

Oxfordshire County Council: Local Transport and Connectivity Plan – Engagement Activity

Consultation response, by Planning Oxfordshire's
Environment and Transport Sustainably (POETS)

May 2020

POETS (Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably) is a small group of senior planning, environment and transport professionals and academics focussed primarily on planning and transport in oxfordshire. For more information go to (www.poetsplanningoxon.uk).

Summary of Key Points

This consultation invites views on many different ideas that might be included in Oxfordshire's new Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5). While most of these individually are desirable and are welcomed, they must not be seen in isolation from the larger picture into which they must fit. A proper strategic framework for the new plan needs to be established at the earliest possible date before too much attention is given to most of these elements.

Oxfordshire's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5) must

- a) present a comprehensive picture of transport in Oxfordshire as it is today and highlight current challenges and deficiencies both strategically and by locality
- b) review the failure of the County Council to deliver much of what was in LTP4 with an analysis of why this has been the case, including reporting back on its Goals and Objectives (to ensure it is not repeated with LTCP5)
- c) ensure that the Climate Emergency, and the need to make rapid progress towards decarbonisation, are at its heart
- d) recognise central government's assertion that active travel and public transport will be the natural first choice for travel, and central funding is only likely to flow for measures that support this
- e) increase substantially the amount of active travel (walking and cycling) while reducing the overall need and amount of travel by motorised vehicle
- f) learn lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic, notably that economic resilience is more important than economic growth, and that the public is ready and willing to adapt to change and would welcome less dependency on the private car
- g) recognise that "business as usual" providing for unconstrained growth in car travel is no longer an option but also that much uncertainty exists about the future
- h) ensure that in future the County Council will no longer be subservient to the demands for new development – and often without receiving the funds to provide essential infrastructure - but will instead require development to fit in with the County's policies and priorities or risk being denied consent to proceed
- i) establish a clearly defined spatial framework into which detail measures and components will fit
- j) set out clear and measureable objectives and targets against which progress will be measured on a regular basis (with at the minimum a comprehensive annual public report)
- k) define and develop a comprehensive core network for bus and rail services including those essential elements that will require financial support
- l) define and develop a comprehensive county-wide network of walking and cycle routes, prioritising the plans for growth areas especially Bicester and Didcot
- m) be bold in its ambition, preparation and presentation of the opportunities for change that the networks in k) and l) represent, such that they can be submitted to central government for funding as packages, making them more likely to receive the maximum possible funding than by seeking piecemeal support.

General Comments

Context

1. While this public engagement exercise is welcomed in principle, it is important that it is put into a proper context. While most of these individual elements are individually worth pursuing, the majority of them will have only a minimal impact and significance county-wide. The framework for the new Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5), needs to be clearly established at the earliest possible date, with the higher level objectives, principles and targets resolved before too much attention is given to many of the detail measures and ideas under consideration. There are some key themes that must be at the heart of the Plan's development, which are outlined in the following paragraphs.

The Climate Emergency & Air Pollution

2. The County Council has declared a climate emergency. Transport is a major contributor both to greenhouse gas emissions – which have actually been increasing - and airborne pollution. Addressing these will need to be at the heart of LTCP5. Government has adopted a Net Zero 2050 target and now launched a consultation on how transport must contribute. Through its document “Decarbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge” (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/878642/decarbonising-transport-setting-the-challenge.pdf) has initiated a consultation on development of a “Transport Decarbonisation Plan.”
3. While it presages a transition to electric propulsion across the transport spectrum, the DfT recognises that embedded carbon in the manufacture and maintenance of vehicles has to be addressed, as must be the source and transmission of electricity being fed through the National Grid. Airborne pollution, particularly from tyres and brakes, will not be reduced by a change of propulsion, and though potentially reduced by electric engines, communities will still be blighted by tyre and wind noise emanating from vehicles and by severance. Changing the method of propulsion will also do nothing to reduce congestion.
4. The end to unrestrained growth of motor vehicle traffic is clearly heralded in these words from Transport Secretary Grant Schapps' foreword: *“Public transport and active travel will be the natural first choice for our daily activities. We will use our cars less and be able to rely on a convenient, cost-effective and coherent public transport network.”*

The Covid-19 Pandemic

5. One of the very few helpful consequences of the current pandemic, has been to show us all how much improved our environment, health and well-being might be with less traffic on our roads. Noise has subsided, air quality is much improved and the intimidation and severance that arises from the presence of high traffic volumes dramatically reduced. It has been striking to observe how many people have been out walking and cycling, particularly families with children, who would never have ventured on to the county's roads in normal times.
6. There are immediate opportunities for the county council to take advantage of the current situation by reallocating roadspace to pedestrians and cyclists. For one example see the Brighton Argos <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/18439297.uks-first-covid-cycle-lane-open-brighton-hove/>). There is also however a key learning message that not only are people able to adapt to a world with less travel, but that many of them would positively welcome it. Whatever the mode of travel, at the heart of LTCP5 must be the need to reduce the need to travel, either as much or as far.

Resources

7. Little of the County Council's current Local Transport Plan (LTP4) has been implemented or even progressed. At its heart was the development of a new Bus Rapid Transport Network linking key nodes in the county with high quality, reliable services. Apart from some measures on the A40 corridor, little of this has been progressed even as far as draft proposals for consultation, and even there, measures to get buses through the major source of congestion, the Cutteslowe roundabout, have been conspicuous by their absence.
8. From the outside, this appears to stem from three factors – lack of political will, inadequate staff resource and constraints on availability of funding. (How significant is it that the "Introduction to the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan" document has been prepared by consultants rather than council staff?).
9. This has created a vacuum which has been filled largely by developers. Many planning applications coming forward, particularly outside of Oxford, have not been opposed despite being in unsustainable travel locations and also been given consent on the basis that they require all new traffic to be accommodated by notionally increasing the capacity of the road network, as opposed to imposing any restraint or significant measures to achieve any large increase in non-car travel.
10. The consequences of this have been not only additional traffic, congestion and pollution across the county, but an increasing shortfall in the money available to offset the other impacts of development. The Oxfordshire Growth Board has identified a backlog in funding for infrastructure in the county of around £10bn.
11. The new Plan must ensure, as far as it is possible, that new development in the county cannot proceed without being consistent with a new approach of seeking to reduce travel overall and increasing the proportion of travel by non-car modes, but crucially only if all the necessary financial obligations are met. Where insufficient finance is available, or mitigation measures are impractical, there needs to be a mechanism to review a development and reduce its size and scale accordingly.

Uncertainty

12. "Business as usual", providing for unconstrained growth in car travel is clearly now not an option. Given the need for radical changes in approach together with so many uncertainties about the immediate future however, some flexibility and scope to adapt will need to be built in to LTCP5. A particular lesson from the Covid-19 pandemic is the need for economic resilience to be prioritised above economic growth. Key unknowns at present are:
 - a) the medium- and longer-term impacts arising from the Covid-19 pandemic
 - b) central government policies to reduce greenhouse emissions, probably including a new regime for charging for road use (as revenue for fuel duty declines)
 - c) the scale of population and economic growth planned for Oxfordshire (which currently exceed anything seen in the past)
 - d) the pace of change towards less personal ownership of cars (more shared ownership/car clubs etc) and the consequent need for less parking space both near homes and elsewhere
 - e) the possible migration towards autonomous vehicles
 - f) the funding available both for capital and revenue expenditure.
13. While the overarching objectives and policies to be pursued will need to be clearly and unambiguously stated, implementation of the Plan and any proposed measures will need to be subject to frequent review. There needs to be close working with the District Councils to ensure development plans are complementary and consistent with LTCP5 and national guidance. There will also need to be mechanisms for intervention if

infrastructure investment and resources are not available and cannot keep pace with development. In such circumstances, development applications would need to be reconsidered.

Essential Components

14. LTCP5 will need to identify, and where possible quantify, the current problems and constraints, taking account also of committed new development. The Plan must set out clearly the higher level objectives, such as reducing the need for travel, increasing walking, cycling, establishing a high quality public transport network that comprehensively covers the whole county, improving air quality, enhancing health and well-being, reducing road casualties and fear of traffic, reducing severance of communities, and minimising isolation of communities (or sections of society). It must clearly state that new development will be opposed unless it can be undertaken where excellent walking, cycling and public transport facilities are available, to ensure car dependency is not perpetuated.
15. The Plan will spell out the range of measures it will undertake to deliver these objectives – how it will improve and expand public transport services, how it will seek to rebalance the costs of travel between modes with consideration of measures such as congestion charging and workplace parking levies, how and where it will seek to physically restrict traffic movements, where and how it will provide improved facilities for walking and cycling, and enhance the public realm and improve conditions in residential streets.
16. The Plan must also set out some clearly quantified targets so we can judge how well the objectives are being achieved.
17. There will need to be a well-defined spatial framework, making clear as far as possible where action will be taken and complementary to and consistent with the development of the Oxfordshire 2050 Strategic Spatial Plan.

Key Messages

18. To be successful, LTCP5 must be:
 - a) ambitious in its aspirations
 - b) bold in its formulation and breadth
 - c) challenging to central government with regard to funding
 - d) realistic, having regard to the need to be practical, affordable and deliverable within the plan period
 - e) address the travel needs of the whole county and not just routes in to Oxford.
19. Central Government increasingly offers funding towards initiatives that have a clear and bold purpose and can offer real change. Given government's Decarbonising Transport agenda there are likely to be many opportunities for Oxfordshire County Council to bid for substantial capital funds if it can align its ambition. There are lessons here from other parts of the country, such as the Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro network and the West Midlands "Midland Connect" concept. By packaging together a comprehensive public transport network, including bus, train and tram/guided bus, they are succeeding in sucking in much more funding than could be expected from a traditional piecemeal approach.
20. The new countywide cycle network needs to be clearly defined and published at the outset, so that the County Council is in a strong position to make early bids for government funds. (It was unhelpful not to have included a legible plan with this consultation).

Comments on Specific Topics

Active and Healthy Streets

Q1. Cycle Streets

21. Cycle Streets would make a significant contribution towards increasing cycle use. Many cyclists are currently intimidated by other traffic, and parents are reluctant to let their children use many of the roads in the county, whether accompanied or not. A more relaxed and less threatening environment would greatly increase the attractiveness of cycling.
22. At present in the UK however, many motorists perceive cyclists to be a nuisance and are frustrated if they cannot overtake them easily. This often results in dangerous manoeuvres and intimidating behaviour. If the role of cycles in a cycling street is to become accepted and respected, it will require a step change in driver behaviour and will be a major educational challenge.
23. Their successful operation could become more self-enforcing if the numbers cycling increases and begin to dominate the street.
24. To encourage higher cycling rates, we must also transform the junctions at the end of any cycle street or road link. Currently most busy junctions in Oxfordshire represent a major impediment to all but the most confident cyclist. The dominance of, and priority afforded to, the private car in these locations will have to be curtailed.

Q2. Greenways

25. Greenways are an excellent concept, which will both encourage active travel and enhance health and well-being by drawing more people into the natural environment.
26. They have the potential to get more people out of their cars, particularly where they are complemented by other measures to restrict, or reduce the roadspace available to, the private car.

Q3. Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans

27. The importance of facilitating and encouraging more cycling and walking especially for utility purposes in the new circumstances cannot be over emphasised. The targets identified are unnecessarily modest and should be more ambitious. For example the small target increase in the proportion of 5 to 10 year-old children walking to school and the absence of a similar target for older children. Perhaps this is reflected in schools not being identified as important destinations in the definition of cycle networks.
28. The arrival of electric bicycles means that many potential routes with relatively steep gradients should no longer be seen as representing a barrier to cycling.
29. Without some definition of the practical components and design principles for each of the 4 categories of strategic cycleways described the application in practice will be difficult and unlikely to be effective. Strategies for growth areas particularly Bicester and Didcot are urgent. Not just because of the current emergency, but also because this could save money by identifying the infrastructure required to be met from developer funding.
30. It is very disappointing that no such plans are yet in place despite one being promised for Bicester last year.
31. All areas should have a plan, especially the urban areas. Provision of plans for the growth areas should be a very high priority. Not only will that secure the best arrangements for cycling and walking it will save money. The provisions can be secured as part of development and the high costs of retrofitting, as in Oxford, will be avoided.

32. Walking and cycling networks should be direct, convenient, and uninterrupted. At points of conflict with other transport modes pedestrians and cyclists should have priority, wherever practicable.
33. Walking and cycling can be made safer by adoption of the above principles plus the definition of specific and high design and maintenance standards for all categories of walking and cycling routes, and these need to be included in the Plan. Having more pedestrians and cyclists conspicuously on the roads will automatically reduce their vulnerability to other traffic as has been evident elsewhere in western Europe.

Q4. Low Traffic Neighbourhoods

34. There would be significant health and community coherence benefits.
35. Their successful introduction would be aided by comprehensive consultation within the locality and the building of a local consensus to overcome the inevitable concerns that some would have about their impacts. They would ideally be part of a proposal to reduce traffic levels in the vicinity to minimise the adverse impact of motorised traffic being displaced onto other streets.

Q5. SHIFT

36. The SHIFT project is commendable, but having to do this retrospectively merely helps to underline the past failure to deliver sustainable travel and integration. This concept needs to be adopted throughout the county and not just on main routes in to Oxford. Priority should be given to encouraging active travel by providing cycle parking as opposed to parking for cars which would in most cases be problematic and land-hungry.

Q6. Parklets

37. In essence, these represent the myriad of different ways that roadspace could be better used if the demand for parking and movement of vehicles is reduced. Differing elements would suit different locations and local input to what might be most appropriate would be desirable.
38. There are many streets where the volume of parking space should be reduced and reallocated for different purposes, most notably St Giles and Broad Street in Oxford. Some localities would be better suited to simply making more space available for the movement of pedestrians or cyclists as opposed to new items of street furniture. In other localities, eg the southern facade of the Westgate centre, a more active frontage and activity could contribute to enhancement of the public realm.
39. The most obvious way they could contribute to active and healthy travel – apart from the indirect benefit of reducing space for vehicles – would probably be as areas for cycle parking and possibly buggy parking. They could also contribute to a more attractive public realm by incorporating other street furniture.

Q7. Strategic Active Travel Network

40. This should be an essential component of Oxfordshire's transport network. It will however require a lot more than a few notional lines on a map to be effective. While this looks to be provide the core of a future network, it will only be effective if the whole length of a route is attractive and safe for pedestrians and cyclists. A length of cycle track for example, will be considerably less effective if it is interrupted repeatedly by junctions at which the user has to give way to other vehicles. Crucially the design of any significant road junctions will have a substantial impact on the attractiveness of the network.

41. Public transport routes must be distinguished from and only infrequently combined with cycling and walking routes. Clear standards of provision need to be defined and identified for each route category and each section of a route.
42. A well designed network will not only serve to get people from A to B by a sustainable mode, it will also open up much more of the county for leisure use, without requiring the use of a car.
43. The proposals should be supported by a financial assessment and implementation programme with clear target delivery dates.

Public Transport

Q9. Bus Strategy

44. The analysis presented shows a sound understanding of many of the kinds of steps needed to achieve an increase in use of buses and improve the travel experience for public transport users. It makes no reference however, to the isolation experienced in many parts of Oxfordshire by the lack of a comprehensive bus service. Without this, it is very difficult for people in many parts of the county to play a full role in society and access work opportunities or leisure and health facilities.
45. There is however, little new in the text and it broadly represents the policies that have been in place for the last 25 years. Sadly, the reality is that things have been moving in the wrong direction for much of that time. New development has been allowed to take place all over the county in locations that have encouraged car dependency, with very little positive provision for public transport. Outside of Oxford, this has often taken place in locations with little or no existing bus service, requiring substantial revenue contributions towards short-term revenue support and little prospect of long-term commercial viability.
46. There are many proposed sites in the current round of District Council Local Plans that fall in to this category and as a rule the county council is failing to stand up and object to them eg Chalgrove Airfield. The approach frequently appears to be one of ensuring that unconstrained increased motor vehicle use can be accommodated by requiring capacity increases on the network, as opposed to requiring developers to contribute to the objective of encouraging use by non-car modes and reducing dependency on the private car.
47. A perfect case study for the failure of current planning is the Northern Gateway development located at a critical node on the transport network, and a key location on the proposed Bus Rapid Transit Network (BRT). As a major development site this had the potential to make a substantial contribution to delivering the BRT, but in amongst a plethora of new lengths of carriageway, the bus lane from the A40 will stop short of the junction. This condemns any buses on that corridor to continued delays and congestion, when a dedicated route for buses should have been established to take them through the junction.
48. In terms of specific measures, in addition to the ideas already suggested the new Plan should:
 - a) ensure every opportunity is taken to segregate buses from other traffic and/or congestion when development proposals comes forward
 - b) ensure development is only allowed in locations which can be efficiently served by a commercially viable bus service and there can be a relatively low modal share for the car
 - c) establish the restoration of an effective network of bus services in the more rural parts of the county, with financial support where necessary

- d) on busy corridors – and particularly on routes serving central Oxford - strive for an early agreement with bus operators that would achieve 100% off-bus ticketing, so that the delays to passengers and congestion resulting from stationary buses can be greatly reduced and the operators' timetables recast
 - e) by taking complementary measures to reduce general traffic levels and congestion, speed up services so that the same bus can make more trips.
49. Oxfordshire needs to show a much greater commitment to public transport than at present and be much bolder in its approach. Not only should it re-commit to the establishment of a high quality Bus Rapid Transit Network, it must also develop proposals in more detail and actively seek funding for it from central government as a major scheme, rather than hoping some scraps from piecemeal development opportunities will come forward as has been the pattern in recent years. There is much to be envied in the way Cambridgeshire has addressed a comparable challenge and pursued the Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro concept.

Q10. Rail Corridor Study

50. POETS fully supports the scope and content of the Rail Corridor Study. Substantial additional patronage would accrue and in particular many of the proposals eg for new stations and restoration of the Cowley Branch Line, could help unlock development pressures without increasing car use.
51. The County Council needs to continue to put pressure on central Government and Network Rail to progress this package as quickly as possible. There may well be merit in incorporating the rail corridor improvements and the Bus Rapid Transit network into a consolidated "Metro" package similar to that under development in Cambridgeshire or the West Midlands. This might give it a higher profile with central government and better prospects for future funding.

Q11. Park & Ride

52. The current Park & Ride network has enabled Oxford to grow and accommodate more development, more employment and more visitors than would otherwise have been possible. In so doing it has reduced the pressure for development on the periphery of Oxford, particularly the Green Belt. It will continue to have an important role in the future.
53. Park & Ride facilities in Oxford have helped offset the adverse consequences of centralising health facilities in (the congested suburb) Headington.
54. Clearly it is preferable to maximise the number of trips into Oxford that are made in their entirety by public transport or by bicycle. Oxfordshire however, has many dispersed settlements which either have very sparse or non-existent public transport opportunities. Unless and until, an effective quality public transport network can be established across the county, there will still be a need for Park & Ride services.
55. Park & Ride car parks in Oxford and in other towns could also become a focus for active travel networks, designed to encourage people to walk and cycle after parking.
56. Though currently primarily focussed on journeys into Oxford, carefully located Park & Ride car parks may well have a role to play in other towns, to complement other measures to reduce traffic volumes and congestion.
57. The proposed Bus Rapid Transit Network envisages a number of nodes where services will interchange – including with rail stations - and where, for areas not served by public transport, some Park & Ride facilities could usefully be provided. The pricing of Park & Ride should be sensitive to ensure it does not undercut alternative public transport fares, but could usefully be set to be cheaper than the alternative of driving closer to one's destination.

58. POETS believes the previous study into remote Park & Rides is now totally out of date as a consequence of changes to patterns of development arising from the emerging and recent Local Plans. While there may remain a case for more remote Park & Ride facilities, the whole strategy will also need to be developed alongside the rest of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan and the inevitable national decisions on the future charging of vehicles as income from fuel duty disappears.

Climate Emergency and Air Quality

Q12. Climate Emergency and Transport

59. Tackling carbon emissions must be embedded in everything Oxfordshire does and the measures mentioned can all make a contribution to the overall effectiveness of this. This will also be necessary to comply with government policies and secure financial support.

Q13. Air Quality

60. Improving air quality must be embedded in everything Oxfordshire does and the measures mentioned can all make a contribution to the overall effectiveness of this.

Q14. Green Infrastructure

61. At present there is clearly too little of this and linkage within and from some urban areas to open spaces and the countryside is inadequate. All of the suggestions can make a contribution.
62. There are many areas of relative deprivation in the county, which should be a priority for establishing active travel corridors within urban areas and into the open space nearby. Barton, Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys on the edge of Oxford are examples of where this could be readily achieved.

Q15. School Streets

63. These would definitely be worth pursuing around some schools. Identifying where and what other measures might be beneficial should be part of a collaboration between the county council and schools as part of routine development and regular updating of School Travel Plans (a function which the County Council used to pro-actively undertake).

Area Strategies

Q16. Connecting Oxford

64. POETS submitted a comprehensive response to the Connecting Oxford proposals last autumn, and it is available to read here:
https://www.poetsplanningoxon.uk/POETS_Connecting_Oxford_Consultation_Response_Oct_19.pdf.
65. In essence, POETS supports the thrust of the proposals and the need to apply demand management, but at this stage feels that the measures outlined will probably be inadequate to achieve the reduction in traffic levels needed to achieve the step change in Oxford sought. The POETS submission also sets out a number of complementary measures, particularly related to the development process countywide, which will be needed alongside the restraint in central Oxford if the sizeable switch away from the car towards cycling and public transport is to be achieved and which tackling the Climate Emergency demands.

Q17. Area Transport Strategies

66. The transport/land use strategy should have as key objectives the reduction of the need to travel, encouragement of the use of sustainable travel modes and discouragement of the use of private motor vehicles, possibly encouraging more mixed use developments.
67. It will be essential for the Area Strategies to incorporate these basic tenets. Although it will be important for them to be flexible and responsive to change they need to set out a framework, showing the relationships between transport and land uses (existing and proposed) for each area. This needs to be illustrated by clear plans and an understanding of how each Area Strategy fits together in the overall picture for Oxfordshire (and beyond).
68. To date, most of the expenditure on Area Strategies seems to have gone on measures to increase capacity for private cars, contrary to the declared priorities.
69. It is important for residents and businesses to be properly engaged in development of the strategy for their area, rather than consulted piecemeal on individual schemes.
70. The travel networks need to be arranged so that cycle, walking and public transport networks are conveniently accessed from all homes, employment centres, shopping, schools etc. and arranged so that they are direct, continuous and uninterrupted. The motor vehicle networks should be subsidiary and less convenient, especially for local trips.

Q18. Transport Corridor Connectivity

71. As a starting point a clear description of problems now and expected, should be set out. Corridor strategies need to be incorporated in the overall strategy for the County and not considered in isolation one from another or road from rail.
72. The guiding principles should be to facilitate the transfer of freight to rail and to prioritise public transport, cycling and walking. The thinking in relation to the A420 is welcomed and along with the addition of active management especially of HGVs and measures on alternative rail corridors to facilitate freight transfer, should be applied generally.
73. A shift from the car towards more use of the bus will require reliable, regular services and perceived travel time and cost advantages over using a private vehicle. Hence, the need for bus priority which should be continuous into and out of main centres and wherever they are subject to congestion and delay. Where appropriate, the introduction of complementary measures would also be necessary, such as traffic restrictions, parking charges and/or road pricing to change the balance of attraction in favour of public transport.

Q19. Regional Transport Network

74. Uncertainty over the emerging policies and proposals for the Arc, both in transport provision and in development terms, reinforces the case for the approach, described in the introduction, of prioritisation, flexibility and review. Fundamental to the council's approach needs to be support for the East - West Rail link and opposition to the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway (which would be totally contrary to the policies and priorities set out in your introduction). The council however also needs to understand and respond to the transport and environmental consequences of the government's – as yet ill-defined -development aspirations for the Arc.
75. Oxfordshire County Council should do all it can to remain a significant regional authority and it is crucial for effective local democracy and support that it retains its independence. It must however take an active role in the other transport and strategic bodies in the region and ensure, so far as possible, that they understand and respect Oxfordshire's policies and priorities. The county council should seek to play a leading role in shaping the regional agenda.

76. There needs to be a change in emphasis in the organisation of regional transport networks to encourage sustainable travel and discourage motor vehicle use. The East-West Rail link will provide improved connectivity across both the Arc and the EEH area in a sustainable way, not least the potential for it to transfer considerable volumes of freight from road to rail. The Council must continue to press for the new link to be electrified from the outset (along with the Didcot to Oxford rail corridor).
77. Clearly there are convenience and potential economic advantages in better physical links between Oxford and Cambridge. The proposed rail link can accommodate much of this in a sustainable way, whereas building a new road would be self-defeating by encouraging more traffic - and ultimately more congestion - and bring huge environmental disbenefits. The Council's opposition to a new major road link is supported. The Covid-19 pandemic has reemphasised how much can be achieved without the need for physical links.

Q20. Zero Emission Zone

78. POETS supports the principles behind the Oxford Zero Emission Zone and anticipates responding to the forthcoming consultation. Early introduction of the city centre traffic restrictions in the Connecting Oxford proposals, would also help ensure a dramatic improvement in air quality.

Q21. Local Community Action on Transport

79. Involving and engaging the local community in developing local schemes is highly desirable, provided there is a clear understanding at the outset that measures have to be consistent with council policies and objectives.
80. To be successful, the council must be able guarantee staff resource and funding, otherwise it will just lead to frustration and cynicism.

Connectivity

Q22. Digital Infrastructure Strategy

81. There is clearly scope for better information to both reduce travel and encourage the use of more sustainable modes. The way in which information is accessed and presented however, is fundamental to how effective it will be in meeting wider objectives and contributing to well-being.

Q23. Network Management and Coordination

82. POETS welcomes the proposed change in approach to managing traffic on the network. In the past, too much emphasis has been given to reducing delays to general traffic which, in a situation where demand is naturally suppressed by congestion, has simply served to encourage more use of cars. If the opposite approach is taken and general traffic is delayed to facilitate freer movement for buses and bicycles, the overall carrying capacity of the network - as measured by person trips – will be maximised.
83. Providing too much information about the availability of parking spaces is also likely to result in more car trips and needs to be handled with care. Clearly restricting parking in sensitive locations and ensuring charges are appropriate are part of a sensible package of network management.
84. These principles should not just be applied in Oxford or within other town centres, they are equally applicable across the whole of Oxfordshire (including the A34). There is a very real danger that giving too much information to motorists about where and when a route is uncongested will also encourage more car use and often on unsuitable roads. (The exception to this is of course at a time of major disruption after an incident or when road works are being undertaken).

85. Establishing bus priority measures on roads such as the A34, A40 or A41 can be expected to achieve an overall increase in capacity measured in person trips, while at the same time reducing emissions and noise.

Q24. Highways Asset Management Plan

86. Much of what is proposed here is sensible and proportionate. It is unfortunate that central government consistently underfunds this essential service.
87. There is however a case for ensuring the surface on primary bus routes is maintained to a very high standard as rough-riding creates safety hazards for passengers who are often standing or on the move as buses leave or approach stops. It also discourages people from use, particularly if they have some physical impairment.
88. Maintenance of cycle lanes and cycle tracks also need to be given much higher priority. On carriageway cycle lanes, are often the worst part of the whole road surface and frequently contain sunken or misaligned metalwork/covers.
89. Segregated cycle tracks are also routinely neglected and the maintenance regime for them needs a total overhaul. They are regularly engulfed in roadside growth due to lack of maintenance and then when bushes and trees are cut back, the debris is often left strewn across the track, resulting in punctures and other hazards. The tracks are often bounded by spiky shrubs like hawthorn which guarantees spates of punctures when cuttings are not cleared up properly. Design of cycle tracks needs to evolve to fully take into account their future maintenance implications.
90. With regard to patching and repairing potholes, the County needs to get much smarter at responding quickly to these items as soon as they are reported and marked out. Neglected potholes can result in damage to motor vehicles but are potentially fatal to cyclists.

Q25. Freight Strategy

91. Freight vehicles have an important role and there is a delicate balance between size and efficiency. There is little prospect of HGVs being powered by anything other than petrol/diesel in the next 20 years. It is important therefore to look imaginatively at how goods can be delivered into our towns and villages away from the major road network, where HGVs belong. Bespoke solutions - such as transshipment - should be explored, certainly in Oxford and larger towns, to seek to achieve a reduction in the size of goods vehicles. Smaller vehicles can either be pedal powered or electric and possibly financial incentives and exemptions from traffic restrictions will have a role to play.
92. With increasing purchases being made on the internet, there has been a significant increase in vans on our roads. One loaded van, could replace several car trips, so there is scope here for some efficiency gains, but it will need careful organisation and management to achieve the maximum community benefit.
93. POETS is pleased to support the objective of getting more freight traffic on to the Rail network. A sizeable proportion of the goods traffic on the A34 in Oxfordshire originates from Southampton Docks and is headed to the midlands and north of England. More freight paths on the Didcot to Oxford to Birmingham corridor and via the East-West Rail link to the west coast, midland, and east coast mainlines could result in a substantial reduction of vehicle numbers on the A34, bringing a huge environmental and safety benefit.
94. The potential for transfer of goods between road and rail in Oxfordshire should be explored with the Cowley branch line and MOD Bicester being possible sites. Trials in London exploring the practicalities and economics of carrying goods at night into town centres rail stations for onward local distribution should be followed closely.

Q26. A Smart County

95. The arrival of the digital age has huge implications for the way we live our lives and for transport. The Covid-19 pandemic is clearly going to accelerate the movement towards more home working and reducing the need for people to make daily journeys to their workplace. Provided the digital infrastructure is in place the need for movement will be much reduced, particularly at peak times. Proposals such as building an Expressway between Oxford and Cambridge to accommodate additional movements, were always misplaced and self-defeating, but in today's context simply appear absurd. As has been stated elsewhere, you don't need an HGV to transfer ideas.
96. This change will also have profound land-use implications. Falling demand for office and retail space will offer new opportunities for housing to be brought back into our town centres. Having people living closer to their workplace, schools, health and leisure facilities will all reduce the need for travel and in particular allow many existing car journeys to be replaced by short walking or cycling trips, provided the road networks are adapted to allow this to happen. It will also reduce the pressure for more development outside our existing urban areas and in particular in the Green Belt.

Q27. Living Labs

97. The Living Lab concept has the potential to contribute to the success of Oxfordshire and its residents' well-being. It is fundamentally important however that it is used to support the core objectives and policies and not to inadvertently undermine them.

Q28. Motorcycles

98. There is a role for motor-cycles in Oxfordshire, but it has to be recognised that noise and emissions currently make them very intrusive.
99. On corridors where active travel is being encouraged, it is likely that many potential users would find faster moving heavier vehicles, such as motor-cycles, intimidating and discourage use. There might need to be a presumption against allowing motor-cycles in such localities and for the same reason they should not be permitted in bus lanes.