

## ESTATES SERVICES

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Mr J Disley  
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23 March 2015

Dear Mr Disley

### **REF – Connecting Oxfordshire: Local Transport Plan 2015-2031**

The University has reviewed the documents published on 5 February that comprise the LTP4 Connecting Oxfordshire consultation and offers the following response:

The University's own Transport Strategy (the University Strategy) was adopted in December 2014 and forms the basis from which the County's proposals have been reviewed. The work undertaken to prepare the University Strategy included a wide ranging staff and student consultation exercise to obtain qualitative views of transport issues, a review of current travel patterns and data to provide quantitative information, and an assessment of likely future growth and development. It reflects the travel patterns of all staff (including college staff), students and visitors travelling to from and between University buildings and sites. Its conclusions share many synergies with the proposed policies within the Connecting Oxfordshire documents, and the University welcomes these areas of shared vision.

Specific University Strategy objectives that demonstrate this shared vision are to:

- Reduce the numbers of car journeys on the network – including reducing congestion during peak periods;
- Promote appropriate sustainable transport alternatives – particularly by improving links on the key north–south (connecting Harwell – central Oxford – Begbroke Science Park) and east–west (connecting central Oxford – John Radcliffe – Old Road – Churchill) routes through the city;
- Improve users' journey experience – by improving the quality, reliability and frequency of transport options;
- Improve local air quality; and
- Reduce the University's carbon footprint.

The University is committed to sustainable travel, encourages the use of efficient public and communal transport, cycling and walking, and is focused on the reduction carbon dioxide emissions from work-related travel and University-owned vehicles. The University discourages unnecessary travel and the use of private motor transport for both travel to the University and travel for work purposes during the day, with the aim of reducing traffic and parking in Oxford.

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The University welcomes the core focus of policy documents on the transport network as an essential pre-requisite for a successful and prosperous economy with sustainable transport at the centre of urban and inter-urban trips. Key considerations for the County when taking account of the University's development in this context during the period to 2031 should include:

- That the University Estate has been increasing by approximately 5% per annum for the last 15 years and will continue to grow significantly over the plan period. This growth will result in an unquantified but significant requirement from additional commuters.
- As the centre of Oxford becomes more constrained in terms of available capacity for development, development will take place in other areas, particularly at the Science Parks located at Begbroke to the north and Harwell to the south. This is likely to be an increasing trend.
- 50% of University staff lives outside the ring-road. Increasing costs of housing in Oxford (disproportionate in relation to wage inflation) can be expected to increase this percentage and result in a growing proportion of staff commuting further to and from work.
- In addition to peak hour journey to work trips, the daily operation of the University results in significant movements between sites, with travel between the Science Area and Headington, between the hospital and research sites in Headington (John Radcliffe and Old Road Campus) and increasingly between sites outside of the city at Begbroke and Harwell being key.

More detailed responses follow, grouped under headings that relate to policies within the consultation documents and key University interest areas.

## **Public Transport**

The University is keen to work with the County to develop efficient public transport services both for commuters and between University sites, particularly between the Science Area and the Headington hospital sites. It is broadly supportive of the strategy proposed in the consultation documents and makes the following comments on specific interest areas:

- The University strongly welcomes the identification of the Eastern Arc as fundamental to the city's growth plans as is it is similarly important to its own plans. Servicing this area via an uninhibited Bus Rapid Transit (or equivalent) facility to dramatically improve accessibility from the ring road and beyond is key to assisting the University in promoting modal shift for staff and students working in those areas. Problematic access to the hospital sites from the Horsepath Driftway/Slade/Old Road and B4150/Cherwell Drive approaches affects significant numbers of University staff and students. The University asks that the County ensure that proposed public transport solutions are suitably uninhibited or that additional road capacity is also considered to ensure a sustainable future for the network in this area. A mass transit solution which does not deliver in terms of journey times will fail to attract modal shift or alleviate congestion.
- The University strongly supports both the Bus Rapid Transit concept and the strategic approach to evolving the Park & Ride network which together demonstrate a well evidenced plan for long-term and sustainable access to the city (noting comments on cycle access that follow). There is however a concern over the reliance on tunnels to

realise the complete vision and the University urges the County to consider alternatives to ensure the credibility of the proposals. For example: looped mass transit services along the four main axes, terminating at hubs just outside of the central area and circulatory services within could potentially serve the needs of University stakeholders well without the obstacles of the significant investment, political opposition and unquantified engineering challenge inherent in the tunnel proposal.

- The lack of public transport service to South Parks Road and the Science Area is a significant obstacle to modal shift amongst staff and students and the University asks that this is considered in the development of service routing. The University asks that the proposed BRT route 1 be routed along Parks Road, Broad Street and St Giles as a looped service to the North of the city. Considering the likely appeal of this to shoppers and tourists in addition to the significant numbers of commuters to the Science area and surrounding streets it has the potential to significantly increase the modal shift impact of the route. The remainder of the BRT route 1 could also function as a looped service to the East of the city to facilitate this in a solution that does not require transit tunnels as discussed above.
- The future development of the Begbroke Science Park to the north of the city can be expected to result in the need for an increased level of public transport connectivity between it, the University's city centre sites and major transport hubs. It is a component of the county's 'Knowledge Spine' and must be adequately served by public transport. The lack of focus on it as a key part the county's economic engine in the consultation documents is a concern to the University given its significant potential for growth. The proposed transport route maps suggest it may be bypassed and this represents a potential missed opportunity and a suppressant to growth.
- The University already runs a Begbroke Science Park shuttle bus service and the University Strategy targets an increased bus service and a Park & Ride facility on site. There is a clear opportunity here for the University and County to work together given the overlap in objectives. In addition, the potential to develop a transport hub on the site for this key growth area and for Kidlington should be considered. This could link the A44, the proposed Park & Ride and potentially a new rail station in the vicinity of Sandy Lane.
- The expansion of other research and development facilities on the outskirts of Oxford, including the site at Harwell, provides the potential for new north-south services linking key academic, research and development sites across Oxford and the wider area. Whilst not forming part of the University estate, the University plays an important role in the activities at these sites and has identified unserved transport needs. It is keen to explore with the local authorities and public transport operators a more detailed scope for services that link with the University estate.

## Cycling

The University strongly welcomes the ambitious target to triple cycling modal share from 7% to 21% in the County (though a proportional increase on the 17% modal share in the city should be specifically noted) within the plan period but urges a broader range of measures and clearer targeting in support of this:

- The modal share ambition is not clearly reflected in a specific long-term commitment to capital and revenue funding. In 2013/14 the County spent just £800k on cycling projects out of a total highways and transport spend of £62.4m (around 1.3%). Other local authorities have adopted a policy of spending 4% to 5% as a minimum.
- £800k equates to a little over £1 per person annually (the national average is £2 per person annually). Whilst the University welcomes the desire to work towards £10, and an aspiration to reach it by 2020/1, adopting the recommendation of the Get Britain Cycling report of £20 (or potentially a better practice example such as the Dutch national spend on cycling of £24) would demonstrate a clearer connection between the proposed policy and its supporting measures.
- The University strongly supports clearer, more extensive and more consistent cycle route marking and way finding. Staff and students report the largest barriers to cycling to be safety, fear and intimidation so all measures to tackle this are welcomed.
- Specifically there is a need to create a safe, convenient and clear East-West route for cyclists through the centre from Botley Road to the Plain and beyond. The current pedestrian and cycling environment on Botley Road as you enter the city centre is not considered to be safe or attractive by University walkers and cyclists. Short term measures to address these issues, not dependent on the train station redevelopment, are urged.
- The University also supports a cycle path from Cowley Road to Headington via Warneford Meadow and a foot and cycle bridge across the Thames aligned with Jackdaw Lane to connect South and East Oxford. The University requests that these key routes be specifically referenced in the policy document with an associated works programme.
- Where it would contribute to increased cycle route safety the University may consider allowing cycle access through some areas of University land.
- The development of an expanded cycle hire scheme in Oxford is strongly supported and could provide a suitable travel option for many staff, researchers and students who have a need to travel between sites during the working day. Approximately 1,600 daily inter-site trips are undertaken between the centre of Oxford and the various Headington sites and 11,500 inter site journeys by staff and students per day within the ring road.
- Such a scheme would also provide an alternative to the numerous bicycles left at the train station by commuters and by students in public cycle parking racks near to their colleges. The diagrammatic reference in the consultation documents to deliver this in the 2020 – 2025 window is noted but the University urges a much higher profile for this scheme within the policy document and clearer signposting on programme and strategy.
- The University welcomes consideration of cycle parking at Bus Rapid Transit stops and at major transport interchanges but would support further measures to facilitate door-to-door sustainable trips. External racks or cycle storage on new and existing buses of all kinds would increase the reach of the public transport network and encourage modal shift away from taxi and private car transport.
- Further in support of the above, a number of University commuters use the existing Park & Ride sites for park and cycle access to the city. Should Park & Ride sites be moved further out of the city this option would be less attractive or eliminated. Consideration

should be given to retaining some of the parking as a park and cycle provision, potentially in conjunction with an extended cycle hire scheme.

## Demand Management

The University has a preference for co-locating departments and services where possible. It also has appropriate IT provision to allow staff to access files and email remotely in a secure manner, as well as flexible working policies to facilitate home working. The University is therefore supportive of the policies to improve internet and mobile connectivity across the County.

The University is opposed to the introduction of a blanket work place charging levy for the following reasons:

- The University (as noted in the consultation documents) already charges staff to park at work. Charges take an important account of salary and revenue is hypothecated and spent on targeted sustainable transport initiatives for University staff and students with little loss of benefit to administration cost.
- University parking is already on a significant downward trend in response to planning policies and drives to increase the efficiency of space usage in the city centre.
- The consultation documents state that: 'the abundance of free workplace parking within the city is a significant threat to achieving the step-change required to avoid the considerable negative impacts of growth', and 'that a) there are many times more workplace parking spaces in the city than public parking spaces and b) car trips to workplace parking spaces are generally made at peak times, there would be clear benefits in being able to influence the use of these spaces.' Though this may be accurate for specific areas the University questions the accuracy of this with regard to the areas (particularly in the centre of the city) where the majority of its parking is located. A blanket policy is inappropriate where such clear disparity is evident and any policy must be developed with a clearer statistical evidence base.
- The summary policy document introduces the concept by noting that; 'In some cases, making public transport more attractive will not be enough to deter car use, and the cost of premium space in the city centre will be such that the introduction of a Workplace Parking Levy or other constraint may become inevitable'. This suggests charging is *considered* simultaneously or subsequent to public transport improvements which the University would support. Timelines later in the documents place new park and ride facilities and Bus Rapid Transit as following the implementation of workplace parking in 2020. This is contradictory, concerning and needs clarification.
- The documents highlight that, 'traffic flows into Oxford city centre have reduced by 24% since 1993.' This suggests that improved public transport, cycling and walking facilities are a strong and successful driver for reducing traffic flows and supports the deployment of further improvements before workplace parking charging is considered. This is likely to be particularly the case for the step changes in access to the Eastern Arc proposed in the documents, which the University welcomes.

- A proposed workplace parking scheme in Bristol was cancelled and the only implemented scheme in Nottingham has experienced significant issues. In particular, the need to implement, administer and police a wide ranging residents parking scheme to manage displacement parking calls into question the significant potential revenue benefit that any scheme could bring to the £1.2 billion cost of the policy proposals.
- A significant proportion of parking spaces, particularly of those operated by colleges, are allocated to low paid staff, those working unsociable hours and to parents of school age children whose ability to work is dependent on journey flexibility not supported by existing public transport. There is no evidence that workplace parking charges can be nuanced enough to take account of the needs of these groups and that they will not disadvantage their ability to take up employment in the city.

The University requests that, in all places where reference is made to its own workplace parking policies in the final policy documents, it is made clear that it opposes the proposal for a universal, County Council administered system. Should the County elect to pursue the policy the University requests that the above points are given due consideration, that alternatives such as congestion charging that do not penalise off-peak use and unsociable hours workers are evaluated in detail and that an exemption for employers already operating successful charging systems is included.

## **Planning & Development**

The University seeks to ensure accessibility for all of its sites and welcomes the reaffirmation of a commitment to development close to sustainable travel options. Further clarification is however sought on some aspects of the consultation documents:

- The University welcomes efforts to ensure development plays its part in delivering appropriate and proportionate sustainable transport in its local area but seeks reassurance on the potential for retrospective charges. The documents state that, 'Where the cumulative impact of a number of developments in an area over the plan period will require improvements to transport infrastructure and services, all developments will be expected to make a contribution towards the wider improvements. The contribution from each development will be linked to its transport impact and the transport need it generates. This contribution will be additional to any works or contributions aimed at resolving any particular problems caused by the development alone.' Incremental development in an area is often not foreseeable and further detail on how this might be implemented must be forthcoming before the University could support this policy. It currently presents as having the potential to act as a suppressant for essential development and economic growth.
- The University has development sites with Section 106 agreements in place and seeks confirmation and clarity that policies in respect of financing public transport will not be pursued in addition to existing agreements.
- In other Local Authority areas the requirements in CIL for developers to ensure viability would appear to imply that the amounts of cash coming forward for transport in the future are likely to be less than they have under the previous system of using Section 106 for developer contributions. Transport will potentially be competing with a range of other infrastructure requirements for a share of a smaller pot. Assurance is sought that this



change in funding landscape has been considered in the potential financing options to deliver the proposed transport improvements.

## Freight

The University welcomes the identification of freight as a key risk area for traffic, cyclist safety, the unimpeded movement of public transport and air quality in the city.

- The University is keen to continue to work with the City and County Councils on further developing delivery and service plans for University sites and exploring alternative options such as delivery consolidation centres on the outskirts of the city and using electric vehicles for the 'last mile'.
- The University would give strong support to the proposal to re-use Park & Ride sites as freight consolidation centres (alongside measures in support of cycling identified previously).
- The University confirms its support for policy promoting increased use of hybrid or electric fleet vehicles and notes the imminent deployment of electric vehicles to service aspects of work across its estate.
- The expected increase in light commercial vehicle traffic on a national level looks to present a significant risk to the success of many policies if left unaddressed for the city. A clear strategy is required to address this as a priority and should form part of the final policy documents.

In conclusion the University welcomes a set of consultation documents that signal a dramatic step change in the vision for transport in Oxford and Oxfordshire. The University's Strategic Plan seeks to identify effective ways for the University to contribute more to public policy making, and to the cultural, social and economic life of the city of Oxford and the Oxfordshire region and there are clear opportunities to work with the County to deliver on this important institutional target.

The University looks forward to working with the County on the points raised above to deliver an improved transport network to support the economic development of the County. The consultation documents reference further updates as options are developed and the University looks forward to the timetable for these and for progress reviews of the final strategy.

Yours sincerely

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Dr Nick Brown

Chair of the University of Oxford Building and Estates Sub-Committee (BESC)