



“The Bus Stops Here”

encouraging people to choose the bus
as their means of transport



Environment Group
February 2008

Protecting our Heritage. Appreciating our City. Shaping our Future.

www.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk

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Note: all photographs shown were taken in January and February 2008

1. Preface

This is the second in an occasional series of Oxford Civic Society publications, which seek to address members' principal concerns about the current state of the city and its future development.

Our first production '**Signage in Central Oxford**' (*January 2006*) was warmly received and continues, we trust, to inform improvements to the city centre, and new plans – for example for the development of the West End.

Here, we have addressed the problem of one aspect of traffic conditions in the city: how to encourage greater use of public transport and reduce dependence on the private car. This must be high on everybody's list of priorities when considering the impact of congestion, pollution and global warming, alongside all our aspirations for easier and more enjoyable lives.

I should like to thank the production team (drawn from our Transport, Environment and Communications Groups) who have brought together their expertise and the shared experience of many members, for all the work they have put into this project – culminating in a most constructive and well-researched argument.

We hope that it will be widely read and acted upon.

Tony Joyce

Chairman

2. Background

Against a general trend of decline, Oxford has been praised for its success in increasing bus usage. Amongst the contributing factors are:

- the introduction of Park & Ride
- the Oxford Transport Strategy – introduced in 1999 – which further restricted car use in the city centre and gave priority to buses
- the bus companies' investment in new buses
- the introduction of Real Time bus information systems on selected routes
- increasingly restricted and expensive parking in the city

With more and more people having access to a car, the wait at the bus stop must be made more attractive in order to persuade people to use the bus. Many of our buses are very good: low-floored, clean, comfortable and air-conditioned. However, a wait at the bus stop can be uncomfortable, and often longer than the more comfortable bus journey.

We think still more can be done to increase bus use by improving bus stops.

The bus journey includes the walk to the bus stop and another walk to the final destination. A change of buses somewhere on the way may introduce another walk. To make bus use more attractive, the walking environment around bus stops may need to be improved.

In Oxford, responsibility for bus stops is divided between city council, county council and bus companies, and this has led to inconsistency in provision and a failure to co-ordinate improvements.

For example, in the centre of Headington there are three stops, all named “Headington Shops”, although two of these are several hundred metres apart on the same side of the London Road. One of these retains the old style signage:



Different bus stops, but same names

Slightly further east, the eastbound “Green Road” bus stop has two subtly different names. The Park & Ride 400 service is listed on the old style sign but not on the new, and there is no timetable for this. Of the 13 services listed, timetables are in fact displayed for just eight.



Same bus stops, but different names

At Sandfield Road (both directions), one bus company calls this stop “Britania” [sic] and the other “Sandfield Road”. The Real Time information system prefers the latter. There are many other



examples of dual naming; this is not helpful for the large numbers of visitors to the city.

3. Who Provides Bus Stops

Bus stops are not provided by the bus companies. Oxfordshire County Council is the Highway Authority and receives money annually for transport, which includes provision of some aspects of bus stops. The City Council fills the gaps.

The County Council told us:

- "Most of the older bus stop poles in Oxford are assumed to be the responsibility of Oxford City Council; bus operators have affixed flags and timetable cases to these, over time."
- "The County Council's involvement in provision of bus stop infrastructure is actually quite recent – the larger 'Premium Routes' bus stop flag & pole units have only been installed in the last two years."

- “Shelters are the responsibility of the City Council although the County has procured several shelters over the last three years for the purposes of the Real Time Information system. The City holds a shelter advertising agreement with Clear Channel UK (*Adshel*).”

When we asked how to identify a premium route, we were told:

- "Premium Routes are defined as 'turn up and go' bus routes (typically at intervals of no more than 15 minutes). The County Council, in partnership with other local authorities, is upgrading bus stop infrastructure and making accessibility improvements as part of the overarching Bus Quality Partnership agreement with the major county operators (Stagecoach in Oxfordshire, Oxford Bus Company and Thames Travel).”

4. What Makes A Good Bus Stop

A bus stop may be simply a pole with a sign (a "flag") at the top saying BUS STOP. At the other extreme, a bus stop will have a shelter, lighting, seating, timetables, a litterbin, and a map of the immediate area. There are stops in Oxford with some of these, but there is little consistent provision.

Guidelines for a good bus stop include:

- timetables must be current and lit at night so that they can be read
- timetables for all routes that use the stop should be displayed and should feature intermediate stops
- shelter, lighting, seating and good visibility of approaching buses are essential for a safe and comfortable wait at night, on dark evenings and wet days

There is a wide variation in the quality of shelters in Oxford – from vandalised and neglected shelters to new shelters with Real Time Information.

A sadly neglected and/or vandalised bus stop (*right*), with comprehensive timetables, but complete with its own lake!



Even some relatively recent bus shelters (*above and left, on the JR Hospital site*) lack covered seating.

Whilst new bits of infrastructure are welcomed, all too often selected components of a bus stop are upgraded whilst the rest are ignored. Much money has been spent with no consideration for the overall image of bus travel.

Clearly this reflects the different responsibilities of the City and County Councils. It would be better for bus users if the whole stop were improved at the same time, and to an agreed city-wide standard.

There should be consistency in the layout so that those waiting have a good view of approaching buses and can attract the driver's attention. A new pole and bench but with an ageing unpainted

shelter and a filthy litterbin do not send out a message that bus travellers are respected.

See the Appendix (inside back cover) for a 'Bus Stop Checklist' to help you assess your own local bus stops.

5. Walking To And From The Bus Stop

As well as a stop that welcomes the bus passenger, the walk between home and bus stop must be easy and pleasant. At minimum, there should be a pedestrian refuge to help people crossing main roads to the stop, and well-kept level pavements.

Areas around the stop should be properly maintained so that puddles do not form on wet days leading to splashing by passing traffic.

At the bus stop, a map of the surrounding area is essential to help people new to the area find their destination. The map should cover a radius of around 400 metres – generally agreed as a reasonable walking distance at either end of a bus journey.

6. Position Of Bus Stops

The distance between stops should not be too great. If you are making a return journey, you need to find the opposite stop to where you got off. In the city centre, this is a particular problem as buses turn and do not return along exactly the same route. The return stop needs to be close to the outgoing stop.

If crossing the road is hazardous in the area, then a formal crossing place near the stops for each direction should be considered.

People who use buses regularly know where the stops are, but if you are less familiar with Oxford (and Oxford has many visitors) you may have problems. A map at the stop at which you have alighted should show you the return stop.



Here cyclists have been directed on to the pavement, on a track that passes directly in front of a bus shelter.

Despite a cyclists' "Give Way" sign approaching the bus stop, there is nowhere else for a cyclist to go.

Proper segregation of cyclists and bus passengers is essential in these situations.

7. Park & Ride

We have five Park & Ride sites. Two (Water Eaton and Thornhill) are County Council operated, with free parking. The others (Redbridge, Peartree and Seacourt) are City Council operated at present, and charge.

Again, there is no consistency in provision for people waiting for a bus at these sites. The newest, Water Eaton, has a clean and comfortable heated waiting room, with toilets and useful information boards. There are uniformed security assistants, and cycle lockers are provided.

Thornhill is being upgraded to a similar standard, whilst at Seacourt there is only a shelter.



The passenger terminal at Water Eaton Park & Ride (*above and right*)



At Peartree (*left*), the information cabin has details of the Park & Ride, but little or nothing about the other bus services in Oxford. There are no toilets on site, or signs to the nearby facilities.

8. Gloucester Green Bus Station

We have one central bus station, which is used by long distance coaches and a few country services eg Witney and Chipping Norton. Gloucester Green offers covered, if sometimes draughty, seating but waiting here is not attractive:



- the walking environment is hostile
- the provision of local information is confusing – especially when the enquiry office is closed
- the bus information office has limited opening hours and represents only Stagecoach; leaflets are made available for other services
- the Oxford Bus Company office is now hidden on an upper floor of a department store (some 5 mins walk), whilst other operators have no official presence anywhere
- when the office is closed, it is difficult to find out where connecting services start
- country buses do not all start from Gloucester Green eg Cheltenham services start from St Giles
- access by car to drop off and collect passengers with luggage is impossible
- the taxi rank is some distance from the bus station and is not easily visible

9. Promising Developments

A programme has started to introduce Real Time information on premium routes; this will increase as bus shelters are updated and more buses are fitted with tracking equipment.

Passengers can now find out by text to their mobile phone or from home or office via

www.oxontime.com when the next bus will reach their stop.

Reduced waiting time is a boon – especially on wet, windy or cold days.



Over the next five years, the contract with Adshel will replace outdated bus shelters with new designs; some bus stops, where no shelter has previously existed, will benefit by having one installed. All will include seating. Adshel will maintain and clean the shelters, many of which will carry advertising.



Examples of Adshel designs to be installed in Oxford

10. Conclusions

There is a wide inconsistency in the provision of bus stops in Oxford and too many are poorly maintained. The City and County Councils need to:

1. **work together** more closely
2. **establish common standards** for what should be provided at each type of stop
3. establish and enforce a **routine of maintenance** with significantly improved standards
4. purchase **infrastructure** that follows an agreed design standard and looks as if it belongs to the same 'brand' i.e. bus travel in Oxford.

Better bus stops will contribute to passenger satisfaction and lead to the increase in passenger numbers that is essential for future sustainability. To achieve this, Oxford needs more effective and concerted action.

Appendix: Bus Stop Checklist

Flag or Sign

- ✓ Telling you which buses stop there
- ✓ Giving the stop a single name by which it should be known to operators, bus drivers and passengers

Timetables

- ✓ Up to date
- ✓ Covering ALL buses using the stop
- ✓ Showing intermediate and final destinations
- ✓ Ideally giving times specifically for that stop but acceptably for a stop no more than 3 minutes earlier
- ✓ Well lit in hours of darkness
- ✓ Preferably showing the whole bus route

Real Time Information

- ✓ Detailing when the next buses will arrive

Map

- ✓ Including streets within 400 metres of the stop and routes on foot
- ✓ Marking the position of the return stop

Shelter

- ✓ Keeping rain off, wind out and splash from passing vehicles away from those waiting
- ✓ Affording good visibility of any approaching bus
- ✓ Seating / resting facilities
- ✓ Light-sensitive illumination after dark and on dull days

Extras

- ✓ Litterbin
- ✓ Cycle parking nearby
- ✓ Safe crossing place if on busy road

If you want to change or report anything about your bus stop, first contact your City Councillor. Your Area Committee will also be interested and may be able to fund improvements.

About Oxford Civic Society

The Oxford Civic Society is a citizens' **Membership** group concerned with the quality of Oxford's built environment and its impact on people's daily lives.

Our threefold priority is to protect Oxford's heritage, appreciate today's city and shape its future.

Environment, Travel and Planning are central to the concerns and activities of the Society.

We are involved with the running of the **Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board** and are in close liaison with **Local Groups** across the city.

We actively encourage an awareness and understanding of our city through a year-round **Programme** of talks, walks and visits.

If you would like to find out more or let us know your views, contact us:

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