

Connecting Oxford Proposals : response from Oxfordshire Green Party

Oxfordshire Green Party welcomes the Connecting Oxford proposals as part of an overall strategy for reducing dependency on cars and for making streets safer for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. We see this as a step in the right direction, which could hopefully lead to further improvements across the city, in line with stated aims of prioritising walking, cycling and public transport use, and with our responsibility to do our bit to address the climate emergency and current dependence on fossil fuels. We welcome the close collaboration on this between the City and County Councils. We appreciate the new emphasis on actively reducing private car traffic. We have long advocated for a city with no through private motorised traffic, and note that drivers will be able to access anywhere in Oxford by car but will be unable to drive through Oxford (with the exception of Between Towns Road, which would also need a traffic filter). Our responses to the separate sections are detailed below. Please note that we refer to the bus gates as ‘traffic filters’ throughout this text:

1) Traffic filters

From the point of view of vulnerable road users (pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchair users) traffic filters sited at all the proposed locations would improve air quality and could turn currently degraded and no-go areas such as Hythe Bridge St, Worcester St, and Holloway into viable areas to walk and cycle in. We would support these being in place 24/7, 365 days a year, in order to encourage modal shift. We encourage the County Council to bear in mind that all change is resisted when proposed, and indeed the experience in other places in the UK has been initial resistance to schemes such as this, with later widespread acceptance once the benefits are realised. The benefits are clear: reduced air pollution, with a knock on effect on public health; reduced traffic congestion (parts of Oxford are regularly gridlocked), and a focus on creating an environment that is attractive and inspires confidence in vulnerable road users. This is also in line with working to do our bit in Oxfordshire to respond to the climate emergency and the need to reduce dependence on fossil fuel burning. From a public health perspective the rewards are obvious. We believe there are many people who currently do not cycle as the roads are too polluted and congested with traffic, and welcome the proposal to install better, continuous cycle lanes and also wider pavements.

The Worcester St traffic filter would be particularly welcome to the Green Party as we have long been advocating the closure of the unpleasant, highly polluted, traffic dominated Hythe Bridge St to through private motorised traffic, so that it could function much better as the main walking and cycling route between the city centre and the railway station. St Giles could be very vastly improved, with much widened pavements and traffic in narrower lanes, and become a beautiful

public square. The proposed Worcester St traffic filter would make these aspirations seem a step closer.

Likewise the St Cross St traffic filter would mean that the Natural History Museum could take its rightful place as the centrepiece of the science area of the University. Currently the 'inner ring road' nature of the route makes the whole route grim and traffic dominated, with dirty air, and a generally unpleasant environment.

We would need to see the proposed Thames St filter worked up so that we can understand its impact on traffic currently accessing the Westgate Centre, along both Abingdon and Botley Roads. Obviously this traffic could not fit into one of these (residential, currently degraded by high levels of motorised traffic) roads. Ideally parking at the Westgate Centre would be reduced so that a reduction in overall levels of motorised vehicles could be achieved, and relief given to all those who live, walk and cycle along Botley and Abingdon Roads.

We support the Marston Ferry Road traffic filter for the knock-on effect on traffic in Summertown and Headington, where we would expect to see a reduction in through motorised traffic. Both these areas are residential and local shopping centres currently dominated by a sense of busy roads, especially Headington.

We support the proposal for the Hollow Way traffic filter because Hollow Way is currently completely dominated by motorised traffic and is a no-go area for walkers and cyclists. However we are concerned that no traffic filter is proposed for Between Towns Road.

Concerns:

If the aim is to reduce car-dependency, we ask that congestion charging or Electronic Road pricing be considered, which could be rolled out city-wide. Otherwise there could be a very uneven city in terms of traffic on roads, with more traffic to the east of the city.

The High Street 'bus gate' is routinely ignored by drivers who flout the restriction, so we are not convinced that cameras will work, and would prefer to see some kind of physical barriers in place, whilst recognising that on some of these routes buses and emergency vehicles need access at all times.

We are wary of knock-on 'rat-running' in residential streets, particularly in east Oxford; this needs to be addressed as a priority to keep local residents on board with changes.

2) Workplace Parking Levy

We welcome this on the grounds that motorised traffic reduction is a good thing, promoting overall health and well-being, and would ideally like to see this expanded to cover the whole of the city. There are plenty of free car parks in central Oxford (eg. OUP, County Council, schools, Waitrose on Botley Road etc.)

which should be charged for. There should be no such things as a public free car parking spaces, with the exception of those provided for disabled drivers. We do not support workplaces with 10 or fewer spaces being exempt from the Levy. Our concern is the emphasis on free-flowing traffic; is this compatible with walking and cycling being safer? As less traffic means higher speeds, we advocate an enforced maximum 20mph speed limit throughout the city including on 'arterial' roads.

3) Complementary Schemes supporting the traffic filters

Car parking should be significantly reduced at the Westgate Shopping Centre, Holloway, the JR and other hospitals etc.

The Green Party would like to see a congestion charge or electronic road pricing applied across the city.

Any rat runs, including any caused by street closures elsewhere, should be treated with 'Home Zone' measures so that no area becomes a displaced traffic road. We believe in the policy of reducing, rather than displacing, motorised traffic.

The workplace parking levy should be expanded to apply city wide.

The cost of travelling by bus from source should always be cheaper than using the Park and Ride, which in turn should always be cheaper than parking in any public space in Oxford city

The Green Party would like to see a maximum speed of 20mph enforced on all city roads

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