



Address to the HIF1 Public Inquiry - CoHSAT

20th February 2024

“Traffic engineers cannot resist trying to fix congestion with one more road...exactly why you should not put engineers in charge of social problems, like how to get people around.” Not my words, but those of author Daniel Knowles. Very apt however.

I’m Robin Tucker the Co-Chair of CoHSAT, the Coalition for Healthy Streets and Active Travel, a Coalition of 21 voluntary and campaigning organisations working across Oxfordshire to create attractive, accessible and people-friendly streets and transport.

We support East Hendred Parish Council and other objectors to the HIF1 road scheme because the HIF1 modelling is not robust, its wider impacts are not considered, the alternatives have not been considered, and it goes against Oxfordshire County Council’s policies – some of the reasons for which their own Planning Committee rejected it last year.

First, the modelling is not robust. It is based on out-of-date projections made before the pandemic that do not take into account the need to decarbonise the transport system, and that reducing vehicle-kilometres travelled is an essential component to this. Reducing vehicle-kilometres travelled is part of both Oxfordshire County Council’s Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, and England’s Economic Heartland’s Transport Strategy, and should be reflected in major infrastructure investments. More on this later.

Second, the impacts on the wider area are not considered. This will be acute for the A415 route into Abingdon, which would see greatly increase traffic, which has not been considered at all. On many days there is a queue I’ve measured at over 800m long waiting to get into the town. The six-hundred-year-old Abingdon Bridge on the A415 suffered structural failure in 2021 due to cumulative weight of traffic, and was reduced to tidal flow controlled by traffic lights for 18 months from May 2021 to December 2022.

Also affected will be the A34, and a quick search of the terms A34 and traffic delays will bring up story after story of the traffic jams on this road. This inquiry will hear, I am sure, that the new roads are intended to relieve traffic congestion, but as with any road expansion project they will only solve it temporarily on the section where capacity is expanded, while encouraging more traffic into other pinch points such as Abingdon and the A34, causing misery there.

A third example is the A4074. The A4074 is notoriously dangerous for high-speed crash deaths. HIF1 will deliver more traffic onto the A4074 and that will result in more casualties unless there are treatments against this.

Then there are the impacts on every village that connects onto the HIF1 scheme. Each will see an increase in traffic. More traffic means more pollution and more road casualties. Nowhere is there an analysis of HIF1 on traffic levels, pollution and casualties in villages such as Steventon, Appleford, Culham, the Hendreds and Nuneham Courtenay. These wider effects have not been considered.

Third, the alternative, more sustainable options have not been considered. Several possible options, including communities with more integrated facilities, Bus Rapid Transit, and more innovative sustainable transport solutions were discarded at stages before any credible assessment was possible. Only the 'more roads and more cars' option was pursued. This continues to lead us down a tunnel of car-dependence, traffic jams, and poor outcomes for climate and health. These other options must be considered properly before a decision is made.

There are, we know, active travel provisions built into the road plans, but there are other ways to achieve these. If the new roads are built, the lesson learned in Milton Keynes and Stevenage is that the increased motor traffic will greatly outweigh possible gains in walking and cycling.

Finally, this goes against Oxfordshire County Council's policies. The Council's highest level transport plan, the LTCP has targets in three areas.

- One is to reduce car trips, reducing 1 in 4 by 2030 and a further 1 in 3 by 2040.
- Two is reducing road fatalities and life changing injuries by 50% and then to zero, the Vision Zero commitment.
- Three is to reduce the climate impact of the transport network of the transport network to net zero by 2040.

This proposal goes against all three targets, by increasing road capacity. Any good highways planner will tell you the fundamental law of road congestion, that adding capacity to a road network generates a proportionate increase in the amount of traffic. The Council may tell you in this inquiry that this road will reduce congestion. It might do so temporarily in a few pinch points, but that congestion is a constraint on overall traffic growth. Make it easier to drive and more people will drive. Other roads will become more congested, and before long, these roads will be congested again. Learn from the Katy Highway in Houston, expanded to 26 lanes in places, and congested again in less than 5 years.

Fortunately, Oxfordshire County Council already has a good strategy to reduce traffic congestion. It is clearly visible in their targets – the strategy of reducing private car traffic. It is implementing this as we speak in Oxford, where the first phase of a Zero Emissions Zone has been rolled out, Parking restrictions and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods encourage people to walk and cycle rather than drive on a local basis, strategic Traffic Filters are approved for implementation in October and will reduce central Oxford traffic by 40%, and the next phases of the Zero Emissions Zone and a Workplace Parking Levy are planned to follow.

These are all included in the Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan, which is an Area Plan, the second layer of Transport Planning in Oxfordshire. The Area Plans for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse are not yet written, but are due this year. They should also have plans for car trip reduction, making this road expansion unnecessary.

On the wider scale, the Transport Strategy for England's Economic Heartland, the Sub-National Transport Body, also has as its Policy number 1, a reduction of private car journeys by a minimum of 5% per decade.

The proposed road scheme would be in conflict with all of these policies and plans. This major road expansion would cause the County to fail to deliver its targets for car journey reduction, road casualty reduction and decarbonisation, even before considering the environmental harm it would cause. Conversely, if HIF1 is implemented, when the LTCP targets are delivered, reducing traffic by half, it will leave HIF1 as a great underused white elephant across our countryside.

Oxfordshire County Council's Planning Committee saw clearly that it would these tests, and so rejected it. So, we believe, should this Inquiry.