



# Walk Talk

Newsletter of Oxford Pedestrians Association

June 2015

## Welcome to Newsletter 115



### An Excellent Bus Network for Oxford?

At our May meeting, we were joined by the Managing Directors of Oxford's two bus companies, Stagecoach and the Oxford Bus Company. Richard Mann introduced the meeting by showing examples of continental cities that enjoy excellent networks of bus and tram, even though, like Oxford, they are restricted by historical city centres. Martin Sutton and Phil Southall then took up the challenge of explaining why Oxford has not yet been able to emulate these. We were told that trams are not a solution in the short term and the looming transport crisis needs a speedier solution. All three speakers agreed on the need to reduce car use, which is seen as the major cause of bus unreliability. While congestion charging has been rejected as making Oxford uncompetitive, workplace parking levies could be effective. The difficulty of cross-city travel was raised, with out-of-centre hubs put forward as a possible solution. School-run congestion could be tackled by shuttles from peripheral P&Rs, if schools and Councils were prepared to enforce. Emissions have been steadily reducing and by 2016 all buses will meet euro5 standards. While there are no quick fixes to many of the problems, modernising ticketing could improve bus times immediately with little outlay and would surely result in increased bus use. Overall we were left with the impression that the buses are in good hands, but Oxford needs a more radical solution to its transport problems than just more and bigger buses.

### St Giles Campaign Update

OxPA members have been taking part in our surveys to determine just who is using St Giles. Our previous surveys, performed between June and October 2013 in conjunction with Oxford Civic Society, showed that St Giles is heavily used by pedestrians. In fact, at busy times, there are considerably more pedestrians and cyclists passing a given point than vehicles. But so far we have been measuring 'throughput', i.e. people passing per hour. Because of the slower speed of pedestrians and cyclists, we have always felt that at any one instant there would be many more walkers than vehicles. On Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> June we tried to measure this in a 'snapshot' survey, attempting to recreate what would be seen if a helicopter were to take a photograph of everyone in St Giles at a given

instant (assuming X-ray vision to count the people in the vehicles). Once again we did this with members of the Civic Society and Simon Hunt from Cyclox. Two parties of observers started simultaneously from the north and south ends of St Giles, and converged, counting everyone they passed. The results have been very clear. At any one typical instant between 12 noon and 1 pm on a summer Sunday, there were 202 pedestrians, 14 people on cycles and 75 in vehicles. These results confirm our belief that St Giles is predominantly a pedestrian street, opening up once again the question as to why it is laid out as a 4-lane dual carriageway with pedestrians confined to narrow corridors on each side. We are pursuing our campaign to change the way St Giles is used. In October we will hold a meeting with key stakeholders including

representatives from the City and County Councils and from some of the buildings fronting St Giles. Our aim is to persuade the County Council to try an experimental reallocation of space, confining vehicles to fewer lanes and allowing more space for people on foot and bike to enjoy this potentially beautiful public space.

### **Stalls**

One of our recurring problems is getting enough volunteers to help to run our stalls; this can mean we miss good opportunities, such as the recent Broad Street Green Fair, to attract new members and raise awareness of issues for walkers in Oxford. Please, if you want to see OxPA continue to be effective in representing pedestrians and vulnerable road/pavement users, pledge 1-3 hours per year to help on one of our stalls. Helping on a stall is easy - and fun! OxPA belongs to us all. Help make it a force to be reckoned with. Please us know if you would like your name to be added to our list of potential helpers.

### **Worcester Street/George Street junction**

Following complaints about delays and danger at this newly aligned junction, OxPA members carried out a one hour off-peak survey. We have sent the following observations and questions to OCC Highways department:

1) After pressing the button pedestrians and wheelchair users wait at least 80 seconds to cross.

**Q: is this what you expect or does the timing need resetting?**

2) This delay results in people crossing against the lights, sometimes narrowly avoiding being hit by a vehicle swinging round the corner.

3) It means pavements are crowded with pedestrians waiting to cross, sometimes with suitcases and pushchairs. The southeast and south west corners have very narrow pavements so that walkers have to go into the road or wait to pass.

4) When the pedestrian lights turn green (not on the other side of the road but to their right, meaning walkers are not encouraged to look ahead), they have 6 seconds to cross before the green crossing light goes off and the beeps stop. Able-bodied people are not halfway across when the beeps stop and the lights go red for crossing.

**Q: This is very short; does it not need resetting?**

5) All lights are red for traffic at once; however there is not time to cross the very wide diagonal, so very few people indeed make this crossing.

**Q: Is it intended that pedestrians can cross diagonally, as we were told when the junction was proposed? If so how could this be enabled? Why is there no notice informing walkers of the diagonal crossing?**

6) The cycle box in the middle of the road is dangerous, with vehicles over-running it and only space for 4 bicycles.

7) Cyclists turning right from the box are at high risk as traffic stops coming from the right at the same time as it starts to come from George Street.

**Q: Has this been thought through? If cyclists have a no right turn rule, shouldn't it be sign posted? (However it would be highly inconvenient to be unable to turn right here on a bicycle.)**

8) We witnessed vehicles illegally proceeding up George St (via the cycle box) from Hythe Bridge St.

**Q: What is to stop drivers doing this?**

9) The huge new buses need a lot of turning room, which leaves little space for people gathered on the narrow pavements.

**Q: is it right to accommodate such huge vehicles at the expense of walkers and cyclists?**

**Stop Press** As part of the works, Hythe Bridge Street has now been temporarily closed to most through traffic and is a joy to walk and cycle in. The air is clear, birds can be heard singing, people are relaxed and safe on the street, without traffic fumes polluting all day and it seems to have come alive for local residents and restaurants. If only we could keep it like this, it would make a truly fitting gateway to Oxford city centre and a perfect route between the city centre and the railway station.

**Road Danger Reduction and Enforcement: *how policing can support walking and cycling.*** This was the subject of a conference recently convened by RoadPeace. An analysis of police collision files for a sample of 200 pedestrian fatalities in London over five years found that the police attribute fault to the pedestrians far more (72 cases) than they do to car drivers (51 cases). The majority of faults include failing to look properly, or to judge speed or path of traffic, or being reckless and in a hurry. Only 35% of drivers were convicted, most commonly for careless driving, following a fatal collision. Pedestrian "contributory factors" included wearing dark clothing, not using an available crossing facility, carrying out activities in the carriageway such as playing, talking to other pedestrians, eating, or walking a dog. Child pedestrian fatalities are more likely than adult to be held to have contributed to their deaths. In all cases most counter measures proposed by the police are to improve pedestrian awareness of other road users, regardless of contributory factors attributed to the driver. This analysis informs TfL's pedestrian safety activities, which focus on 'educating' pedestrians to look out for themselves. The messages for children are harsh and terrifying, with graphic depictions of dead children who had been distracted when crossing the road. Such victim blaming and scare-mongering might reduce fatalities but only by keeping "non-motorised road users" off the streets, rather than addressing the basic causes of road danger.

### **Meetings:**

**June 23rd** An evening walk. Meet 7pm at Town Hall.

**July 28** Details to follow

**No August meeting**

### **Contacts:**

**Chair:** Sushila Dhall 790783

**Secretary:** Corinne Grimley Evans 779663

**Treasurer:** Christine Hamand 559856

**Membership:** Michaele Philbin 201541

**Website:** <http://www.oxpa.org.uk>

**Facebook:** Oxford Pedestrians Association - OXPA

**Write to:** OxPA, 431 Meadow Lane, Oxford OX4 4ED.