OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

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Local Transport & Connectivity Plan (LTCP5):

OCS narrative response to the survey May 2020

Oxfordshire County Council invited residents and all interested parties to contribute to a survey in advance of formal consultation on a new transport Plan later in 2020. This document gives our narrative response to the key issues raised by the survey.

The survey covered 28 topics and OCS answers to the questions are published in another document, *Local Transport & Connectivity Plan (LTCP5): OCS response to the topic paper questions May 2020.*

Details of the survey can be found on the County Council's website:
https://consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/ltcp.engagement/consultationHome

Oxford Civic Society welcomes the County Council's initiative in seeking to engage the public and promote debate on transport planning topics in advance of consultation on the draft Plan itself. We have responded separately to the online questionnaire (as indicated above). However, we have serious reservations about the nature of the material in the topic papers taken as a whole. We are therefore submitting this additional response in the hope that some of the perceived limitations may be rectified during the remainder of the plan preparation process.

Topic-based approach

The 28 papers cover a wide range of subjects and vary greatly in scale and significance. They are presented in five groups and divided into three levels (although the purpose of these divisions isn't clear). However, there are minimal links between the individual papers and no over-arching strategy or 'vision' which might provide a common thread in their substance bar a listing of the Council's Corporate Plan and LTCP objectives to which action under the various heads (it is implied) is intended to contribute.

The situation may be likened to a jigsaw puzzle. We have been presented with a box containing a variety of pieces of different shapes and sizes. We don't know whether all the pieces fit together (or whether any are missing!), what picture is created when assembled and how far this matches the one being aimed for on the outside of the box. One of the difficulties we faced in answering the questions on individual topics is that our response would depend greatly on what is or isn't being done in related fields, ie how any single piece combines with others in contributing to the overall picture and what that picture might be.

Strategic issues

A further drawback of the fragmented approach is that several strategic issues which one would expect to underpin consideration of individual topics do not receive the attention they deserve. We would highlight the following:

1 Catering for economic and population growth

The Welcome to the Survey (page 1) states that "as Oxfordshire's economy grows there is an increasing strain on the county's infrastructure… rail and road infrastructure are not sufficient to meet rising demand".

The Rail Corridor Study (summarised as one of the topic papers) addresses this issue but there is no equivalent for the road network. Logically the following questions arise:

- in what respect is the current (road) infrastructure 'insufficient'?
- how are demands on the network (by motorised traffic) expected to rise?
- is accommodating the projected growth a) practicable and b) desirable? (especially in the context of the climate emergency) - and, if not, how might demand be managed and with what consequences?

2 Public transport improvements outside Oxford City?

The Rail and Bus Strategy papers refer to the need for a shift to these modes to deliver the Council's objectives in a growth context.   (The Climate Emergency and Air Quality papers tend to focus on a shift to walking and cycling which are of limited significance outside Oxford City where the bulk of vehicle mileage - hence emissions - occurs).   However practicable improvements in public transport alone are unlikely to impact on a sufficient scale.   Bus travel as an option for car drivers outside Oxford and Oxford-focused corridors is especially problematic. (Nevertheless where good services *are* available there would appear to be scope for greater use through the development of mini-hub, interchange opportunities taking forward suggestions in the Park and Ride and SHIFT topic papers). However – as evidenced to date in Oxford City - achieving a significant mode shift is dependent on the use of 'stick' as well as 'carrot' measures, ie on the need for demand management.

3 Demand management

Other than for Oxford City (ie Connecting Oxford) the issue of demand management is not addressed in the topic papers.

Beyond rail-connected locations the Area and Corridor Strategy papers offer no solution to the conundrum of how to achieve a reduction in car driving for medium and longer distance journeys. (Nationally 85% of car mileage is on journeys longer than 5 miles).   In Oxford City low levels of car ownership and use are fundamentally linked to on and off-street parking policies as restraint mechanisms as well as to the availability and promotion of other modes through physical management measures.   What such measures, if any, might be deliverable elsewhere and what are the implications if they are not?

As a complementary possibility what is the scope for demand management through travel substitution? The experience of lockdown during the CV crisis has transformed people's awareness of the possibilities for work and social engagement without the need for travel. Given adequate digital infrastructure (see topic paper 22) what opportunity exists to promote such substitution as a permanent feature of the Council's transport and connectivity programme?

4 Spatial planning framework

One of the key roles of the LTCP is to provide a transport complement to the development proposals in District Councils' Local Plans.   However the topic papers (notably the Area and Corridor Studies) give little acknowledgement to the development geography of the 100,000 new homes to 2031 agreed in the Oxfordshire Growth Deal and to the transport issues arising. Nor do they suggest how

the multiple transport modes might be integrated to optimise transport provision and, in particular to offer a 'Metro' system of the kind the Society has advocated for the Oxford city-region.

5 The A34

The A34 is omitted from the list of would-be Corridor Studies since, as a trunk road, it is the responsibility of Highways England and subject to decision-making at regional level (as indicated in the Regional Transport Networks paper).   However it is the most important element of road transport infrastructure in the county and how its operating problems and environmental impacts might be resolved in a growth context is illustrative of the more general dilemma. It is also a material factor in progressing Connecting Oxford or other demand management measures in the city which imply displacement of traffic on to the Ring Road. Significantly the County Council has voted not to support the building of the Ox-Cam Expressway (as a 'solution' to the A34 problem) but has yet to demonstrate how the Council's growth and sustainability objectives might be fulfilled by other means.

The LTCP process will clearly be seriously deficient if it does not include consideration of this subject and the implications of various scenarios.

A suggested objectives-led approach

We are concerned that the fragmented, topic-by-topic approach adopted thus far may continue to be applied in developing policies and proposals for the Plan itself.   We suggest that a reorientation is needed in which *objectives* form the main and explicit structuring device.

Debate should be generated in terms of options surrounding the *mix* of actions possible for contributing to each objective. These options might then be assessed in terms of their potential deliverability, cost-effectiveness, robustness (in the face of future uncertainties), ancillary impacts (benefits or losses) etc.

The focus on objectives raises the question of **which objectives should be adopted.** Strangely the engagement exercise offered no explanation or opportunity for comment on the three objectives which were quoted (climate emergency, active and healthy travel and healthy place-shaping). Other objectives which are plainly relevant and which will come into play when Plan proposals are judged were not acknowledged. Foremost amongst these is the basic duty of the County Council as highway authority to operate a safe and efficient local road network. Maintaining or improving ~~its~~ road connectivity (especially in the face of substantial forecast traffic growth) has to be weighed alongside the other objectives mentioned – otherwise the climate emergency for example could simply be addressed by shutting down the network!

Further material on objectives should include information as to the indicators by which conditions may be measured (and standards possibly set) and the availability of data on these to the Council.

Information and analysis needed

Another difficulty we experienced with the papers was their deliberately brief and non-technical nature. This was designed to facilitate engagement by the general public and businesses but leaves unfulfilled the information and analysis needed by the Civic Society and other specialist interest groups to participate effectively in debate *before* Plan proposals are published.

We would therefore look to receive information and the opportunity for further comment on the following (in relation to each objective)

- **What are current conditions like?** (and, if possible their relationship to desirable standards)
- **Do these alone imply improvement action is needed?**
- **How are conditions expected to change in future?**
- **Does this imply (further) action is required** to combat, reinforce or redirect the expected change?
- **What discretion** (obligations, powers, sources and extent of funding) **does the County Council and its partners have to take the relevant type of action?**
- (Within this discretionary envelope) **what choices are available?**
- **What are the pros and cons of each option?**

A particularly important feature of this approach is the ability to distinguish between the action ideally needed to fulfil the Council's objectives and that which the Council itself is able to undertake. The residuum is likely to point to the lobbying the Council may wish to pursue as a political authority to influence the policies and proposals of others.

The planning process for LTCP5

Part of the concern we have registered in this submission derives from the fact that **no indication has yet been given about the process which the Council expects to follow from hereon in preparing LTCP5** and whether any additional information is likely to be made available (possibly to the Stakeholder group only) before the draft Plan is published. We appreciate that current circumstances make timetabling difficult but **we would be grateful to learn of the steps which the Council plans to take and which hopefully will address the points we have made.**