

OGP Policy Working Group: Background to Transport and connectivity

What is happening in Oxfordshire now

County Council policies have for some years stated that walking, cycling and public transport users will have priority, but this does not translate into action. Where they do attempt to implement the policy, they don't follow street design guidelines (e.g. the government's LT1/20 on cycle infrastructure design). Further, private contractors sometimes do not adhere to the specified design and too often their work is signed off by officers despite faulty construction.

In reality, cars and vans dominate public space, and this has worsened. For instance, Park and Rides have seriously undermined rural public transport. The underlying assumption seems to be that rural areas will always need private cars. This does not link with safety issues for cyclists and walkers, and the pollution created by these cars (even if electric).

What the Green Party needs to work towards

Connectivity is about connecting people rather than just moving people, and improving broadband connections is an important part of this. In many parts of the county connection is still slow and unreliable, but County Council policy is now to make rapid improvements, which the Green Party welcomes.

Shorter commutes for employees are to be encouraged, but also a recognition that Covid-19 impact is likely to lead to much more remote working and more jobs worked further from the place of work – so it is important to consider how to make long-distance travel by train/bus with good first mile/last mile connections work better as well. Rural connectivity means broadband improvements plus buses/electric car pools and greater investment in the local community. We need better, greener, and cheaper bus services; safer, properly made cycle routes and reliable local trains. We need to create safe, pleasant streets which prioritise walking and cycling; 'active travel' has health benefits as well as reducing car use.

The model for connectivity is 15-minute communities – i.e. where people can access most of what they need within 15 minutes of walking, so the need to travel long distances is reduced. Community facilities need to be supported and developed.

Work needed on active travel and local transport includes:

- high priority given to active travel – walking and cycling – including routes without motorised traffic; a strategic network of safe and interconnected cycle routes across Oxfordshire; in particular, the dangerous B4044 Eynsham Road, which has been the subject of a campaign for several years, must get a segregated cycle path to connect all the new housing in Eynsham with Oxford;
- more user-friendly streets which walkers and cyclists can safely share with cars;
- pavements at least 2m wide and level and unobstructed, so that two wheelchair users can pass one another in comfort; car parking on pavements needs to be stopped;

- crossings (preferably zebras) where people want to use them; and huge puddles at crossings need to be addressed;
- properly continuous cycle lanes that do not stop suddenly near junctions, and advance cycle boxes placed at junctions;
- roads made safe for cyclists so that pavements can be freed up for pedestrians and wheelchair users;
- extensive, safe, sheltered cycle parking, including for electric bikes;
- good subsidies for rural school transport, and greater efforts to ensure that more children travel to school using means of transport other than private cars;
- improved bus services, more frequent and better interconnected; bus gates are needed on roads where buses are slowed down by heavy traffic; and speeding up the move towards electric (including hydrogen fuel cell) buses is a high priority;
- local rail links, e.g. between Carterton, Witney and Oxford (the only way to reduce the congestion on the A40), as well as the completion of the line to Milton Keynes and Cambridge and the planned reopening to passengers of the Cowley branch line; and encouraging rail freight over road freight; but note that the Green Party opposes HS2 (see under 'Current issues' below);
- better coordination of public transport: i.e. trains, bus services and cycle routes need to work well together; and information for transport users must be upgraded and better publicised;
- a focus on electric or pedal-powered delivery vehicles, including for retail and business delivery for the first mile/last mile;
- a speed limit of a maximum of 20 mph for all residential roads, outside schools and hospitals and on selected rural roads;
- introduction of car-sharing schemes and support for more car clubs;
- more electric charging points;
- profits from Park and Ride used to subsidise rural public transport, making it cheaper than driving.

Current issues

LTNs: Low traffic neighbourhoods are to be encouraged and 'school streets' (safe zones around schools) in city, towns and villages. Oxford has just introduced LTNs in east Oxford, although these are proving controversial – some people love them but there is anger from some car owners, possibly because there was insufficient consultation and explanation.

20 mph speed limits: Green County Councillor Pete Sudbury's motion on 20 mph speed limits was passed at the OCC meeting in December 2020, meaning that the presumption now is that 20 mph is the speed limit on roads with housing.

Park and Rides: Although we recognise that Park and Rides keep large amounts of traffic out of the city centre in Oxford, we really need to focus on reducing the number of car journeys and increasing public transport.

Connecting Oxford: The Green Party supports the County Council's Connecting Oxford strategy for the city, to "relieve congestion, increase connectivity, improve air quality and help combat climate change", by introducing new traffic restrictions in the city aimed at

improving walking, cycling and bus routes and reducing pollution and noise. (This was prefigured in Oxford Green Party's 1995 Transport Manifesto.) This can be taken further, and other ideas for the city that the Green Party would want to explore are a cable car and/or tram route – which among other things could replace the many coaches transporting tourists to the city centre.

Oxford Zero Emission Zone: The Green Party supports strong measures to improve air quality. It has reservations, however, about the so-called ZEZ scheme that Oxford is introducing in summer 2021 for a few streets in the city centre. In reality, this is a low-emission, not zero-emission, zone, as other vehicles beside zero-emission vehicles will be allowed to access the area on a sliding scale of charges. We agree with the proposal to introduce some exemptions and discounts, including for residents and businesses inside the zone and people with disabilities; but we do not approve of letting other users pay to pollute. The pilot zone covers very few streets and we support the expansion of the zone to cover a wider area.

HS2: The Green Party opposes HS2 because it takes resources that would be better used in upgrading and extending the rail network elsewhere. The rise in teleworking during the pandemic will reduce the need to travel, and in any case people work on trains, so saving small amounts of time is not a priority. High-speed trains use far more energy than normal rail travel; and the route has to be constructed in a relatively straight line, whatever ancient woodlands etc. lie in its path. (For a detailed critique of the scheme by members of Extinction Rebellion, see [Seven Arguments against HS2.](#))