



Walk Talk

Newsletter of Oxford Pedestrians Association

September 2015

Welcome to Newsletter 116



On Foot in New York

Our Amtrak train trip across the USA and back was a good opportunity to observe very different transport habits across the continent. In very many American cities "going out" is synonymous with getting into a car; places where walking and cycling are the norm are rare. However, New York City is one of these rare cases, and when we stayed in Manhattan Island we found a different way of managing traffic and walkers from that in the UK. Manhattan is built, like many US cities, on a grid, with streets at right angles to one another and reasonably spaced apart. Streets intersecting the main arterial routes are all one way for traffic, and alternate, so drivers only need to go for at most one block to get to the right direction for them. Every junction has four crossings across the ends of the streets. Pedestrian crossings are on the junctions (not just off them), and as soon as traffic lights go red pedestrians can start to cross safely, and have priority over traffic turning into the side roads. Plenty of crossing time is given and once it is over, instead of traffic just starting up, a countdown of 25 seconds is given during which it is still safe to cross. Although Manhattan is very crowded and busy, most of the traffic is taxis, which means that there is space for the many cyclists, skateboarders, walkers, horse-drawn carriages and cycle rickshaws! Oxford could learn from this highly populated city across the Atlantic, where due to everybody being given equal time, relations between all road users appear for the most part cordial and courteous. *Sushila Dhall*

What if

"The Economist" has published an intriguing article on what the world would be like if

driverless cars became the norm. The change would be transformational for manufacturers and insurers of cars as well as for those who drive

and service them. Luddites, however, need not despair; just as livery stables, ostlers, and farriers were replaced by garages, mechanics, and repairers, we can expect that the service and repair of driverless cars will be copiously productive of new and numerous skilled jobs. Importantly, road traffic deaths and injuries, of which 94% are currently due to human error, would be reduced. An early step in the evolution of urban transport is likely to be a ban on ordinary cars in city centres, resorts, and campuses. Next, people being transported in driverless cars will not want to share the road with cars controlled by mere humans. Private car ownership will probably be significantly replaced by subscription-based access to fleets, significantly reducing the total numbers of cars. As the article concludes: "A world of self-driving cars may sound odd, but coming generations will consider the era of car ownership to have been much stranger".

(<http://worldif.economist.com/article/11/what-if-autonomous-vehicles-rule-the-world-from-horseless-to-driverless>)

Pembroke Street

After many years, it seems that our requests for improvements in Pembroke Street have been heeded. Traffic Orders are now out for consultation to restrict loading and unloading of vehicles to a single loading bay in preparation for resurfacing and making the street more fit for pedestrians and cyclists. It will become two-way for cycles, but remain one-way for all other vehicles. Creation of a single-level shared surface should improve conditions for pedestrians since the existing narrow pavements are of little use, being in poor condition and often blocked by parked vehicles and bikes. There will be further consultations about the design details in due course.

Frideswide Square Update

Frideswide Square is still a building site, so nobody is expecting to find their passage through it a comfortable experience. However, such features as the lengthy detours to the few designated crossing places and the very long waiting times at the George Street lights, make people on foot feel the least considered group during the construction period. On the other hand many drivers have found that their journeys have been surprisingly trouble-free and speedy.

The daily experience of one of our members prompted him to ask the Highway Authority whether the needs and safety of pedestrians during the construction phase had been properly considered. Was the balance between the

conflicting aims of keeping traffic flowing, and the convenience and safety of pedestrians properly assessed? After some correspondence and a FOI request, several issues remain unresolved: i) **the needs of elderly and mobility-impaired** people do not seem to be adequately catered for in the timing of the George Street lights; ii) **how to make it possible for less confident** pedestrians to cross the square when traffic is free-flowing at more than 20mph, as it is likely to be in non-rush hour times and at night.

From this correspondence, it is not clear that existing problems for pedestrians during construction will all be resolved when the works are finished. Unless the highway authority can reduce the volume of traffic and effectively control its speed, pedestrians and cyclists will remain second-class citizens. We have been promised "continuous monitoring" of the workings of the square once it is complete. We too must make sure that we report and keep a record of all instances of poor function. Courtesy between road users is a vital ingredient of shared-space schemes, and as our correspondent points out, this has yet to be displayed in Frideswide Square, where he has found hooting and abuse are the reactions of nearby drivers when as a cyclist he gives way to a pedestrian.

Photo Competition

The new edition of **A More Walkable Oxford** will soon be ready for the press but we need some new photos to accompany many of the articles, and a **colour photo** for the cover. If you would like your photo to adorn the cover of OxPA's "walking manifesto", start thinking of suitable views of Oxford, and email your photos to oxford.pedestrians.association@gmail.com or bring them to the next meeting on September 22. Have a look at the existing AMWO for ideas of what and where needs illustrating.

Meetings:

September 22nd 7pm Town Hall: open discussion to include photo competition, stall, recruitment, wheelchair access et al.

October 27th details to follow

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