



a company of Royal HaskoningDHV

Community Rail Partnership Eco Tourism Bus Feasibility Study

20 March 2025



About us



James Ford
Senior
Consultant



Clare Waldron
Associate
Director



Sarah Grove
Project Officer

About the study

ITP was commissioned to undertake a feasibility study for a local bus service pilot, to link visitor attractions to railway stations on behalf of the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Community Rail Partnership

This project was made possible through funding from the **Community Rail Development Fund**, administered by Community Rail Network on behalf of the Department for Transport and the **Green to Our Core Fund** administered by South Cambridgeshire District Council



Location, location... location...

Rural areas present specific challenges in providing public transport.

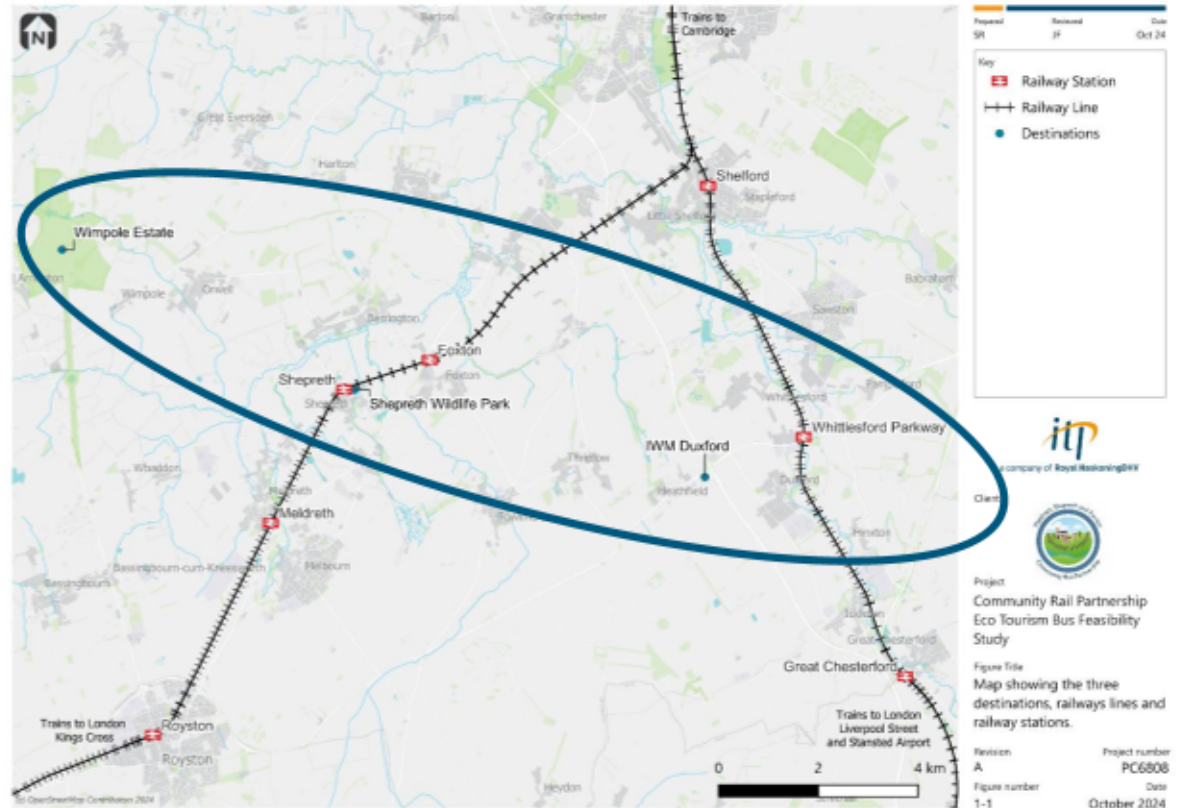
Low population densities and wide geographic catchments mean providing commercially viable bus services can be exceptionally difficult.



a company of Royal HaskoningDHV

Sites

- Three major tourist attractions in the area:
 - Imperial War Museum Duxford
 - National Trust Wimpole Estate
 - Shepreth Wildlife Park
- Two railway stations:
 - Shepreth
 - Whittlesford Parkway



Goals of the Study

- Building on the success of existing CRP initiatives
- Investigating options for a dedicated bus service represented an opportunity to:

Consider how we might link attractions further afield from the stations, and...

Foster a more cohesive and connected community, ensuring visitors and residents can more easily explore the wider area in a sustainable and convenient way

- The initiative aligned with the CRP's ongoing commitments to promote sustainable travel whilst supporting local tourism.

Key Questions

01

**CONTEXT &
NEED**

What is the need
for a bus service
to connect the
identified
locations?

Could the potential
bus service improve
the local transport
offer?

02

LOCAL OFFER

03

**BETTER
ACCESS FOR
LEISURE**

Would the potential bus
service provide better
access to tourism, leisure
and recreation, and how
might it attract new
visitors to the area?

Tourist Destinations – Wimpole Estate



The Wimpole Estate, spread over 2,500 acres, is managed by the National Trust.

- The visitor profile has high young family, and senior visitor segments.
- A key priority for the site was bringing visitors to Hardwick Gate
 - best location for information and ticketing
 - highest quality waiting area
- Peak months April to August
- 98% drive there
- 68% are NT members

Tourist Destinations – Imperial War Museum Duxford



- The Imperial War Museum exhibitions at Duxford are housed across a series of hangars
- Peak months April to August
- 25% are IWM members
- Downward trend in visitor numbers
 - 'Transforming Duxford Masterplan' aims to respond to these challenges and appeal to new audiences
- Improvements include formalising and expanding car parks
- The site has a suitable layby for buses and coaches with a shelter outside the visitor entrance. This could be used to ensure speedy access to the site

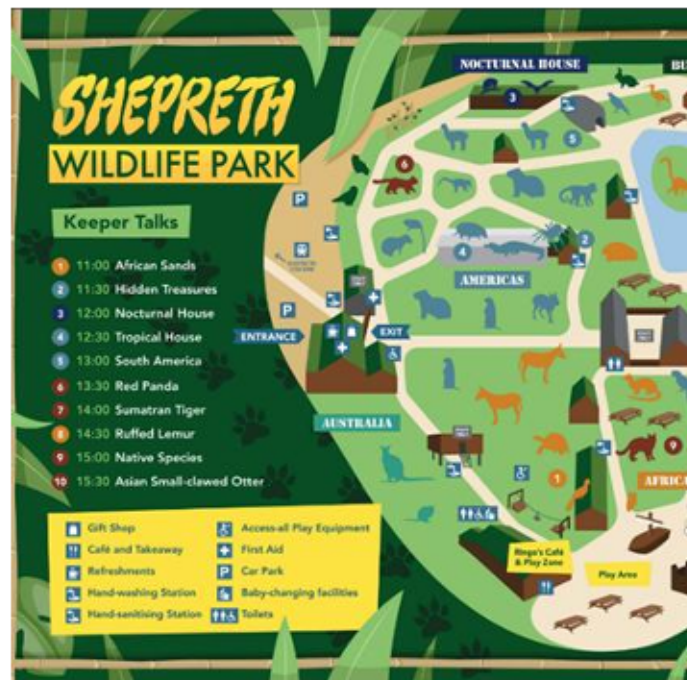
Youth Schemes at IWM Duxford

‘Youth Volunteer Programme’ will recruit 150 young people over the next two years, adding to a volunteer force of already 300 adult volunteers on site

‘Young Producers Scheme’ will be designed to enable young adults to shape and develop programmes and content at IWM

- Large numbers of young people attending the site.
- Lack of existing public transport links is felt to be a barrier.

Tourist Destinations – Shepreth Wildlife Park



- Situated next to Shepreth station, with up to 10% of visitors arriving by train.
- The audience for the site is primarily families.
- Peak times between 11:00 and 13:00.
- Dwell time is typically a few hours.
- Peak months March to July.
- Car park often reaches capacity, with visitors also making use of the nearby village hall car park.

Key Points



Similarities

Existing bus services do not adequately serve the tourism sites – they are infrequent, badly timed, and in some cases stop relatively far from the site.

Dwell time at Duxford and Wimpole Estate is around a day, whereas visitors typically spend half a day at the Wildlife Park.



Opportunities

Peak periods are similar due to the seasonality of the sites.

Potential to meet visitor and local demand (IWM youth schemes).

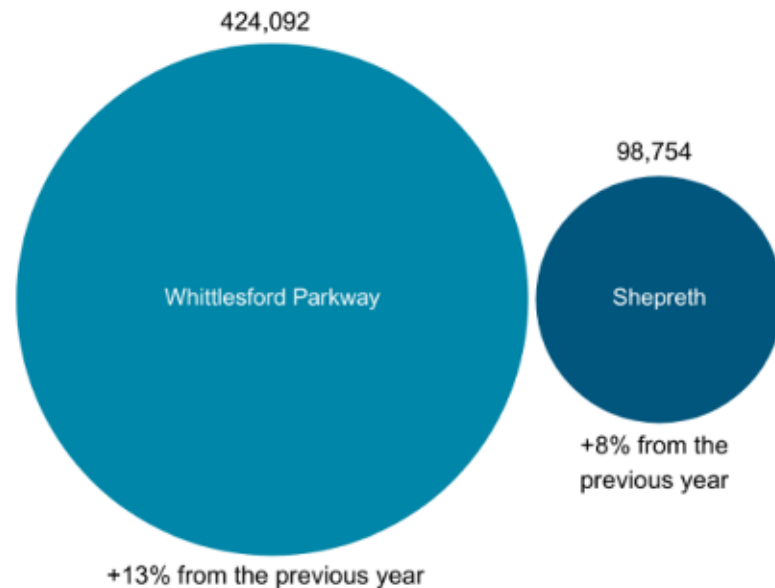
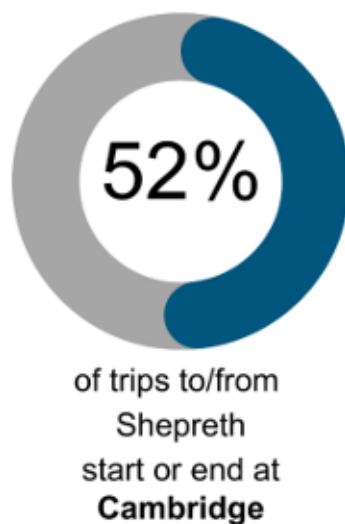


Constraints

Free parking offered at all three sites will make delivery of a service challenging...
How do we surpass the perceived value of free parking?

People buying tickets on the day / using existing membership – lack of journey planning.

Railway Stations



Shepreth Station



- No toilets or baby changing facilities.
- Unheated waiting shelters on the platforms.
- Ticket machine, however, there is no staffed ticket office or public Wi-Fi at the station.
- Small number of bike storage spaces available with CCTV.
- Small car park.
- Step-free access to both platforms via separate entrances via the street and a level crossing.

Whittlesford Parkway Station



- Staffed ticket office and ticket machines.
- No toilets or baby changing facilities.
- Waiting rooms available as well as public Wi-Fi.
- 48 sheltered bike storage spaces available at the station, which are not covered by CCTV.
- Large car park.
- Step-free access to each platform; however, not step-free between platforms (stepped footbridge only, or via a long road route which is approximately **1.7 miles** by road between platforms).

Key Points

The two stations are well connected to both Cambridge and London.

Cambridge is less than 15minutes away, and London is around 1hr 15 from both stations.

Accessibility at Whittlesford Parkway could be a barrier, although there are possible solutions.

Waiting areas at both stations would not be welcoming or conducive for visitors needing to wait at the station.

The lack of facilities would also hinder the experience.

Engagement with transport providers



Meetings with the Combined Authority and local bus operators aimed to:

Consider options for diverting existing services

Ascertain interest in operating a dedicated bus service

Explore likely costs of different models of provision



Meetings with train operating companies aimed to explore:

Options for promoting the bus service to rail passengers

Thoughts regarding ticketing options to promote sustainable access to the sites

Options for improving access



Building on existing home to school provision



Revising existing scheduled bus provision



TIGER on Demand



Dedicated shuttle service

Options for improving access

■ Building on home to school provision

- Potential for utilising contracted school transport vehicles to operate shuttle services between school runs.
- Did not offer sufficient flexibility during weekdays, and the return journey would be particularly difficult to schedule before the afternoon school run.

■ Revising existing scheduled provision

- The services in the area were either:
 - Commercial and not easily amended to incorporate new sections of route without significant additional costs, or
 - Supported by CPCA, with no scope to amend these services at this time.

Options for improving access

■ TIGER on Demand

- Proposal to extend the operating zone of the TIGER on Demand DRT service to cover the area of this study.
 - Not deemed possible as the zone is operated with a single vehicle.
- Benefit of using the existing DRT back-office system, and utilising the efficiencies created by expanding the zone, rather than creating a new service.
- Flexibility in the timing and duration of their visit, scheduled in advance.
- However, visitors may view booking such a service as an additional difficulty or stress in their visit.
- Expanding the zone with an additional vehicle was relatively costly.



TIGER
On Demand



a company of Royal HaskoningDHV

Recommended Solution

Dedicated shuttle service

Dedicated shuttle service



A pilot to ascertain the demand for such a service in the future.



If accessibility was a barrier at Whittlesford Parkway, options for using an alternative station, such as Shelford could be considered.



Access to all sites from each rail station.
Shuttles would meet various key arrival and departure times.



April to August.
Scope to operate on weekdays during the school holidays

Route

A circular route in nature with Shepreth in the centre.

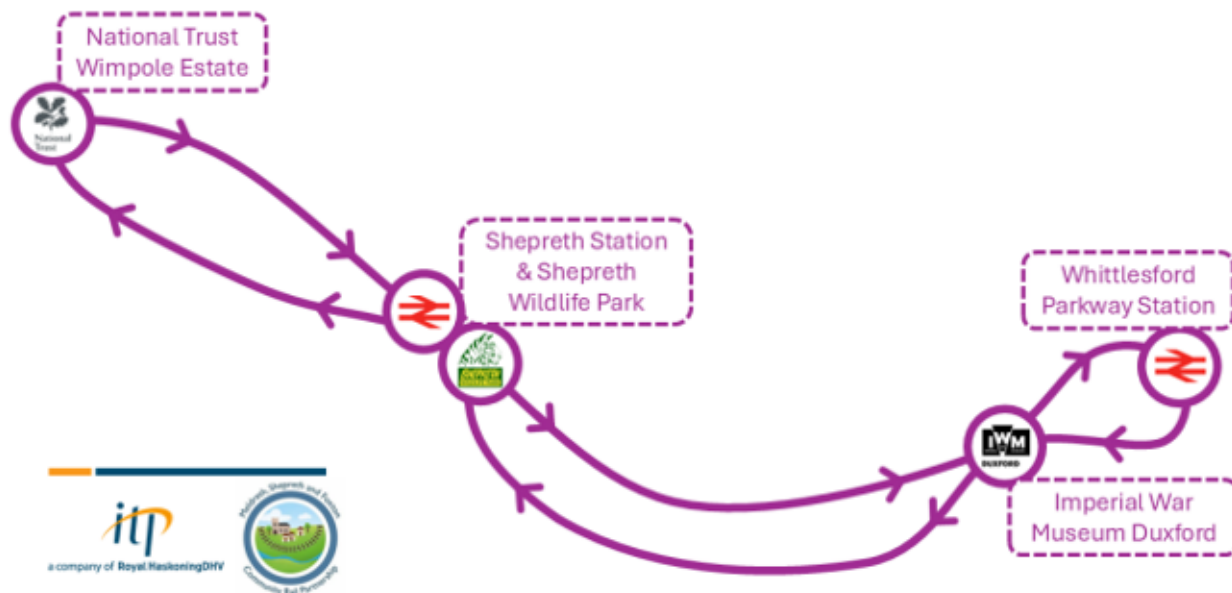


Figure 20 – Proposed service routing

Service Timetable

Timetable report									
Arrivals								Route	
Departures									
Monday-Saturday								Service KM:	150
Days		MTWHFS		MTWHFS		MTWHFS		MTWHFS	MTWHFS
Service No		MSFCRP		MSFCRP		MSFCRP		MSFCRP	MSFCRP
Shepreth Station and Shepreth Wildlife Park (adj)	Dep			10:38 from Cambridge 10:50 10:39 from London		12:38 from Cambridge 12:50 12:39 from London		15:39 to Cambridge 15:25 15:38 to London	16:40
National Trust Wimpole Estate	Arr			11:01		13:01		15:36	16:51
National Trust Wimpole Estate	Dep			11:05		13:05		15:40	16:55
Shepreth Station and Shepreth Wildlife Park (adj)	Arr			11:16		13:16		15:51	17:39 to Cambridge 17:06 17:38 to London
Shepreth Station and Shepreth Wildlife Park (adj)	Dep			11:20		13:38 from Cambridge 13:50 13:39 from London		15:55	
Imperial War Museums Duxford	Arr			11:35		14:05		16:10	
Imperial War Museums Duxford	Dep			11:40		14:40		16:15	
Whittlesford Parkway Station	Arr			11:45		15:09 to Cambridge 14:45 15:11 to London		16:39 to Cambridge 16:20 16:30 to London	
Whittlesford Parkway Station	Dep	09:57 from Cambridge 10:15 09:58 from London		11:30 from Cambridge 11:50 11:39 from London		14:50		16:20	
Imperial War Museums Duxford	Arr	10:20		11:55		14:55		16:25	
Imperial War Museums Duxford	Dep	10:35		11:59		14:59		16:29	
Shepreth Station & Shepreth Wildlife Park (opp)	Arr	10:46		12:10		15:10		16:40	
Journey run time:		00:31		01:20		02:20		01:15	00:26
Total service run time:									06:51

Operational Considerations



A two-bus operation would meet more rail connections via an hourly service.

Not deemed as proportional to demand at this stage.



Connecting local settlements to the tourism destinations and rail stations presents an opportunity to support connectivity in the local community.



Hail and ride in these areas would be difficult to manage and may present accessibility issues.

Branding and Marketing



Perceived service quality.

Livery for the entire vehicle may add additional cost.

Low-cost temporary solutions such as through magnetic signs or decals.



Marketing of the area and the service along the railway lines to London and Cambridge

Promotion to a wide audience (existing rail users).



Existing visitors of the destination sites.

Marketing on departure advertising the service as an alternative way to access the site could encourage mode shift in these groups.

Advertising other nearby tourism destinations as easily accessible.



a company of Royal HaskoningDHV

Conclusions

Conclusions



Neither demand locally, nor from rail passengers, would result in this service becoming a commercial proposition.



The service might be expected to cover approximately half of its costs if the vehicle operate at maximum capacity.



Weather-dependent sites could have a strong influence on patronage.



Further work to determine fare structures.

Conclusions



Potential to make the tourism destinations more attractive propositions for day trips from Cambridge and London.

Encourage new groups of visitors to these sites.



Abundance of free parking at each site is likely to present a significant challenge.

Marketing of the benefits to a wide range of potential users is key.

Future Considerations



The waiting environment at both stations is not conducive to a pleasant interchange.

Opportunity for partnership with local hotels.



Anticipated that subsidy of some form would be required to operate both a pilot, and any service in the future.

A pilot would enable monitoring of costs and patronage.



a company of Royal HaskoningDHV

To wrap up...

Location, location location...

*Location and local context are key
to understanding the opportunities,
constraints, and options.*



a company of Royal HaskoningDHV



ITP

- Capabilities
 - Service planning and design from feasibility through to implementation
 - Demand modelling and business case assessments
 - Service monitoring and evaluation
 - Strategic advice, partnership development and organisational reviews
 - Transport co-ordination and achieving a 'Total Transport' approach
- Independent consultancy with over 100 transport planners, engineers and researchers in the UK, and many more worldwide as part of Royal Haskoning DHV



a company of **Royal HaskoningDHV**

Thank you for listening, we'd be happy to take any questions.

Feel free to get in touch, we look forward to hearing from you!



James.Ford@itp.rhdhv.com



Clare.Waldron@itp.rhdhv.com

itpworld.net



a company of Royal HaskoningDHV