



CONNECTING OXFORD: Response by Oxford Civic Society

Oxford Civic Society very much welcomes this collaborative initiative by the City and County Councils in bringing forward for public consultation proposals for demand management of the kind contained in the Oxford Transport Strategy (LTP4). The goal of traffic reduction in the city and the promotion of sustainable modes is strongly supported

It is difficult to comment on the proposals in detail since no evidence is supplied of the current scale or pattern of traffic movements and what changes would be likely to result from implementation of the proposals. As a result it is not possible to assess the likely success of the proposals in achieving the desired objectives or to compare their effectiveness with other measures which could be considered. We therefore hope that the Councils will move quickly to commission the technical work necessary to produce this information to enable all parties to make an informed assessment. Meanwhile our comments at this stage are necessarily provisional.

It would also be informative if the Councils were to indicate the alternative ideas that they have considered and the reasons for not now preferring them. Since the current proposals have some shortcomings and since it is stated that the Councils are not closed to other possibilities we develop these points further in the accompanying commentary. In summary our conclusions are that:

1. We are supportive of the ‘two-pronged’ approach which underpins the current proposals, namely a) a scheme to reduce peak period traffic across a wide area of the city and b) additional restriction measures targeted at reducing traffic in the vicinity of the city centre more substantially and over a longer time period.
2. In seeking to reduce peak period traffic we query the Councils’ claim that the proposed WorkPlace Parking Levy (WPL), especially as confined to the Eastern Arc, is the most effective instrument, in particular as compared with a city-wide congestion charge. No information is supplied for example on the likely effects of restricting the WPL to employment sites with 10 or more parking spaces.
3. Whilst accepting the principle of charging motorists (and using the revenue to promote alternative modes) we think the proposed WPL is open to criticism for unfairness in its charging implications. It only impacts on (larger) employers and/or their employees and only in part of the city - not on all motorists who contribute to congestion etc. in the city by travelling at peak times (eg parents taking their children to school in the mornings and collecting them at the end of the school day)
4. Given the targeted nature of the proposed WPL we appreciate the Councils’ reasons for wishing to link it to a specific set of benefits (e.g. P&R discounts). However we do not think this expedient is a sound basis for pursuing demand management over the longer term. We would prefer the principle to be advocated that in an urban context motorists should pay (via a general congestion charge) for the disbenefits they cause to more sustainable modes

and for the benefit they themselves enjoy from the resulting (less congested) traffic conditions.

5. Whatever form of charging is adopted we strongly support use of the revenues to improve public transport access to and within the Eastern Arc, especially from places outside Oxford City
6. We support the principle of traffic restriction points around the city centre to reduce traffic by curtailing through movements. As well as the general environmental benefits from lower vehicle flows the restrictions create the opportunity to introduce transformational public realm improvements in the core of the city centre and in surrounding streets such as Hythe Bridge Street and St Giles.
7. Nevertheless we recognise that, in the absence of nearby alternative routes, the restriction points are likely to generate additional vehicle mileage through detours via the Ring Road (itself heavily trafficked). Such detours will inevitably imply costs and inconvenience being incurred by individuals and businesses some of whom may not have other options available (such as changing mode, time of travel or forgoing travelling altogether). They will also generate increased travel distances and associated emissions. These adverse effects do not appear to have been quantified or adequately addressed
8. Hence there is a balance to be struck between the benefits of traffic reduction in the vicinity of the city centre and the disbenefits - public and private - of motorists' displaced journeys. It is not obvious that applying an absolute ban (i.e. on *all* vehicles) at the restriction points represents the most appropriate balance. The implications of different degrees of restriction deserve to be explored
9. The Councils are likely to receive claims for exemptions from the restrictions by people who consider retaining their present motorised journey 'essential' to avoid hardship or exceptional cost. If, as seems likely, a permit system is introduced to cater for such exemptions then it should be a matter for further consideration whether certain categories should be charged for and, if so, whether this might best be integrated with a city wide system of congestion charging.
10. The Civic Society has commented previously on the need for measures to deal with the adverse effects of goods deliveries and tourist coaches in the vicinity of the city centre. Proposals for the restriction points should be framed in the context of broader policies addressing these issues.

Overall we reiterate our strong support for the Councils' initiative and look forward to commenting further as details are developed.

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