

Cllr Peter Edwards - Leader, Exeter City Council

Cllr John Hart - Leader, Devon County Council

Wanted: bold leadership to decongest the city

Dear John and Peter

As Exeter once again ground to an agonising, congested halt this week, it is surely time to think differently about how we move people across the city.

This is not just an issue that Exeter faces. As the hub of one of the country's largest 'travel to work' areas getting Exeter moving properly and reliably is a county-wide problem that we need to solve. This is why we need you both, as leaders of the city and county, to work together on this. We are looking to you to be bold and courageous in embracing the solutions our city and county needs. Are you up for this? We have some proposals to put to you.

Congestion is more than simply a frustration. It is huge drag on the productivity of the city and a disincentive to those considering investing or moving their business to Exeter.

What is more, congestion is only one manifestation of a set of wider challenges the city and county faces. Pollution is, quite literally, killing us off. A reported 42 premature deaths a year in Exeter alone are being caused by pollution, mostly from transport. Furthermore, the way we have built the city it is hard for people to build activity into their everyday lives. As a result it is hard to be active, leading to us becoming unfit - with the resulting strain on our already-stretched social and medical services.

Other cities are beginning to take these issues seriously. Exeter must not be left behind. We could become leaders in tackling these issues and building a better city. Imagine a future where our beautiful city and county has become known as the place to live and do business because we have tackled these issues. A future where we have lifted the blight of congestion, we've reduced pollution and we've enabled people to build activity into their lives. Where we've created beautiful, tranquil places for people to meet and do business.

The answers to the challenges we face are not hidden. Other cities are demonstrating how it can be done and research evidence points to the solutions. What we need is the political boldness, working across parties and across the city/county to embrace and press for these solutions. The prize is a precious one, but requires clear-sighted vision for a better future and courage from you, our leaders.

We have some proposals to help you grasp this better future for our city:

- Firstly, appoint a Transport Commissioner, with authority to work across both city and county. Charge her or him to consider evidence, review best practice and examine the pressure that the growth in our city will bring. Ask the Transport Commissioner to make proposals to unblock Exeter's congestion, reduce pollution and enable active transport whilst accommodating our growing population and our move towards a knowledge-based economy.

We are confident that once a Transport Commissioner considers the evidence for the most efficient way of moving people in Exeter they will conclude that we need to enable a wholesale shift of transport away from the private car and to the bicycle.

- Secondly, ask your Transport Officers to propose solutions soon that prioritise moving people on our roads, not simply moving cars. Ask them to seriously weigh and propose to you how schemes such as congestion charging, car-sharing, reduced car-parking places, increased parking fees, park&ride, parking-free roads, a dense network of cycle paths and business parking levies can form a holistic package that will nudge us into more efficient and sustainable ways of travelling. Task your Officers to build a 'Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan' (LCWIP), as the Department for Transport has encouraged local authorities to do, and start planning for its implementation.
- Thirdly, task your Councillors to be bold in challenging Planning Developments that do not align with the Councils' strategies and masterplans. Too often we see Developers ignoring Council policies and strategies that are designed to enable more walking and cycling and yet their plans still receive Council Committee approval. We need our county and city transport strategies to be adhered to and delivered on the ground.

The people of Exeter and those of Devon who work, shop or visit the city are crying out for solutions. Business too is calling for change: all the city's major employers and nearly 200 of the city's businesses supported the [Exeter Cycling Charter](#) which recognised that "cycling supports local business, boosts economic productivity and contributes to the health and well-being of our workforce".

What we are asking for is courageous political leadership that will deliver a paradigm shift in the way we design our city and travel across it.

Will you be the leaders who will grasp these solutions and make the change?

Mike Walton

EXETER CYCLING CAMPAIGN

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