

Less Traffic ... A Better Exeter ... A Better Planet

Exeter Traffic Reduction Action (ExTRA)

Introduction

The following strategy concludes a consensus building process and launches an important initiative: Exeter Traffic Reduction Action (ExTRA).

ExTRA challenges local authorities, responsible for traffic management in Exeter, to take brave and radical action to reduce traffic in the Exeter area by adopting our comprehensive Traffic Reduction Strategy for Exeter.

→ ExTRA is seeking a pledge of support for measures to reduce traffic levels in Exeter by 30%, from a 2006 baseline figure, by 2016. We call on Exeter residents, transport and environmental campaigners, voluntary and community associations, public authorities, businesses and politicians to sign the pledge.

See the pledge at the end of this report.
--

The Traffic Reduction Strategy has been developed following a comprehensive process involving individuals and representatives from a wide range of expert and local groups in Exeter¹. Details of the consensus building process involved in shaping this Traffic Reduction Strategy for Exeter can be found in Appendix 1.

The case for traffic reduction in Exeter

Reducing traffic in cities has now become an imperative due to climate change, pollution and the need to create vibrant livable communities.

Traffic growth, both nationally and locally, presents us with significant economic, social and environmental challenges.

The cost to society, the community, the environment and the economy in terms of pollution, congestion, road crashes, health problems and climate change are extremely serious. Traffic is responsible for:

- reducing the quality of life by severing many local communities and making the local environment more intimidating, less safe, noisier and dirtier.
- high and growing carbon dioxide emissions which contribute to climate change.
- severe air pollution with its associated impacts on public health.
- congestion with its associated costs on businesses and the frustrations it causes motorists.

Current transport policy and the way it has encouraged car dependency also affects our psychology. As with all forms of addiction, the negative consequences of excessive driving is vigorously denied by those who cannot or will not see the longer term consequences. The terms "we couldn't do without" or "I have no choice" are statements of dependency, well documented by those who work in the fields of alcohol or chemical addiction, for instance.

Facing the facts: traffic growth nationally

The following statistics² provide a snap shot of the problems associated nationally with high traffic levels and continued traffic growth across the UK.

¹ Groups represented include Exeter Friends of the Earth, Transport 2000 Devon Group, Action Heavitree Residents Group, Exeter Green Party, Sustrans, Carfree UK and Residents against Alphington Road widening.

² Statistics drawn mainly from the Transport 2000 website: www.transport2000.org.uk which in turn draws from a wide range of sources

- Transport is the only sector of the UK economy in which carbon emissions have risen consistently since 1990.
- According to the CBI traffic delays cost the country around £20 billion a year.
- Every day on average ten people die on the roads and over a hundred are seriously injured. Many of the people killed and injured are children, pedestrians and cyclists.
- Particulates and other pollutants from vehicle exhausts cause lung and heart diseases, killing up to 24,000 people every year.
- A recent study in the US has proved that traffic pollutants not only make asthma attacks worse but are responsible for causing the condition in the first place. More than one in seven children now suffers from asthma, six times as many as 25 years ago.

Facing the facts: traffic growth in Devon and Exeter

The following statistics³ help demonstrate the importance of reducing traffic levels in Exeter and promoting alternatives to the car – particularly a frequent and reliable public transport system and safe facilities for cyclists and pedestrians.

- Road transport accounts for 54% of total carbon dioxide emissions in Devon, the largest contributor by far.
- Levels of nitrogen dioxide exceed ‘objective levels’ at five sites in Exeter (declared ‘Air Quality Management Areas’) including Alphington Road corridor, Heavitree Road corridor and Countess Wear.
- By 2001 there were over 370,000 cars owned in Devon, more than double that of thirty years ago.
- Exeter has the lowest car ownership in Devon with 28% of households in 2001 not having access to a car.
- 55% of people in Devon travel to work alone in a car or van.
- Local rail journeys in Devon increased from 2 million journeys in 2000/01 to 2.24 million in 2004/05.
- Bus journeys to Exeter have almost doubled from 1.86 million journeys in 2000/01 to 3.46 million in 2004/05; Park and Ride journeys have risen from 0.89 to 1.19 million during the same period.
- The number of cycle trips rose by 15% between 2001 and 2004; recent funding for cycling from Cycle England could see this figure rise steeply.
- People aged 35 – 54 in Devon, most of whom travelled to work by car, said they would like to get to work and to shop by bus providing there was a convenient, frequent and reliable service.
- Of the nine objectives outlined in the Devon Local Transport Plan, the most highly rated was “improving road safety”.
- An Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system, used in London for congestion charging, was introduced in Exeter during 2005. The system is currently being used in Exeter to monitor journey times!

BUT, a case of failure to reduce traffic levels in Exeter

Despite the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997 encouraging traffic reduction plans, local authorities, including Devon County Council (DCC), have been reluctant to set traffic reduction targets. Indeed, traffic reduction does not feature at all in DCC’s Provisional Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011. Instead Objective 1 focuses on tackling traffic congestion by ‘preventing peak-time traffic growth in Exeter’. Under Objective 4: Improving Air Quality, again the target is to ‘reduce the rate of growth in vehicle kilometres travelled in Devon’ rather than reduce overall traffic levels.

³ Statistics drawn mainly from Devon County Council’s Provisional Devon Local Transport Plan 2006-2011

Yet as London has demonstrated, where local authorities do take action to reduce traffic there can be dramatic results. The London congestion charge has resulted in 18% traffic reduction and bus passenger numbers have soared.

→ **ExTRA calls for *real* traffic reduction in Exeter; not just reductions in traffic *growth*: We call on our local authorities to immediately set and introduce measures to achieve a 3% annual traffic reduction target, which would result in an overall 30% reduction in traffic levels in the Exeter area by 2016, based on a 2006 baseline figure.**

More roads – a knee-jerk reaction

The common response to traffic growth and congestion has been to widen roads and build new ones, despite all the signs pointing to this making things worse in the long term. Time and again it has been shown that new road space creates extra traffic. Nevertheless, pressure for new or widened roads continues; the Alphington Road widening scheme is an example of this in Exeter and the Kingskerswell bypass an example in South Devon.

ExTRA rejects completely any further road building and road widening in Exeter as this clearly fails to reduce overall traffic levels; indeed such developments always increase traffic levels still further.

Tackling traffic: the key measures

Through a consensus building process, examining the likely impact and ease of implementation of a range of measures, **five key measures emerge for traffic reduction in Exeter**. These measures are considered to be both high impact and easy to achieve and ExTRA calls for them to be implemented immediately:

- 1. Change minimum city centre parking charges to equate with return bus fares from the outskirts of the city**
- 2. Gradual decrease in on-street and off-street public parking (3% per year)**
- 3. Introduction of workplace parking charges**
- 4. All primary schools to have ‘walking buses’**
- 5. ‘Car free housing’ developments with public transport links and car clubs**

Understanding the five key traffic reduction measures

1. Change minimum city centre parking charges to equate with return bus fares from the outskirts of the city

On the whole, Exeter has a good quality bus service for a city of its size. However, it is expensive and above inflationary rises in ticket prices occur nearly every year. Pegging minimum parking charges in the city centre to return bus fares from the outskirts would mean that everyone will have an interest in bus fares, not just those who regularly use buses. It makes no social or environmental sense for city centre parking to be cheaper than travelling into the city by bus. Linking the costs of city centre parking to return bus fares would provide an incentive for using city buses and Park and Ride and for car sharing. Such a policy could also, of course, have positive social and economic benefits: it may put downward pressure on bus fares (because of public pressure and greater bus usage) and encourage more people to access the city on foot and by bicycle.

2. Gradual decrease in council controlled on-street and off-street public parking by 3% per year

With parking charges pegged to bus fares, more people will be encouraged to access the city by other means. Fewer parking spaces will therefore be required. **A 3% annual reduction in council controlled parking spaces equates with the call from leading environmental campaigning groups for a 3% annual reduction in carbon emissions and with this strategy’s call for a 3% annual reduction in traffic levels in Exeter over the next ten years.** Also, if downward pressure is

placed on bus fares – and consequently ‘pegged’ parking charges - (see above), a reduction in parking spaces would ensure that driving into the city centre does not ‘creep up’ again over time.

3. Introduction of workplace parking charges

A charge for parking at places of work could be introduced under existing legislation, making it an easy measure to implement and one that would have high impact. It is acknowledged that this measure is generally regarded as unpopular with business and there is concern about competition between neighbouring authorities if one local authority introduces such a scheme alone. Local authorities have therefore to date shied away from the idea.

However, ExTRA strongly advocates workplace parking charges for Exeter. Whilst clearly introducing such a measure as a regional policy would be preferable, Exeter has the economic strength to ‘carry’ such a policy on its own and become a demonstration city for workplace parking charges.

Such a measure would encourage greater use of Park and Ride services, city bus services and car sharing as well as encouraging cycling and walking. It would also address traffic growth on the edge of the city, particularly traffic related to business and retail parks.

The money raised from such a scheme must be ring-fenced for investment in sustainable transport solutions. We believe that the local authorities should present a strong case for workplace parking charges to business, emphasising the time and money savings that businesses would make with less congested roads.

4. All primary schools to have ‘walking buses’

ExTRA believes that the local authorities should insist on a walking buses for every primary school in Exeter. Such a policy will link well with the new emphasis on education for sustainable development, which schools are now to be assessed on. Nearly one in five cars on the road at 8.50 am is on the school run, so clearly this is an important policy for traffic reduction and relieving congestion. It is also an important way of reducing traffic and pollution around school gates.

There are many other good reasons for introducing walking buses. They provide a chance for regular exercise and the development of healthy habits; evidence shows that more active children are likely to become more active adults. Children who are part of a walking bus are part of a large and visible group which is supervised by adults and seen safely into school. This reassures parents who are concerned about letting their children walk on their own. The walking bus helps children learn pedestrian skills so that when they begin to walk on their own they are better equipped to deal with traffic. The journey to school also gives children a chance to socialise with others.

5. Car free housing developments with public transport links and car clubs

There is a clear relationship between traffic growth and housing growth. With hundreds of new homes proposed in and around Exeter, traffic levels will grow along with the increase in housing, unless the local authorities commit to car free housing developments. Parking is still incorporated into all new housing developments in Exeter as a matter of course. Valuable space that could provide non paved ‘green’ areas or amenities for residents or extra housing within the development is sacrificed in favour of parking spaces. Alternatively, expensive underground car parks are incorporated into the developments. With nearly one in three households in Exeter not having access to a car (either due to a lifestyle choice or economic circumstances), the provision of parking spaces in urban developments makes little social, economic or environmental sense.

New developments where cars are excluded offer many benefits. Space and resources that would otherwise be dedicated for car parking or vehicle movement can be used to create gardens, meeting places, play areas and other amenities which help improve the quality of life. As has been witnessed in large demonstration projects in Europe, the chance for children to play in the streets and walk home in peace and safety is a powerful selling point for new homes.

In the UK the number of smaller car-free residential developments obtaining planning permission in our towns and cities has been growing. Yet on the whole, developers are still reluctant to commit to such schemes. If we are serious about de-coupling traffic growth from housing growth then the

planning authority needs to ensure urban housing developments are largely car free in future. This does not mean that residents are 'excluded' or immobile; instead, cycle and pedestrian routes, bus routes and car club schemes are built into car free developments.

Furthermore, by concentrating high proportions of non-car users within a relatively small area, car free communities provide the incentive for more efficient and sustainable public transport operations. This is likely to have positive knock-on effects city-wide, both in terms of public transport and in demonstrating to the wider community the benefits of car free housing/living.

→ ExTRA calls for an immediate change in local planning legislation so that car free housing developments become the norm rather than the exception.

A greater vision: a greater priority

A public debate in Exeter is required to ensure that the most effective long term measures are selected to supplement the key measures outlined in this strategy. The consensus process identified the urgent need for the establishment of a 'transport vision' group for the Local Strategic Partnership. This group would need to be listened to and have real influence. **ExTRA also believes that transport and the environment need to be prioritised in the Strategic Plan.**

Secondary traffic reduction measures

The consensus process also identified a series of secondary measures for the Traffic Reduction Strategy, to be implemented in the short term. These measures are seen as crucial and relatively easy to achieve; they support or link with the five key measures.

1. Fund/subsidise public transport using ring-fenced funds raised from parking charges.
2. Improved city bus services including the introduction of peripheral bus routes to link railway stations, business/retail parks, hospitals, the university, park-and-ride sites etc; redevelopment of the city bus station; increase in evening frequencies and a comprehensive public transport guide like that produced by Torbay Council.
3. Household leafleting campaign (similar to the recycling campaign) focusing on public transport and highlighting the real costs of the car – financial, social, health, environmental; to include information on real and perceived fears of travelling without a car.
4. Use of Cycling England grant to massively increase safe junctions and cycle lanes particularly to schools, workplaces and shops and to fund adverts to raise the status of cyclists while decreasing the status of cars.
5. Extension of car exclusion zones, particularly in the city centre.
6. More pedestrian crossings; better people priority.

Other measures

The emphasis of this strategy is to identify measures which can most effectively reduce traffic levels within the next five years. The following measures were also considered and whilst some could form important policies in the longer term, they have ultimately not been included in the strategy at this point. This is because they would be difficult to achieve, they are considered to be more controversial and would require much greater public and political acceptance, they require new legislation, or whilst being positive measures in their own right, they are not considered to have a high enough impact in terms of traffic reduction.

- Congestion charging/road pricing (preceded by a feasibility study).
- Bus priority (*REAL priority given to buses in their own dedicated lanes operating at all or at least the majority of times*).
- Free bus travel paid for by car and air taxes.
- More Park and Ride.
- Addressing people's fears, e.g. increasing street lighting, conductors for late buses.

- Pollution monitoring at school gates.
- More coordinated regional transport strategy.
- More, better, cheaper public transport through subsidy.
- Incentives for home deliveries/shopping.
- Closing off rat-runs in residential areas.
- Unlimited bus travel within an hour (*or other timeframe*) with one ticket.
- Train and bus through ticketing (*one ticket allowing travel on more than one mode of transport: travelcard principle*).
- All employers of 60+ employees to develop travel plans (*needs legislation*).
- Exeter metro (*using existing track plus extensions to Crediton and to new communities in East Devon – very expensive and even cities larger than Exeter are struggling to get light rail systems implemented*).
- Discourage edge of city shops/workplaces.
- Car adverts: lobby central government for more truthful adverts and real health warnings.
- More encouragement for home working.
- Get local authorities to lobby parliament for removal of parental choice for schools.
- Transport co-operatives (*for running public transport. Not-for-profit public transport providers seen as an important way forward but given current legislation and the entrenchment of large private companies difficult to achieve*).
- More public subsidy for Exeter Car Club (*though see car free housing above*).
- Greener public transport.
- More self-enforced 20mph zones.
- Local transport information on the web.
- School safe zones (no parking near schools)
- Improved surfaces for walkers and cyclists.
- New residential developments with LOCAL services.
- Flexible public transport/experimental transport (e.g. similar to the Wiggly Bus model).
- Park and Ride points dispersed across Devon.

Pledge of support for the Exeter Traffic Reduction Action (ExTRA) Traffic Reduction Strategy

I/we the undersigned, representing _____ (individual/group/business etc) fully support the ExTRA Traffic Reduction Strategy for Exeter.

We call on our local authorities to immediately set and introduce measures to achieve a 3% annual traffic reduction target, which would result in an overall 30% reduction by 2016, based on a 2006 baseline figure. We believe that this reduction can be brought about by our local authorities implementing the following five key measures:

1. **Change minimum city centre parking charges to equate with return bus fares from the outskirts of the city**
2. **Gradual decrease in on-street and off-street public parking (3% per year)**
3. **Introduction of workplace parking charges**
4. **All primary schools to have 'walking buses'**
5. **'Car free housing' developments with public transport links and car clubs**

In addition to these key traffic reduction measures we also believe that the local authorities should implement **a series of secondary measures** to support or link with the five key measures:

1. Fund/subsidise public transport using ring-fenced funds raised from parking charges.
2. Improved city bus services including the introduction of peripheral bus routes to link railway stations, business/retail parks, hospitals, the university, park-and-ride sites etc; redevelopment of the city bus station; increase in evening frequencies and a comprehensive public transport guide like that produced by Torbay Council.
3. Household leafleting campaign (similar to the recycling campaign) focusing on public transport and highlighting the real costs of the car – financial, social, health, environmental; to include information on real and perceived fears of travelling without a car.
4. Use of Cycling England grant to massively increase safe junctions and cycle lanes particularly to schools, workplaces and shops and to fund adverts to raise the status of cyclists while decreasing the status of cars.
5. Extension of car exclusion zones, particularly in the city centre.
6. More pedestrian crossings; better people priority.

Signed: _____

Name(s) _____

Date: _____

Please send signed pledges to Andrew Bell, 70 Church Road, EX2 8TA or copy and email this completed page to abell@fish.co.uk

Appendix 1: The consensus building process

The process consisted of two meetings. At the first meeting, attended by some 30 people, participants, working in groups, identified the main causes of traffic growth and congestion in Exeter. These causes were categorised into strategic themes. Groups then considered a strategic response to each theme and tactical responses to particular issues identified under each theme.

At a second meeting convened as a working group, the solutions proposed at the first meeting within each of the strategic themes were assessed for their likely impact and feasibility. An impact matrix was used as a method of assessing solutions. From this a series of measures for the Traffic Reduction Strategy for Exeter were agreed.

The impact matrix

	High impact	Medium impact <i>or</i> difference of opinion	Low impact
Easy to achieve			
Moderately easy to achieve <i>or</i> where there is wide difference of opinion			
Difficult to achieve			

Following the second meeting a preliminary report and provisional Traffic Reduction Strategy was drafted. This was then considered by participants in the consensus process before the final report was prepared.

The next stage of the process is to encourage as many groups and individuals in Exeter as possible to pledge their support for the strategy and to try and work with the local authorities to adopt the strategy.