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27th March 2015

Connecting Oxfordshire – Local Transport Plan 4 Response

Dear Sir,

Harwell Campus Bicycle Users Group (HarBUG) would like to comment on the Connecting Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4).

We would like to record our support for the response to LTP4 from the Oxfordshire Cycling Network, of which HarBUG is a member.

The HarBUG response focusses on the Science Vale Cycling Strategy and Science Vale Area Strategy.

We fully support the vision for cycling in the Science Vale Cycling Strategy.

There are several key issues we think need to be addressed in order to deliver a successful cycling strategy (apart from financial). The issues we have witnessed include:

- Landowner Issues.

The first cycle infrastructure projects, the Winnaway and Backhill Tunnel projects, are being prevented from starting by landowner objections. Both projects are late and, to date, have not started.

Landowner issues were also preventing cycle paths crossing from Grove into the Grove airfield development.

We believe that the County Council should take a more robust stand with landowners, where there are no reasonable grounds for objections. If necessary use compulsory purchase orders.

- Timing the delivery of infrastructure.

The best chance to change people's transport habits is when they move house or change jobs. With the growth in housing and jobs in the Science Vale, we should be in a good position to facilitate changes in transport habits. To enable this, cycling infrastructure needs to be delivered at a very early stage in new developments.

Great Western Park, in Didcot, has failed to achieve its transport ambitions. From day 1, good quality roads were provided but there were no convenient routes for cyclists out of the development. Great Western Park now has parking problems and almost all existing residents use their car to travel around Didcot.



- Co-ordination with developers / lack of a master-plan.

Development in the Science Vale is happening at a very fast pace and planning for cycling is not keeping up.

Trying to change development plans once permission is granted is difficult. Retro-fitting cycle infrastructure is costly and rarely achieves an acceptable outcome.

HarBUG has attended major planning consultation events and each time we ask 'How can I cycle from your development to the shops', the response ranges from a shrug of the shoulders to 'it's the County Council's responsibility.

The lack of a master plan has also resulted in S106/S278 agreements that do not meet the actual needs of cyclists.

The B4493, between Didcot and Harwell village is a good example of how things can go wrong without co-ordination and a master plan.
- Out of date ideas on the design of cycle infrastructure.

Shared use paths appears to be the default solution for cycle infrastructure in Oxfordshire.

Whilst shared use paths do have a use, there are usually better solutions. Shared use paths even with white line segregation, are not popular with either cyclists or pedestrians alike.

If the Science Vale is to realise the vision stated in the Cycling Strategy then new thinking is required for the design of cycle infrastructure.

The Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan also states that 'the Science Vale will have a cycle network comparable with the best European practice'.
- Political Leadership

It is also essential that new thinking and leadership at a political level is required in order that the vision is delivered.

Cycling will complement the road network, offering an alternative and a reduction in congestion. However there will be areas where there could be perceived conflicts of interest between infrastructures. Example could include: 20mph zones, removing parking spaces to make space for cycling and blocking off side road through routes to allow safe routes for cyclists.

Some or all of these types of measures are necessary to achieve coherent cycle infrastructure but they can be controversial with potential protests from residents and road users.

We require local politicians to support plans for a Science Vale Cycling Network and ensure that they are delivered and not compromised by short term or short sighted local objections.



The Premium Routes Approach

We support the concept of the premium cycle routes and feeder routes for the Science Vale Cycle Network.

Complementary Measures

We support the complementary measures listed, although we would like to highlight the following:

- We hope that network maps will be made available so that they can be embedded into other websites i.e. the HarBUG website.
- Cycle training should be listed as a complementary measure. We would like to see training courses available for business parks, where training can take place at lunchtimes.

Routes and Schemes

We have been consulting with the County Council about the premium cycle routes from the Science Vale towns to the business parks. We look forward to commenting on the results from the consultations.

We believe that additional premium routes should be included in the Science Vale towns:

- Wantage to Grove route.
- Cross Grove Link – Ensuring a fast connection from the A338 through to Grove Airfield.
- Didcot Ladygrove Link – Connecting Didcot North East to the town.
- Didcot West Access – Connecting Didcot through Great Western Park and Valley Park.

The Corridors

We support the identification of the main corridors. We would like to make the following comments:

- On the Wantage to Harwell Campus, we would be cautious about the statement concerning the route along the A417. We don't think that this route should be included in the section concerning premium cycle routes. HarBUG does not believe it to be a priority route.
- On the Abingdon to Harwell Campus, improvements to the B4017 should be made as many cyclists from Abingdon to the Harwell Campus use this route. An alternative route should be formed out of other upgrades i.e. Abingdon to Milton Park, Backhill Tunnel, Cow Lane through Valley Park and the Winnaway.
- The Didcot to Harwell Campus section makes no mention of the Sustrans 544 route which is another important route.
- The Didcot to Milton Park route makes no mention of Power Station roundabout, which is a main reason people cite for not cycling to Milton Park.
- A Didcot to Culham Science Centre route is missing.

Feeder Routes

We support the Steventon to Milton Park route. This should be built as a Premium Cycle Route as it may in future form part of the Wantage / Grove to Milton Park route. We have proposed that this section is also part of a Milton Outer Ring, which will form an alternative to using the Milton Interchange.

We support the Chilton to West Ilsley A34 Junction. It is worth noting that, as well as providing a link to the Harwell Campus, the link would 'open up' the Wessex Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to cyclists from Didcot, Abingdon and visitors.



Other Schemes

The Cow Lane Underpass is a crucial link in the Science Vale Cycle Network. It is:

- Part of the premium cycle route to Culham Science Centre from Didcot Parkway.
- Part of Sustrans national cycle route 5.
- Part of the Ladygrove Link, premium cycle route to Didcot North East
- A link for feeder routes to the new Ladygrove East development and through the Ladygrove estate.
- A link for a possible future leisure cycle routes to Whittenham Clumps / Earth Clumps.
- An access to the new Didcot sports and leisure centre.

The chances of achieving a real growth of cycling in Didcot and the Science Vale will be seriously curtailed if nothing is done to address this barrier to cycling.

With the amount of extra cross town traffic generated by Didcot North East and the sports centre, traffic congestion will be at a problem at all the railway crossing points unless real travel choices are offered.

Cow lane Underpass should be closed to motor traffic, re-furbished and used for cyclists and pedestrians only.

This is initially politically controversial, but we note that in LTP4 there is a commitment to offer radical solutions and to 'nudge' people away from car use.

We don't believe that a footbridge or subway, at a potential future northern entrance to Didcot Parkway, would provide an adequate solution because:

- It would be too late. A solution needs to be in place before the Didcot North East development is started or the sports centre is opened.
- There is no guarantee that the northern entrance would actually be built. It is an aspiration.
- Footbridges are very inconvenient for cyclists and hard work. This is not a solution for such an important route.
- Assuming the subway would link up with the existing subway, cyclists would have to dismount to use it. Again not a solution for an important route.

These comments about Cow lane Underpass also apply to point 37 of the Science Vale Area Strategy in LTP4, which again offers the station northern entrance as a solution.

It is also worth noting that removing the Cow Lane Underpass from the Station Road junction traffic lights would improve traffic flow around the station and the new Didcot Gateway development.



We would like to comment on proposal SV 3.2 in the Science Vale Area Strategy concerning capacity improvements at the Jubilee Way Roundabout.

The roundabout was designed the way it is, using 'continental geometry', to keep traffic speeds down. It was recognised at the time that this was a very important desire line for cyclists and pedestrians (including school children), this is still the case. A conventional high capacity, two lane, roundabout at such a location would not be suitable and would have an isolating effect on places like Fleet Meadow.

This is an opportunity to consider a fully Dutch style roundabout, using Zebra's instead of signalised crossings for pedestrians, and thereby reduce the capacity penalty that we get from the current combination of signals and continental geometry.

HarBUG looks forward to the completion of the Science Vale Cycle Network, where residents and visitors will find it easy, convenient and fast to travel by cycle on safe, modern, European style infrastructure.

We hope that the network will not just be for cyclists but an asset to the Science Vale community and something the area can be proud of. With a good cycle network we can have economic growth whilst retaining a good, healthy environment to live in. This environment will also attract businesses to the area.

Yours sincerely.

Kevin Wilkinson
Chair, HarBUG