



Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 5 – Topic Papers

Need not Greed Oxfordshire response, May 2020

Need Not Greed Oxfordshire (NNGO) is a coalition of 36 groups from across the county, together representing thousands of community members. Our campaign is committed to:

- A restoration of planning principles, with a proper balancing of economic, environmental and social considerations,
- Local democracy, with planning control in the hands of locally elected and accountable representatives; and
- Environment and rural sustainability, ensuring that our landscape, nature and rural communities are at the heart of decision-making.

Q2 Greenways

Do Greenways sound like a good idea? Would you or people you know, use them? Could they help mitigate the effects of private car ownership upon the environment, congestion and people's health?

NNGO supports the development of greenways especially where they allow access to the rural hinterlands of the market towns throughout Oxfordshire. Whilst we acknowledge issues concerning landowner permissions, it may be that selective re-designation and improvement of certain existing footpath public rights-of-way could enable greater use by cyclists and equestrians of such facilities. The responsibility for, and funding of, long-term maintenance would also be an issue. Recent experience suggests that maintaining the existing network is a sufficient challenge in itself and this should remain a priority for any available funding.

Q3 Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans

Where else should have an LCWIP? What improvements would you like to see to your cycling or walking network? How can cycling and walking be made safer and more attractive for all?

We understand that this concept is not new and are still awaiting the Bicester area LCWIP which remains outstanding. NNGO supports, in due course the further extension of LCWIPs to the other market towns in the county as constraint to the knowledge spine seems illogical. An early and ambitious delivery date for these would be welcome.

Oxfordshire regrettably has to rely on infrastructure provided by large-scale, in our view often inappropriate, development and it seems to be obvious that an active travel plan imposed upon developers combined with CIL/S28 funding can be combined to create such infrastructure in the vicinity of major developments.

Q5 SHIFT

Do you agree with our approach to progressing the SHIFT proposal? What types of measures do you think would help you to combine walking, cycling and public transport to make your daily journeys? Which locations should be a priority for any SHIFT network investment?

NNGO remains concerned about the Oxford centric nature of most transport planning in the county. We fully support the SHIFT concept but would also wish it to be focused to address the rural transport deprivation issues that currently exist and have been compounded by the progressive removal of bus subsidies. SHIFT proposals should be considered to open up the rural hinterlands of the market towns throughout Oxfordshire particularly where they would give access to bus corridors from smaller villages and hamlets that currently do not enjoy any public transport provision. This could include secure cycle parking at key bus stops for example along the A420.

Q9 Bus Strategy

Are there other areas that would help to make the bus network better for you, given our current constraints? What else could our bus strategy consider? Most bus routes go in and out of Oxford; would you use the buses to go to other places, instead of Oxford, if it were possible/easier?

Along with rail, bus strategies need to be updated in connection with the post COVID-19 world. It is essential that the modal shift towards public transport is not thwarted by the public's residual concerns regarding respiratory issues when sharing medium and longer distance/duration public transport journeys. This could particularly disenfranchise a large rural population which does not enjoy ownership of private vehicles and has to rely on the few remaining bus services. It would be a tragedy if public concern were to prevent ridership of buses from increasing to the levels that would allow them to become closer to self-sustaining financially. The

strategy must address the rural nature of Oxfordshire and try to offset the huge damage caused by the loss of the bus subsidies over the last few years.

Many district councils have reluctantly supported in Local Plans the creation of isolated communities. Reliance on developers to support public transport is always limited both in scale and timespan of those subsidies being in place. Spatial planning should ideally be used as a mechanism to prevent the need for travel, focusing on the co-location of employment and homes. Where this proves to be impossible it is essential that active travel and public transport are the key mechanisms used to address the travel needs of the community. Such development schemes and public transport schemes need to form part of the over-arching countywide bus strategy. The incorporation of “demand responsive travel” approaches should form a core aspect of the overall bus strategy.

Question 10 Rail corridor strategy

If capacity and connectivity were improved, how much more could you use the rail network in Oxfordshire?

The active consideration of improving the rail network in Oxfordshire is welcomed by NNGO. Electrification of the network is a priority for climate change reasons and that has not been mentioned specifically, which is a serious omission. Electrification and the reintroduction of freight loops should include the East-West rail link to Cambridge.

Issues created by commuting could be addressed by a better network and rail services. We believe that for far too long things like the Grove rail station have only been talked about in abstract rather than a time bound commitment made to ensure their delivery. A challenging but realistic timetable of 2025 should be a headline commitment.

We are disappointed that there is still no adequate consideration being given to the possibility of a Witney-Oxford rail solution.

Obviously all stations must be built to current Disability Discrimination Act standards and have mechanisms, both hard infrastructure and soft behavioural prompts, to encourage active travel choices to be made by those using the new stations.

Question 11 Park and Ride

What role do you think Park and Ride should have in our future transport strategy development? How do you think Park and Ride could be developed or changed to contribute to reducing carbon emissions and improving health and well-being? What else should future Park and Ride strategy consider?

NNGO believes that the current proposals to open new remote Park and Rides, potentially closing or repurposing the existing sites is fundamentally flawed. The evidence base for the current proposals was always extremely limited and lacked any detailed rigour. We believe that post COVID-19 a comprehensive review of the P&R strategy is required. This is compounded by the current government intentions to fund ambitious schemes to promote active travel.

We believe that the current park-and-ride locations, improved with prioritised direct access from the existing ring-road, need to become major transport hubs that focus primarily on active travel into the city of Oxford. This approach should also, where possible be used for other market towns in the county with strategically located parking facilities that then encourage the use of active travel methods into the respective town centres / areas of employment. In this context active travel should include strategies and facilities to promote and prioritise walking, cycling and electric scooter use/hire. Existing egress from and layout of these sites should prioritise active modes of travel and not arriving motor-vehicle traffic. Routes from sites should be direct, uninterrupted, and fundamentally safe for all users including children.

Whilst NNGO believes that prioritising affordable rural public transport is a key element in catering for travel demand, it is acknowledged that private motor-vehicle will remain the choice of many (economically fortunate) individuals. The combination of individual travel to a point close enough within the relatively tight confines of the city within the ring-road to allow the use of prioritised active travel mechanisms into the city centre seems an obvious strategy that the County should develop and adopt. This approach has specific merit for the Seacourt and Redbridge P&R sites for the city centre given their close proximity to Carfax.

As a consequence of this approach the current intention to create multiple greenfield Green Belt sites (with its consequential loss of valuable farmland and Green Belt status) remote from both the journey point of origin and arrival is clearly flawed and should be removed from future plans.

NNGO is not convinced by the prospect of 'mini' park and rides. Facilitating links to public transport interchanges is welcome in principle, but in practise this risks leading to a series of car parks in the countryside. Prioritising a reduction in the need to travel with improvements to rural broadband and 5G and measures to promote active transport (walking/cycling) to bus stops on the major radial bus routes is a more sustainable solution.

Question 12 Climate Emergency and Air Quality

We know that doing nothing is not an option. What could you do, and the Council realistically support you to do, to help you make a long-term change to a much less polluting/carbon emitting mode of transport?

Whilst the current health emergency is uppermost in our minds at present it is clear that the longer-term critical threat to our population and the planet remains the climate emergency and the urgent need to address it. NNGO believes that there is an important window of opportunity to join public and governmental responses to both issues. The promotion and facilitation of widespread active travel, a step change in working from home and the opportunities to decarbonise current travel footprints have seemingly been brought together as a once in a generation opportunity to change our approach to addressing the climate emergency. It would be foolhardy to let this opportunity slip by without a Herculean effort to capitalise on the situation and make big inroads into changing public travel behaviours permanently.

NNGO suggests that OCC should be clear that it supports the commitment, made in England's Economic Heartland's Outline Transport Strategy, to deliver a zero-carbon transport system by 2050 at the latest. LTCP5 should set out the milestones for achieving this and be clear how transport proposals will be assessed against these measures.

The main options for individuals are to move to less polluting forms of transport. If they continue to rely on their own vehicles as opposed to increased use of shared use vehicles, this means a move to less polluting forms, notably hybrid or preferably electric cars. It is still noted that even electric cars create tyre and brake pollution and merely changing the form of propulsion fails to address the congestion aspect of the challenge. Therefore, prioritisation of active travel and public transport remains key to addressing the current and future challenges.

Incentives could guide this behaviour, but we recognise that many are in central government control – for example taxation rates on fuel, subsidies for electric vehicles, improving 'green' electricity supplies, vehicle road pricing and changing building regulations.

Question 14 Green Infrastructure

This paper has used Science Vale as an example. Your area will also need a transport strategy. What are your views on a strategy for your area? What would make it easier for you to choose more sustainable and active modes of travel such as walking, cycling and public transport for some journeys instead of opting for your car?

NNGO supports the development of a comprehensive green infrastructure plan. Recent significant developments such as the Water-Eaton park-and-ride and proposals for the A40 cycle track fail to meet the level of expectation created by apparent current pseudo-commitment to improving green infrastructure but failing to deliver it. They are explicit examples of NNGO's concerns. It is essential that green infrastructure is an integral part of all future major transport developments with an intent to ensure that not only is it designed to high standards but include mechanisms in place to fund maintenance particularly during the early critical years of the growth.

Question 17 Area Transport Strategies

This paper has used Science Vale as an example. Your area will also need a transport strategy.

What are your views on a strategy for your area? What would make it easier for you to choose more sustainable and active modes of travel such as walking, cycling and public transport for some journeys instead of opting for your car?

We would in particular support the inclusion of a specific overarching strategy for rural areas, drawing together information on the particular needs of, and resulting policies for, rural communities (many of which are already referenced in these outline papers, but would benefit from a coherent overview).

NNGO agrees that other areas need transport strategies. However, we also note that whilst Wantage and Didcot are part of the Science Vale, Abingdon and Wallingford only fall within its “area of influence.” If Abingdon also were to fall into the “area of influence” of Oxford City, it demonstrates the variable geographies of Oxfordshire that such an area based approach entails. If areas such as Shrivenham are considered it is more associated with Swindon than Oxford which complicates matters even further. This is complex situation and will require both creative and flexible approaches.

Any area facing significant development is also likely to benefit from a co-ordinated transport strategy. For example, in North Abingdon, where 1,000+ houses are being brought forward, difficulties have been experienced with issues such as setting up a key, continuous cycle route from North Abingdon across the new estates and other key pieces of land, to Radley station; effectively linking the western and eastern part of the estate; and development of the South facing slips at the A34 Lodge Hill junction.

Q18 Transport Corridor Connectivity

What approaches to managing transport and movement should be developed on major corridors such as the A420? What changes do you think would be realistic and effective? What would encourage you to switch to using the bus on the major routes through the county - A40, A44, A420, A4074? If you live near or on a major transport corridor what would you like to see changed?

Whilst the A420 is used in example, clearly other major transport corridors exist and need their own considerations. Universally though it is essential that the surrounding countryside and its population to those corridors are considered actively as part of the transport corridors themselves. The needs of significant proportions of non-car owning rural residents require active consideration potentially with Demand Responsive Travel schemes tied to each corridor strategy.

In terms of the A420 strategy specifically, NNGO has reservations about the mini park-and-ride strategies along such corridors and would like to have more focus made on existing service bus uses which would prevent the need for reliance on motor vehicles.

Question 19 Regional Transport Network

How do you think Oxfordshire should ensure it remains a significant authority across the region? How might the schemes above play a role in mitigating climate emergency, improving air quality or supporting healthy place shaping?

How beneficial do you think it might be for Oxfordshire to be better linked to Cambridge by new transport links?

Oxfordshire is likely to remain a significant “authority” in the region whatever the future entails although it will no doubt be required to take an active part in wider strategic authorities such as EEH. However, irrespective of such larger entities, Oxfordshire County Council remains the legally responsible Highway Authority and must recognise that Oxfordshire’s residents will hold the County to account for its decisions and performance.

Whilst only one aspect of the regional transport network, there seems to be an over focus on the concept of the East-West ARC and the potential expressway, itself apparently under review prior to the current health emergency. NNGO believes that further promotion of such schemes needs considerable thought given their exceptionally poor cost benefit ratios.

NNGO opposes the Expressway and the vast amount of related house building associated with it. NNGO opposes any attempts for that excessive growth to be situated in Oxfordshire even though the Expressway may at some later date be abandoned. NNGO believes that too much land has already been released for housing development in Oxfordshire with only about half of the land currently released required for local needs or to address affordability problems. Promised growth to fill the other half does not seem to have occurred and will be further made unlikely due to the post COVID-19 induced recession. Affordability problems will not be sorted out by extensive fields packed with expensive new-build houses.

NNGO supports the East-west rail link to rebuild the line from Oxford to Cambridge. The line should be electrified to minimise its carbon impact and provided with freight loops (or at least the “land take” for their later development) at time of development.

Question 21 Local Community Action on Travel

What can you do for your community to make it a better/nicer/safer place to live? What type of small interventions would you see as a priority for funding? How might other organisations support you?

What would you find useful? Can we frame the issue in a way that will help you as a resident to engage and come up with your own sustainable solutions for your community?

Are there current schemes that need help expanding to benefit more of the community?

We believe that this is important for the entire county, but particularly those in more rural areas including the market towns. Currently there is an over-reliance on the Oxford centric nature of our public transport provision and this needs to be addressed by creative approaches potentially using the voluntary sector in providing local Demand Response Travel type initiatives. Consideration should be given to joint ventures put forward by local town and parish councils and OCC. Local experimentation should be encouraged as this may come up with innovative solutions that work.

Question 22 Digital Infrastructure Strategy

How could you be better connected? How would easier access to information, services and transport be good for you? Would it reduce your need to travel?

NNGO strongly supports considering Connectivity with transport as the former can substitute for the latter. The recent Coronavirus crisis has demonstrated that many people can work at home, at least for part of the time. With better broadband infrastructure, this would presumably be easier to continue. NNGO considers that supporting efforts to continue working at home are essential. However, we are also aware that new technologies can easily exclude others particularly those who are less well off. So public support and where necessary facilitated access is important. One consequence is the likely continuing growth of that feature of the modern physical highway, the white delivery van which themselves bring their own challenges which need creative solutions.

Question 24 Highways Asset Management Plan

Does Oxfordshire’s Asset Management approach sound like a good idea to you? Do you think it could be a good solution to ensuring the transport network is maintained? What else might you want to know about HAMP?

We support the general approach to the HAMP. However, as representing a wide range of organisations and individuals across the entire county, we wish to stress that the rural road network, particularly suited to cycling, should not be relegated to the “sometime never part” of a refurbishment / repairs plan that focusses on major routes. Metrics for reporting maintenance of transport networks should provide sufficient information to reassure Oxfordshire’s rural population that their needs are being equitably addressed.

Question 25 Freight Strategy

Do you have any ideas about how to better move and manage freight through and within Oxfordshire? How do you think improvements could be made?

The move to electric or hydrogen power, reducing pollution, that is mentioned by the topic paper, would be welcomed.

Large HGVs are generally not welcome in urban areas and are a major risk to cyclists so anything to reduce these hazards would improve the environment. It is noted that the cycling planning professionals often “plan for freight first” and we commend this approach.

According to this topic paper, England’s Economic Heartland (EEH) Freight Study¹ supposedly provides:

‘opportunities to better manage strategic road and rail freight movements across the EEH area, including a number related to mitigating environmental impacts, which Oxfordshire can benefit from.’

However, the EEH Freight study also seems to assume that the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway is inevitable – which is under significant doubt and NNGO, other organisations and even the County Council formally oppose as it would have a severe and lasting detrimental impact on the Oxfordshire environment.

¹ <http://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/Pages/freight.aspx>

Q29 Is there anything else you would like to tell us about improving transport and travel? How could you contribute to making Oxfordshire a thriving county?

Health & wellbeing of people and the environment should be the key starting point for decision-making with regards to transport & connectivity.

We have a unique opportunity, as part of an ongoing response to Covid 19, to embed some of the positives that have come out of the situation with regards to reduced travel, congestion and pollution.

We welcome the Government's recent announcement about immediate investment in active travel solutions. The County should be planning for a long Covid recovery period and putting in temporary fixes with an eye to permanency.

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