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Transport plans for Oxfordshire should focus on walking, cycling and public transport

Oxfordshire County Council should focus on walking, cycling and public transport in its future plans, and abandon proposals for major road building. These are among the recommendations from the POETS [Planning Oxfordshire's Environment and Transport Sustainably] group in response to the county council's consultation on its Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. Such an approach would also show that the council is serious about addressing the climate emergency that it has declared.

Noel Newson of POETS said, "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. It has been striking to see how many more people than usual – particularly families with children - have been out walking and cycling when they don't feel intimidated by traffic."

The response to the pandemic has also shown that many activities can be carried out effectively without involving lengthy journeys. "While some travel will obviously increase once the lockdown is over – not least as people are able to meet family and friends again – there are likely to be other areas where things will change permanently", says Noel Newson. "It's long been said that you don't need an HGV to transport ideas, and in the last few months we've seen the truth of that."

POETS argue that the council should abandon proposals for major road building. Instead it should concentrate on creating high quality networks for walking, cycling and public transport. "The county council has paid lip-service to providing such networks for years, but made precious little progress" said Noel Newson. "These networks should now be progressed fast. Growing towns such as Bicester and Didcot could easily be places where cycling is a main mode of transport, but only if the infrastructure is put in place – as it would routinely be in countries such as Germany or the Netherlands. It makes economic sense too: providing walking and cycling routes costs a fraction of the money required for road building and brings many other health and environmental benefits."

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has recently encouraged councils to allocate more road space for pedestrians and cyclists, with less available for cars. Secretary of State, Grant Shapps, has said that he wants this done within weeks, adding: "Active travel is affordable, delivers significant health benefits, has been shown to improve wellbeing, mitigates congestion, improves air quality and has no carbon emissions at the point of use."

"POETS agree with the Secretary of State on this" says Noel Newson. "We hope that the county council will implement these principles for Oxfordshire as a matter of urgency."

Details of Oxfordshire County Council's engagement activity on its new Local Transport & Connectivity Plan can be found here: https://consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/ltcp.engagement/consultationHome

The POETS response can be accessed here: https://www.poetsplanningoxon.uk/poets-local-transport-and-connectivity-plan-consultation-response-170520.pdf

More information about the POETS group and its membership can be found at www.poetsplanningoxon.uk

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