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26th September 2019

**CONNECTING OXFORD**

The Cowley Area Transport Group is a loose network of people interested in transport issues in the following area of Oxford: Cowley and Lye Valley wards, plus Temple Cowley. This is part of a response to the Connecting Oxford proposals being made by the Group. The other two parts – *Electronic Road Pricing for Oxford* & *the Cowley Area Transport Strategy,* 2nd edition, are being submitted also - due to a variety of problems in the Connecting Oxford proposals document. Both of these documents concur with parts of the Connecting Oxford proposals, but there are additions to detail and a suggestion of a Government-funded national trial in the Oxford City Region for Electronic Road Pricing, used in Singapore since 1998, to fund the overall road system in the area.

This part of the overall submission deals with:

Omissions

Questionable Assumptions

**Omissions:**

**Cambridge-Oxford Expressway:** If this is built, then the Connecting Oxford proposals are not going to be adequate to deal with predictable increases in traffic in the Oxford City Region. Stopping this project, as the City Council has indicated, is vital to making the eventual Connecting Oxford policies work. Connecting Oxford, and all councils involved, need to be very clear about this.

**Pedestrianisation and pedestrian priority areas:** Oxford is congested and polluted in the central area particularly. One major cause of this is exceptionally unambitious pedestrianised and pedestrian priority areas. You cannot have ‘a complete, high-quality, spacious walking and cycling network’ as suggested in the Connecting Oxford consultation document unless the timidity of the City and County concerning pedestrianisation is abandoned. The City & County should commit themselves to a rolling programme of increasing the space only available to pedestrians and emergency vehicles in St Giles, Broad Street, Queen Street and beyond with the aim of adding to pedestrianised space year on year. Compared to Norwich and Canterbury, the central area of Oxford has excessive movements of vehicles at all too many points. Groups of tourists and walking tour groups are subjected to many problematic areas with traffic movements including Queen Street and its junction with the Cornmarket, the St.Giles-Broad Street-George Street junction and the High Street-St Aldates area. Pedestrian priority areas should be extended around an enlarged pedestrianised zone. Parts of the City afflicted by rat-running, excessive car movements outside schools etc should be considered for pedestrian priority treatment, larger area parking bans, or full pedestrianisation if conditions warrant this. Health promotion in a country plagued by obesity should include encouraging people to walk and cycle more, and pedestrianisation with marked cycle routes can contribute to this. Since the Zero Emission Zone is far too small, extending pedestrianised areas will contribute to extending this also, to the whole City.

**Scale of Workplace Parking Levy locations:** It is manifestly unfair that some areas of the City might have WPL but that many employers including large ones will be excluded. It is very important that ALL workplaces with more than 10 parking spaces for staff within the City cordon are included in the WPL scheme to secure significant traffic reductions. It remains unclear why City & County have decided only half of the employee parking spaces in the City are to be included. This is strongly suggestive of lobbying resulting in clearly unjust exemptions. It is notable that the designated area excludes the large number of parking spaces at the BMW/ Mini plant.

**Witney/Carterton-Oxford rail line:** If the Councils are serious about reducing traffic afflicting Oxford, then they must come out in favour of re-opening all disused rail lines in the medium term and ensuring they connect to other lines to improve the overall network. Witney-Oxford is an obvious starting point, made more urgent by the Oxford North proposal which dumps another source of traffic movements in an area already severely congested in rush hours/school run times.

**The school run:** The afternoon school run – from no later than 3.00pm on school days – starts the evening rush hour in Oxford. Its impact is not given enough emphasis as a part of traffic movements which could be the subject of specific initiatives such as ‘walking bus’ or ‘bike bus’ arrangements, car sharing, reductions in parking near schools. I am appalled by conditions at both ends of the school day which I have seen around a number of schools such as the Tyndal school in Hollow Way; the Spires Academy at the other end of Hollow Way; St Christopher’s school in Temple Road. Local residents should not have to put up with the substantial car movements and air pollution generated by this type of problem.

**Green Travel Plans:** It is a really surprising gap in the Connecting Oxford proposals that no mention is made of Green Travel Plans for all Oxford employers. The City and County can take the position that all employers based in the City which have ANY car parking for their employees should develop Green Travel Plans to encourage their staff to walk, cycle, take bus or train to get to work. Green Travel Plans should include flexitime, so that more staff are able to work at home as well. There are abundant sources on this topic.[[1]](#footnote-1) Such promotion as done by councils in Oxfordshire has yet to prompt reductions in car movements so additional efforts are needed.

Questionable assumptions:

The figures given for premature deaths in the UK each year are wrong. These has been revised upwards by the World Health Organisation from the 40,000 estimate to 64,000. The WHO recalculated global deaths from air pollution in 2019.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The Connecting Oxford document does not consider how the ‘bus gate’ arrangements will impact local residential traffic. There is an implicit assumption that this will not be the case. Whilst this may be a point of detail for further consultation, it is naturally of concern to those who may be directly affected. I would very much like to see traffic modelling of a realistic nature, including rush hour and school run times and based on evidence from periods where both schools and universities are in operation, for Hollow Way. The bus gates do not seem to form an integrated transport strategy. Although some of the radiating routes are severed some are left open e.g. The Slade/ Horspath Driftway, Between Towns Road nor Donnington Bridge Road. The rationale behind the proposals is therefore unclear.

Also on bus gates, it is suggested that different times are used for different locations. This would be confusing to those driving in the City and should be avoided in favour of consistent times, or many drivers may be turning around when they discover the inconsistencies.

The Climate Emergency requires major action far earlier than the current Government’s preferred net zero carbon goal of 2050. Connecting Oxford places emphasis on 2050, which is woefully inadequate in relation to the really dramatic acceleration in Climate Change in the period since 2000 in particular – an assumption too limited to be sustained. I note that the Green Party and the Labour Party want a 2030 net carbon neutral target for the UK. Considering that transport is the largest sector for greenhouse gas emissions and is actually growing, including aviation and shipping, it follows that transport measures, and indeed the whole planning process, needs to make major adjustments to cut greenhouse gas emissions and in doing so radically reduce air pollution. I note that South Oxfordshire DC is to consider a 2025 deadline for its own greenhouse gas emissions and a 2030 deadline for its whole area. I note that the County Council envisages being carbon neutral in its own operations by 2030. Given that 85% of the public are now indicating they are ‘concerned’ about Climate Change, it is time the City and County councils raised their ambitions to cover all employers throughout the County, and recognised transport as the major area where Climate-related policies need to change rapidly. The goal of a carbon neutral County by 2030 is an essential one, especially when reining in unacceptable levels of, and pollution from, traffic.

Steve Dawe

*Steve Dawe wrote a thesis on the Business and Environmental Group influences upon the Trans-European Transport Networks, completed in 2001. He is a former communications officer of the No Expressway Alliance and makes regular submissions to consultations on transport, housing and planning matters. He has been teaching part-time in Universities since 1997, including environmental policy, public administration and International Development.*

1. See: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/worktravelplans> & <https://www.eta.co.uk/environmental-info/green-travel-plans/> & <https://www.derby.gov.uk/transport-and-streets/travel-plans/toolkit/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See: <https://inews.co.uk/news/health/air-pollution-kills-64000-people-in-the-uk-every-year-80393> & <https://www.who.int/airpollution/en/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)