

Oxford Civic Society Transport Group
Comments for Consultation on "Experimental" Closure of Queen Street
for 18months from October 2017 and other city centre permanent works.

1. The Reasons

The Statement of Reasons does not give any reason for closing Queen Street, it merely states that the High street and St. Aldates are to be made into clearways at certain hours and that alterations are to be made to the junctions of Worcester Street with Hythe Bridge street and Park End Street and Speedwell Street. This is an "experimental" 18th month closure requested by the Westgate Partnership (Land Securities and the City Council) and we need to know where the funds are coming from for this scheme.

Some people cannot walk the length of Queen Street. We suggest that, alternative arrangements are provided (possibly using Section 106 or CIL payments). This is particularly important for disabled people. If closure of Queen Street becomes permanent perhaps travelators could be considered?

2. Overall Plan

This is a good plan as it shows exactly where the changes will be in each case and highlighted in different colours. As a general criticism of this consultation, one could say that it relies too heavily on plans without much explanatory text. It is not entirely obvious in relation to the existing traffic lights.

The intention appears to be to remove the traffic lights from 3 junctions around the city centre - mainly to help the buses move more easily through the city. This obviously has repercussions for other forms of transport - particularly cyclists and pedestrians, but also motorists and delivery vehicles. It should be noted that some disabled people such as those with restricted sight or hearing, may need some safe means of crossing the roads where traffic lights have been removed.. These changes are analysed below and their safety and practicality discussed.

3. High Street Bus, Taxi and Loading Bays

In moving these bays further away from Carfax, which is necessary because of current congestion, there appears to have been no consideration of cyclists. One of the most important cycling routes in Oxford goes through the Turl and across to Alfred Street. Putting a loading bay right next door to Turl Street is bound to make it more difficult for cyclists to see the buses coming before they cross the High Street. Maybe it would be more sensible to move the pedestrian traffic lights to between the loading bay and the Turl/Alfred Street crossing, so that at least cyclists do get some "safe time" to cross.

Making the High Street into a "clearway", will no doubt make it faster for the buses, but correspondingly more dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists.

St Aldates waiting restrictions

Although the objectives in making this into a "clearway" are the same as for the High Street - in other words - to make the buses move faster, it has some more damaging effects.

What about all the weddings that take place at the Town Hall or how will the Mayor access ceremonial occasions? What about disabled people getting to Christchurch and other locations in St. Aldates?

Secondly, St. Aldates is another street which is heavily used by cyclists. It is made extremely difficult for cyclists because of all the bus stops, but buses moving faster might not necessarily be such a good idea. However, less buses in St. Aldates certainly could be a good idea. There is also the need to reduce air pollution there - which one cannot do until the means of transport there are entirely electric.

Taxi-turning Area in Cornmarket

Cornmarket is now a street which is entirely for pedestrians during the daytime and is used by cyclists out of business hours. Since the intention is now to have taxis waiting and turning there, this does seem to defeat the objective of its original pedestrianisation. So, as many people think now, it could re-open it to buses. This is another street which would benefit from travelators to help those who find walking difficult (assuming it still has no buses).

George Street, Worcester Street, Hythe Bridge Street junction

This junction has been working much better recently as it takes some traffic away from Frideswide Square. However, the cycling lobby regards it as dangerous and so the County may be trying to do something to help cyclists. However, there seem to be some things which the County have not considered in their new design.

1. They have put islands into the middle of this junction. This now means that the larger buses coming from Gloucester Green cannot cross to Hythe Bridge Street (i.e. go straight on from George Street. Sometimes these buses go straight on and sometimes they turn left (very nearly hitting any cyclists waiting in front of the traffic lights who are either turning right into George Street or going straight on towards Worcester College. There have been some very near misses recently. On the plan, it is admitted that two buses cannot pass each other - so it is staggered.
2. The intention appears to be to ban all traffic, other than buses and cyclists from Worcester Street South. The County doesn't seem to have thought of how cars will be able to exit Worcester Street car-park. At present they enter from Park End Street and exit left or right into Worcester Street South opposite Nuffield College. Banning all traffic from Worcester Street South is going to lead to even more traffic congestion around this area. At present it operates reasonably well.
3. Consideration of cyclists seems to come last on the County list of priorities - having stressed in their local plan how important they are (for health reasons, pollution reduction and traffic congestion). At present at this junction, cyclists can go 3 ways when travelling North and South on Worcester Street, which they will no longer be able to do. When coming out of George Street, they seem to go left mainly, and from Hythe Bridge Street,

they can go left, or straight across by waiting in the middle of the road in the "tear-drop". It is important that cyclists have the maximum flexibility to go in every direction safely. By taking out the traffic lights, it maybe that this junction will become even more dangerous for cyclists.

Park End Street, Worcester Street, New Road

This is one place where removing that traffic lights might actually work and thus it might be worth the County trying this out separately. It is important to remember that the very large London buses travel though this junction and they are normally either turning left or right. They conflict with only buses and cyclists coming out of New Road. The problem is also the turn into the Worcester Street carpark from Park End Street and so far the County have not declared whether cars will also have to come out at that place or somewhere else?

Again, no mention of cyclists at this junction - several of whom also use Tidmarsh Lane. Clearly the County need to produce a Cycling Plan for their proposed "Experimental closure of Queen Street" after this consultation is completed.

In dealing with the two junctions listed above, the County seem to be completely dismissing the idea of moving Gloucester Green bus station to Oxpens. This would certainly make the whole scheme a lot safer as the very large buses will not have to cross the area. It is widely acknowledged that Gloucester Green is no longer suitable for the large buses which use it and much greater facilities for changing from long distance to local buses needs to be provided. If people were to walk through the new Westgate centre, it might make it more viable and then the idea of closing Queen Street to buses might disappear.

Speedwell Street/ and St Aldates junction

Again the objective of this is to speed the exit of buses from St. Aldates where they turn right into Speedwell Street. This junction has been considered before without traffic lights - which in principle should be a good thing. However, again with many cyclists, it is important to check that cyclists can see round the buses to avoid a serious accident.

The change to the bus layover is acceptable. However, at this point it should be noted that many South Oxford cyclists use the St. Ebbe's route, rather than St. Aldates (which is more dangerous). They therefore need to travel up and down Butterwyke Place and they do so - even though they are not supposed to go south. Having no access south (because of buses swinging into Butterwyke Place from Thames Street) needs serious County engineering attention - especially as Thames Street doesn't have a proper cycle lane going east. The County engineers should consider where they could provide a pavement cycleway from Butterwyke Place turning left across the laybys alongside Thames street - instead of the missing cycleway.

Additional Bus facilities - Hythe Bridge Street and Park End Street.

The success of this whole scheme will depend on the balance of traffic travelling along these to streets. Park End Street now carries less traffic than Hythe Bridge Street - partly because many people still think it is for buses only. However, with these changes, it looks

as though all traffic for Worcester Street car park might have to go along it - both ways. This will mean that anyone wanting to come from the North to use Worcester Street carpark will need to go down Hythe Bridge Street and across Frideswide Square and up Park End Street - thus adding to the congestion and not improving the bus situation.

Traffic Regulations

This should not have been phrased in a legalistic manner - such that make it difficult for the public to understand, but in plain English text.

From this we understand that the Clearway will be in operation in the High Street and St. Aldates from 12 noon to 8pm every day of the week. It will probably prove unnecessary to enforce the Clearway on Sundays. There will be exceptions and permissions can be given to doctors, the police, residents, disabled people and loading bays etc.

Since we do not know what was in the 2003 order, we cannot tell what effect this will have in the George Street area.

Westgate Traffic Plan

What is not mentioned in this consultation is the situation in Castle Street. Since this is going to be full of buses and pedestrians getting on and off those buses, it is clearly an extremely unsafe place for any cyclists to be. So far we have not had enough detail to judge whether the access and travel around Westgate is going to be adequate and safe.

Oxford Civic Society Transport Group
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sent by email.