns and bends. A great description of having to remember which way to turn at every point along the way. Which way do I leave the Beehive? Do I turn left at Abbey Walk or right? Did I miss my turning and should I go through the St Matthew’s Gardens cycleway link instead?

Torturous means causing torture or suffering. A great description of having to remember which way to turn at every point along the way.

What we need is a direct, simple, and non-tortuous route between these places.

I would be able to cross Mill Road without having to cross Mill Road. Absolutely fantastic. The same should happen at Newmarket Road. We should be able to cycle across the city without having to play dodge with a Dodge.

Just think of all the schools that now become easily accessible to children?

Just think of all the new jobs that are now easily accessible to people on the other side of the river. Got a job on the Science Park and live in Abbey? Forget about becoming part of the traffic chaos that is reported every morning, and become part of the freedom movement that gets on two wheels, or even walks.

Just remember that building good infrastructure means that people will use it. This has been proven on the northern and southern sections of this trail that have already been built. What would happen to Milton Road and Histon Road if all those thousands of people stopped cycling to wherever they are going and got in a car instead? Or worse, those school children had to be dropped off by car, doubling the journeys on the radials.

Cambridge has congestion, and the Chisholm Trail will provide a valuable decongestant.

And don’t think that just because the route is from one station to the other, that that is the only journey that people will make. The A14 is 127 miles long, yet most people in this area only touch it for a small fraction of the distance. The cycling route from Trumpington to St Ives would be about 19 miles long, but that doesn’t mean that you’d have to ride the whole length every day.

You may just pop under Mill Road to go from the station to the Beehive. Or you may just use the section near Coldham’s Lane to get to Ditton Walk. Perhaps you just want to get to the football ground?

The Chisholm Trail will be a fantastic addition to Cambridge and everybody should benefit. Now, let’s build it.

Robin Heydon

Additional support

"Outspoken Delivery specialise in sustainable urban logistics and have operated in Cambridge for the past 10 years, currently working with over 200 local companies and delivering over 10,000 items around the City each month. The Chisholm Trail offers us a major new route into the city, making our economically sustainable model even more attractive. We will soon be moving to a new depot situated on the edge of the city close to the new station and will act as a consolidation centre for large logistics companies as well small businesses driving their vans into the centres for just a handful of deliveries.

The Chisholm Trail will provide a fast superhighway with easy access to different parts of the city. Improved delivery times due to long stretches of uninterrupted dedicated cycle paths which are not compromised by motor vehicles, traffic signals and parked cars will give us competitive advantage over vans/lorries."

Rob King

"Cycling for all! It’s not ‘cycle’ science! “There’s a physical benefit, there’s a mental benefit, there’s a social benefit.

“How brilliant it would be if we can make the cycle routes in and around Cambridge more accessible - to be able to make it possible for the variety of bikes that are available to support those with disabilities get in and around Cambridge - to work and/or for leisure pursuits.

If you can find an activity that everybody can do in the family - this is it, cycling.

“There is a type of cycle for everybody - let’s see Cambridge make it possible for people to use them!”

Ruth Brannan
Community Facilitator for You Can Bike Too

"The Chisholm Trail will be of great value to all fans of Cambridge United, and those in the local area. Having easy direct walking and cycling routes to the stadium, and especially from both railway stations, will help those who would wish to leave their cars at home.

“Those improved routes will fit in well with the proposed stadium modernisation.”

Cambridge United Fans Trust