

Hi everyone. My name's Emily Scaysbrook and I'm a local business owner, as well as Chair of the Oxford Business Action Group - or OBAG - who I represent here today.

My father Phillip and I co-own Hoyle's, the games shop on the High Street. I went to school in Summertown and I've also experienced Oxford as a local resident, studying at Brasenose for four years. Now I no longer live here in town, I also represent the cycling, commuting and rural county voice - to get to Oxford, I cycle ten miles from home to Bicester Village railway station, where I catch a train for the final leg to Oxford.

OBAG represents Oxford's brilliant and diverse business community. We are apolitical - though I am personally a Green Party member. I say this in particular to stress the point that I have an environmental focus as well as a commercial one - and I believe the two can coexist. I - and OBAG - believe in a sustainable, positive future for local businesses: one supported by fair, data-driven solutions to local issues... and that extends to transport policy of course, which is why I am here with you today.

As a business owner myself then, I am concerned with not only the timely, affordable, healthy *and environmentally friendly* transport of myself and my employees, but *also* our customers - which makes it difficult to fit everything into the 7 minutes that we have together today! I will try, though inevitably I sadly can't be exhaustive.

Although there is inevitably extensive overlap, I have split considerations into three: issues that impact business employers and employees; business customers; and both.

Considerations for employers

Like any city centre, Oxford's businesses are wide ranging: it is so important to make sure none are overlooked or discriminated against, so please do account for this in your plans:

- those based in the city centre and those based further afield in rural Oxfordshire;
- those with a shop front and those without;
- those selling services, and those physical products requiring supply and fulfilment;
- those who depend on regular footfall and those who don't;
- those with a fixed site whose owners and employees follow traditional commuting travel patterns and those whose work requires they travel like carers and couriers, who 'trip-chain' (that is, they make multiple, shorter journeys throughout the day). These in particular are often forgotten, especially those whose movements have no revenue associated with them. (For more on this, do read *Invisible Women* by Caroline Criado Perez!)

Avoid creating charges that will be passed onto businesses:

Try to be cognisant of introducing charges that will simply be passed onto local businesses. Once passed on to local businesses, they cease to act as disincentives for a particular behaviour, and act as another business tax, unnecessarily. Local businesses already have to

contend with: rent; rates; utility bills; staff wages and National Insurance Contributions; and tax, which we pay far more fairly I would suggest than many larger companies; reduced footfall; costs of operating online, including courier costs (often not fully passed onto the consumer to stay competitive); AND finally shrinking margins, which we are forced to accept in order to compete with online behemoths who can benefit from better economies of scale.

Help businesses to go electric:

- Make it easier for businesses to buy electric cars and charging points, offering incentives and grants to do so. Most businesses don't need help with the what of business, they need help with cash flow. The council needs to help in that respect.
-

Considerations for customers

Don't encourage customers to go to other cities!

Oxford does not exist in a vacuum, please do not make decisions on transport as though it does. The choice facing would-be visitors is not one of Oxford or nothing, but Oxford or numerous other beautiful towns and cities in the county and surrounding area.

I often hear from visitors to Oxford who quite reasonably promise to never come here again, rather than face the chaos that is the combination of one-way system, bus gates and car-parking charges. Now, some of these people I believe we could bring round, with free Park & Ride parking and fares. Especially now, with the rising cost of inflation, such changes could make a real difference to visitor numbers.

And for those still not inclined towards public transport, and for those who can't use public transport for whatever reason, make the purchase of electric cars more attractive!

- Electric charging points need to be highly visible across the city as soon as possible, to reassure would-be buyers that they will be able to charge them easily. Again with the cost of living crisis, grants or at least interest free loans should be afforded to families to invest in them.
- Make sure policies reinforce and support one another, where aspects of one don't dis-incentivise another. For example, the ZEZ nominally looks to encourage uptake of electric vehicles, yet the bus gates have no exemptions for electric vehicles, reducing the incentive to go electric. Why buy an electric car if you'll still be blocked from huge amounts of the city centre?

On street car parking charges need to not be as prohibitive as they are now.

I do not believe that making on-street parking prohibitive reduces congestion or net pollution. It pushes a huge number of the visitors who do still decide to come to Oxford to an already overcrowded Westgate, where traffic is already unbearable. Car journeys for such visitors become more circuitous and more polluting, and traffic around the Westgate worsens further. Additionally, this further supports national chains and neglects independent businesses, often much further out in the city centre. In forcing visitors to the Westgate, the council is essentially, if inadvertently, supporting national chains in preference to the local economy,

counteracting so many of the brilliant, supporting measures the council sought to take to support us throughout the pandemic.

Positive action - carrots that is - is needed to encourage positive behaviour change.

Considerations for both

To encourage active transport - and here my main focus is on cycling, as we have such little time - carrots are needed far more than sticks if we are to avoid adverse behaviour change - I would encourage everyone to read *Misbehaving* by Richard Thaler for more detail on this, a fascinating subject!

The city's cycling infrastructure is actually pretty poor considering how many people already cycle here and *this* is what I believe effort and funds should be spent on improving. Encourage people to cycle and walk by making it more attractive, not by blocking other means of transport. Cycling safety - and the perception of safety - must be improved too.

Improve the existing infrastructure first! Cycling infrastructure is only as good as its weakest link, so if commuters, school runners and shoppers are to be encouraged to make cycling their 'last mile' solution, cycling infrastructure from all Park and Rides needs to be vastly improved.

On the 'last mile' solution note...

- Liaise with rail companies to provide more bike space on commuter trains. On many Oxford-Paddington trains for example, there are often just 4 spaces, and you can't book them alongside your ticket in-app. There needs to be more space allocated to bikes, and it needs to be easier to book as part of the ticket-buying journey, however you are buying.
- Provide lockers and safer bike parking for those leaving their bikes there for more than 24 hours. Many insurance providers will not insure bikes left longer than this, so safe parking for long periods is essential.

Small changes and incentives can make a big difference. What about:

- subsidised cycling proficiency lessons for *any* Oxfordshire resident wanting them! When I moved to London after graduating, I took up my borough's offer of three free cycling proficiency lessons and they were utterly invaluable. I know I am a safer cyclist because of them.
- help lower-income families and individuals to buy bikes and accessories with grants, not just loan schemes.
- Punish bike theft more severely: help the public feel more confident investing in their cycling.
- Subsidise electric bikes for elderly and less able people: Oxford isn't flat and hills make a difference! This is not the Netherlands and Headington Hill is painful!
- Make Exchanging Places training mandatory for all HGV drivers coming into Oxford to reduce accident rates.
- Redesign badly arranged roads (Eg. Magdalen roundabout)

- Introduce more bike parking! There is a huge need for more on-street bike parking and it wouldn't be hard to implement. One blocker for me is the nonsensical 'bikes parked here will be removed' signs that line the historic streets, which I find utterly insane. Perhaps engagement with the university and colleges could see them removing these signs and *encouraging* cyclists to park! By all means limit parking to 24 hours, but short term parking is an invaluable draw to those, including myself, who want to run errands in the city centre knowing that my bike is secure wherever I leave it.
 - Make sure ALL new housing developments have safe, broad, pleasant bike routes incorporated into them, from there to the city centre.
-

Conclusion

In my position, faced with your question, trying to find solutions that work for everyone affected in Oxford, my advice would be to focus on the carrots, not the sticks. Encourage people to change their mode of transport for the better as a positive choice, don't not just penalise current behaviour, or move it out of the city centre onto arterial and ring roads.

3 quick points:

1. Electrification of buses and cars must be a priority and policies must be designed towards this goal. I would urge you to reconsider bus gates in the form currently proposed. I question why a congestion charge hasn't first been proposed. Behaviour change must happen, but it must be -and must be perceived to be - accessible and achievable too
2. On data: I would urge you to use applicable data for a city like Oxford: Many pro-bus gates people keep mentioning the city of Ghent as a success story comparator. To those, I would say that Oxford does not have a single, consistent and coherent tram offering across the city centre. Oxford is not flat, it does not currently have brilliant cycling infrastructure, or a fast, broad ring road. Studies on Ghent have also been done pre-Covid. It is not a like-for-like comparison and should not be treated as such. Plan in thresholds to measure failure as well as success, and fall back plans. Design to iterate and learn.
3. Finally and perhaps surprisingly given my position as a business owner but please consider *all* road users, not just those spending money.