

Headington Transport Strategy Development

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Answers to Comments form

FINAL RESPONSE

Response ID #42815. Submitted on 11 Oct 2013 13:26 by Andrew Pritchard

What do you consider to be the transport issues and problems in the study area (includes Barton, Headington, Marston, Risinghurst and Wood Farm)?

On behalf of the Oxford Civic Society's Transport Group, of which I am the convenor, I/we wish to make three high level comments in response to this Invitation to Comment. We have not commented on detailed aspects about transport in Headington as this is best done by local groups and residents.

What solutions do you think could form part of a strategy to address the transport issues identified?

Absence of wider strategy

This invitation to comment differs from the normal process since at the moment there is nothing substantive to respond to. Instead we are asked to submit perceived problems and suggested improvements. In one way this is to be welcomed, as all too often the public are only involved in consulting on the details of schemes, not on which schemes get put forward or implemented.

However, we are very concerned that the HTS is being carried out BEFORE developing a clear strategy for the city, the Eastern Arc, or indeed the whole matter of people movement in the eastern part of the County, including origins and destinations of journeys and the modes of transport used. The first question is therefore 'What are the wider planning and transport assumptions against which any proposals for Headington are to be assessed?' Are strategic choices embedded in these assumptions which really ought to be the subject of public debate before more detailed local issues are addressed? Is this not 'putting the cart before the horse'? We think it potentially a waste of money to make sub-optimal detailed changes in a small area whilst not planning changes at a broader level. We understand that this approach is driven by central government funding processes, but nevertheless feel it important to say this is wrong.

Non-holistic approaches

A less than optimal process can be seen at a more localised level. As an example, the scheme to improve the London Road between Headington and the A40 roundabout has the objective "to provide bus priority along this important route into Headington", which is a worthy objective. This hopefully will encourage more people to use buses, but if it reduces congestion on London Road it may also encourage more car journeys. For cyclists the scheme merely seeks "to maintain the current level of cycling provision without making the situation worse than it already is". This is an unworthy objective, especially given the County and City policies of encouraging cycling as a modal choice. The needs of pedestrians (fit commuters, parents with children and buggies, school and college students, shopper, the elderly, the disabled) are not considered at all.

We believe this is wrong, and urge the County to address this issue in any future Transport Strategy. Transport Plans and Strategies should be developed that improve the quality of life for all, whether they are car drivers, bus users, cyclists or pedestrians. This needs a step change in the way transport schemes are drawn up.

The set of small things is vital

We also believe that the quality of life in an area depends not just on how long-term

strategies develop and are implemented, but also on getting all the small things right. For example, even the newly rebuilt sections of London Road suffer from puddles, so pedestrians get splashed by passing vehicles. Sometimes unrepaired collapsed drains are the cause, other times the profile of the re-laid road surface is to blame - a failure of engineering supervision.

Another example - signs have been installed along the 'North-East quiet cycle route'. Quite a few of them are in the wrong place, at the wrong height, or point in the wrong direction, which shows a lack of attention to detail. These are just two of many examples.

If we want to get significantly more people choosing to cycle or to walk instead of going by car or bus, we need to make walking and cycling a MUCH better experience. This means both designing schemes with all users in mind from the outset, and caring enough to get the little things right. Get them wrong, or ignore them, and people's experiences won't improve, and behaviour won't change. Get them right, and we might achieve something worthwhile.