

WESTMINSTER AMENITY SOCIETIES FORUM

CLOSURE OF OXFORD STREET WEST TO ALL TRAFFIC PROPOSALS

ISSUES OF CONCERN from wasf members 7.12.2017

1. Displacement- buses, taxis, lorries, vans, private and private hire vehicles (they can presently travel legally down Oxford street after 7.00pm), and pedicabs- resulting in: pollution, noise, congestion, that is, not only in surrounding local streets but all the major routes: Park Lane Marble Arch, Edgware Road, Marylebone Road and beyond.
2. Lack of traffic mitigation in present proposals - with the exception of a reduction/relocation of bus routes we are aware of no proposals to deal with actually reducing any of the traffic mentioned above that will be displaced by closing Oxford Street. It will all be left to find its own way through our areas.
3. Significant damage to surrounding areas - not only from vastly increased amounts of displaced through traffic but also from turning the side streets into servicing areas for Oxford Street: taxi ranks, loading, unloading, new bus stands, resulting in resident and business disturbance, noise and pollution. In addition, new bus routes through residential areas 24 hours a day, bus stops, and stands for other 24 hour routes located in these areas.
4. Loss of Accessibility - to, from and through Oxford Street from the loss, dismemberment and displacement of 9 active bus routes. E.g. At Marble Arch 4 bus routes will be diverted from the Oxford Street area requiring a difficult and awkward change to the one remaining westbound route that will be left there . Also loss of accessibility to cyclists from the loss of an active cycle route: cyclists to be banned with no effective alternative routes on offer. Accessibility by taxi etc will be heavily compromised.
5. Public Realm- the proposals as presented concentrate on Oxford Street, not the whole area as previously stated, excepting 4 extra crossings on Wigmore Street, which are there only in order to slow the traffic and act as a deterrence to using the street.(incidentally this is the only plan that TfL have been able to provide to date for any form of traffic reduction- i.e. relying on making Wigmore too unpleasant for it to be used as a through route, the same policy of deterrence that has been seen to fail on previous TfL schemes). No definition of what is actually included in Oxford Street area.
6. Enforcement - problems arising from a 24 hour pedestrianised Oxford Street, including, but not limited to: crime, illegal street performing, trading, begging, pavement artists, amplified busking, etc. Noise and disturbance to residents in surrounding streets. Major public security issues. Even greater concerns at night; drunks, roaming gangs, street soiling, dealers, noise, disturbance etc.
7. Change of use- likely proliferation of new alcohol licences, extensions of existing ones- on Oxford Street, and surrounds, overall extension of late night economy, threat of tents and other structures as eating and drinking places being erected in the middle of what was the road to bring in more income. Whilst Wigmore Street would be in great danger of becoming the new Oxford Shopping Street, as that is where the buses will be. It is anyway

likely that more bus routes will be added and frequency increased, nothing to stop TfL doing this once they have brought buses into Wigmore Street.

8. Practicality- Even without all the other problems listed the closure would require far more time to implement successfully, the present program is too rapid, in breach of Mayor's own promise on gradual implementation, no time to assimilate. Also the timing is little short of disastrous: in the middle of other major road schemes, and threatens to compromise them: Baker Street 2 Way, Tottenham Court Road, Cycle Superhighway, no proper time to cut and bed in changes to buses, also huge amount of building work already going on in the very area in Mayfair and Marylebone where all the traffic will be heading.

9. Cost of maintenance and enforcement, - who is going to pay for this after the initial period, on a year to year basis, in perpetuity? Business doesn't want to, the Mayor says he won't pay, and Westminster cannot afford it. Why has no long term appraisal of ongoing financial costs of this project been carried out? No legal agreement in place or seemingly contemplated to apportion agreed contributions from the various bodies and stakeholders.

THE CONSULTATION

1. Publicity- lack of general awareness of consultation in spite of TfL/WCC flyers, emails, radio ads, etc, road shows poorly attended. Heavy emphasis on online information and responses means a major lack of penetration to elderly demographic, many of whom tend to be bus users and with poor mobility and will be most severely affected. Poor penetration even amongst computer users, with very many local people and businesses remaining unaware that there is a consultation, even in the areas that will be directly affected.

2. Time Allowed- there is a very large amount of information on offer. More comprehensive and detailed than in any previous similar consultation, but not all entirely accurate. It is also the case that this consultation is so rushed that we are only now starting uncover some of the hidden consequences for the surrounding areas. 6 weeks is insufficient.

3. Area of consultation- Why should it be open to all throughout England and even Scotland, allowing groups with an ideological proclivity towards pedestrianisation to encourage their members to participate. It is wrong to allow national pressure groups to decide whether or not Oxford Street is closed.

FURTHER QUESTIONS:

Why is WCC now convinced that pedestrianisation is the right course? In spite of all the problems involved in it, its almost universal unpopularity amongst residents, and most businesses, as evidenced on the first consultation, and in spite of the fact that only last year Westminster said it wasn't practical? It was only 5 years ago that TfL were saying it couldn't be done.

Why is this being advocated as the only way to solve pollution on Oxford Street? On TfL's own modelling the next 5-10 years will see vehicle emissions drop substantially because of cleaner vehicles and emissions charging.

Why is the assumption that arrival of Crossrail will immediately result in a vast increase in footfall? When any increase can ultimately only be determined, not by people selecting it over different routes, such as the existing underground services, but by more people coming into Oxford Street, to shop and work. There are no figures for this that are not based on guesswork. Any increase, if there actually is one, will be incremental. Against this there is also the loss of footfall to take into account from major reduction in buses serving Oxford Street- many of these users are unable or unwilling to travel by tube and will just find alternative shopping venues.

Why is the Mayor able to threaten Westminster with "consequences" if they do not comply when WCC owns the road? Why does Westminster feel that a Conservative Secretary of State would sign the road over to a Labour Mayor if Westminster Council opposed it? What evidence is there for this? Has anyone at Westminster Council spoken to the Secretary of State to get some feedback on this?

There are, in addition a number other other questions raised at the last WASF meeting still awaiting written replies.

7.12.2017