

Oxford Civic Society Transport Group

July 2020

COMMENTS ON BANBURY/WOODSTOCK ROAD IMPROVEMENT

Scope of the works

1. It is critical to establish what the scope of the works is since this is fundamental to developing the principles and the designs for the works, and in setting realistic budgets.
2. Setting the scope should include establishing exactly what the desired objectives are and prioritising them; subsequent development of specific proposals for physical interventions should continuously reflect these established priorities.
3. We are strongly supportive of improvements to these roads to reduce motor traffic and mitigate its severe adverse effects, reduce pollution and encourage active travel in the interests of public health. The current situation regarding the layout, provision and physical condition of Banbury Road and Woodstock Road is wholly unacceptable, and urgent improvement is necessary.
4. Our concerns relate to the basic provision of cycle and pedestrian and public transport facilities, allocation of the highway space, lack of segregation of transport modes, faults in drainage, collapsing road structure, poor maintenance and badly implemented repairs. All these issues should be addressed in developing works of improvement.
5. The scope should also be defined in geographic terms, so that the limits of the current proposals are understood from the outset; whatever the current geographic limits to physical works, the development of proposals should always consider potential future works beyond those limits to ensure alignment with wider-area interventions.
6. Specifically, consideration of improvements to these roads should include St Giles, where the opportunity to restore the character of one of the city's finest open spaces at the same time as alleviating the current intimidating domination by motor traffic should be taken.
7. Further clarification on the inclusion of improvement measures to the Cutteslowe and Wolvercote roundabouts is necessary; these continue to represent serious impediments to active travel, and to public transport services.

Policies

8. We strongly support policy statements by Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council which commit to prioritisation of active travel and public transport modes in urban and suburban situations, as prevail along all of the Banbury and Woodstock Roads within the city boundary and beyond.
9. We note the adoption of the Oxford City Local Cycling and Walking infrastructure Plan (OLCWIP) by the County Council in March 2020, and we consider that this should form the basis for development of proposals for improvements to the Banbury and Woodstock Roads. Implementation of any measures which are not consistent with the adopted policies of the OLCWIP would be perverse, as would any failure to implement policies established therein whilst this opportunity is presented.
10. The OLCWIP is a component of the Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP); we have contributed to the consultation on the emerging LTCP5, and endorse all policies aimed at reducing motor traffic and encouraging active travel and the use of public transport.

Proposals for improvement of Banbury and Woodstock Roads should fulfil these policies.

Principles

11. The OLCWIP which has now been adopted as policy by Oxfordshire County Council implies that pedestrians and cyclists should take priority over motorised vehicles, especially on 'Quickways' such as indicated for these two arterial road corridors. Whilst it may prove impossible to achieve all the desirable design characteristics of this designation because of physical or financial constraints, the objective for these Quickways, that they are to be used as a realistic alternative to travel by car, by people making purposeful journeys, e.g. commuting to work, should be pursued as a key priority.
12. Oxfordshire County Council is currently committed to developing proposals under the heading of "Connecting Oxford"; we have contributed to the discussion of these proposals, the principles of which we generally endorse. Proposals developed for the improvement of Banbury and Woodstock Roads should reflect the likely effects of this project, for example on traffic flows and mode split. Likewise, proposals for the introduction of staged Zero Emission Zones are in an advanced stage of implementation and should be reflected in such assessments.
13. Consideration should be given not only to general potential increases in traffic, including continuing increases in cycle traffic, but also the effects of specific developments: Oxford North, Eynsham Garden Village, Begbroke & Yarnton, North Oxford Golf Course, sites around Oxford Parkway Station, and others served by the Banbury and Woodstock Roads beyond the city boundaries.
14. The opportunity to deliver genuinely attractive cycling and walking routes to and from Oxford Parkway Station and the Oxford North employment site, and between these, should be taken. Major constraints to this are the two (Cutteslowe and Wolvercote) roundabouts; it is probable that the only satisfactory solution will be grade separation (bridges), and, if these are outside the scope and budget of the current projects, these latter should at least be compatible with any future provision.
15. We note that the OLCWIP identifies residential areas either side of both Banbury and Woodstock Roads along their complete lengths as potential Low Traffic Neighbourhoods:



In policy OC14 OCC has committed to support of development of LTNs, hence improvements to Banbury and Woodstock Roads should reflect the potential identified, for example in assessing cycle and walking traffic volumes, choice of routes, design of junctions with side roads, and management of inter-connecting traffic.

16. Specifically, routes OXR3 and OXR4 identified in the OLCWIP relate to Banbury and Woodstock Roads, and the principles outlined therein should be followed. However, routes OXR1, OXR2 and OXR5 are also relevant to studies of travel behaviour in these corridors and should be considered.
17. Recognition should be given to alternative, near-parallel “quiet routes” for pedestrians and cyclists, such as NCN5 and NCN51.
18. In addition to creating conditions much more attractive for active travel, improvements to public transport are essential, i.e. reductions in journey times through prioritisation and relief of ‘pinch points’, increases in frequency and improvements to ride quality.
19. Modelling of traffic flows should include assessment of proposals such as one-way or ‘tidal’ flow motor traffic or bus services, though we have significant reservations about the likely effects of such proposals on inter-connecting side streets and compatibility with potential LTNs.
20. One-way routing assessments should include particular consideration of potential adjustment of bus services, for example to provide ‘express’ services on Woodstock Road and ‘all stops’ on Banbury Road.

Design issues

21. In adopting policy OC27 of the OLCWIP, the County Council has committed to a review of its 2017 “Oxfordshire Cycling Design Standards” (OCDS). Pending this review, we would urge that improvements to Banbury and Woodstock Roads should be designed to the London Cycling Design Standards published by TfL, as referenced in the OCDS, 1.1.15.
22. Structural design of the carriageways carrying motor traffic should properly account for likely increases in the volume and axle weight of public transport vehicles and the need for greatly improved ride quality. Design and construction of gullies and utilities service covers should ensure smooth riding for buses and long-term stability.
23. Consideration should be given to innovative drainage solutions, such as a central channel on carriageways, which could avoid accumulation of water adjacent to foot and cycle ways, making use of these more attractive under adverse weather conditions.
24. Some fundamental design issues are that cycle routes must be direct, smooth and segregated, and should be level across side-road junctions and at access drives, and should provide visual reinforcement to the priority of cyclists. Where cycle routes have drainage gully gratings, or other ironwork associated with utilities services, these should be flush with the road surface; robust designs and specification, and rigorous monitoring of workmanship must be implemented, and remedial action enforced where necessary.
25. The undulation of cycle tracks to accommodate accesses to properties is unacceptable, not least because of the psychological effect of diminution of the priority of cycles.
26. Other important issues are: availability of road width and possibilities for enlargement; how the requirements for public transport (possibly including future bus rapid transit (BRT)) can be accommodated; how bus stops are incorporated; how different transport modes can be segregated; how safe pedestrian crossings are provided; the retention of mature ‘green’ infrastructure and trees; how the particular circumstances at the Summertown local centre are

dealt with; and what speed limits should apply.

Budget and funding

27. We understand that the budget for the improvements to Banbury and Woodstock Roads which are being considered at the present time is in the region of £10m for each road; we also note that the costing for the establishment of 'quick route' cycle facilities for these two roads, identified in the OLCWIP is approximately £16m for each, and we query the basis for each of these costings, and the discrepancy between them.

Conclusions

28. We look forward to a constructive dialogue on the basis of the foregoing with officers of Oxfordshire County Council in developing proposals for the improvement of these important routes.