

Good morning committee, my name is Geoff Sutton, I am here today on behalf of Reconnecting Oxford and OBAG.

Oxford City has been the centre of transport networks for 1000 years. Businesses served Oxfordshire from the city centre until 2000 when heavy retail was evicted leaving light retail in the historic centre. The NHS also moved and developed Headington into the £billion complex we see today.

In transport terms, we now have two similar sized trip destinations within the Oxford Ring Road, with their own separate catchment areas, drawing in visitors with different objectives and needs, the city centre at the heart of the transport network, the hospitals on the periphery. Put simply, the Congestion Charge has now separated the two, stopping hospitals pulling cars across Oxford city centre.

I think the Highways Authority didn't do enough to understand the catchments of the two neighbouring trip destinations, especially the needs of the regional catchment served by the hospitals and how the Congestion Charge would optimise one at the expense of the other. Reconnecting Oxford's consultation response was our attempt to address the analytical shortfall. My first question for the committee is to ask you to scrutinise how this could have happened.

My next request is to ask the committee to look at the failings in the Oxfordshire Strategic Model. I analysed the output and found that the car parks for the John Radcliffe, the single largest trip destination in Oxford, were missing. How this could have happened? The model underwent rigorous testing and validation, it was recalibrated at least once, yet this error appears to have been repeatedly missed. Is it now fixed?

When I asked the Council about this, the response was that the OSM was more accurate at the strategic level and less accurate at the granular level. What I didn't realise at the time was the impact that this error would have on the bus companies, that the actual congestion in Headington post implementation was so bad that at one point Go Ahead risked losing their operator's licence.

Yesterday Councillor Gant expressed his delight at Cabinet that Oxford now had more electric buses per capita than anyone else. The improvement in air quality is noticeable but someone has to pay for them. At the moment, it's the bus companies but they retain the option to ask the County to pay, the agreement apparently hinging on one metric, bus journey times. Both the County and the bus companies say this metric has not been hit by the target date despite the County claiming the introduction of the Congestion Charge would deliver it. My next request is for the committee to investigate why bus journey time was selected as the key metric and why it was not met. Did the County enter into the Zebra commitment, using an overly optimistic bus journey time calculation generated from the flawed OSM modelling data?

Another point, Councillor Gant was clear that he supported the scheme because accident rates were forecast to drop. Yet there's no mention of accident rates in the report before you today. My question is why not and when can we expect a report?

This brings me to my final point on governance, what's happened to the project management and management of risks? I want to know why did monitoring of local businesses fail? Why was there no back up monitoring plan? Why was the flaw in the modelling data not spotted and the real-world impact on the bus companies not anticipated? Why was the adverse impact on the hospitals also not anticipated?

Thank you