

CABINET – 21 JANUARY 2020

CONNECTING OXFORD

Report by Director for Planning and Place

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to endorse the overall approach proposed as the basis for further scheme and business case development of Connecting Oxford proposals in partnership with Oxford City Council.

Executive Summary

1. Connecting Oxford proposals - further traffic restrictions across Oxford and a workplace parking levy (WPL) in Oxford's Eastern Arc - could deliver significant benefits for Oxfordshire including reduced congestion and improved public transport connectivity, better air quality and reduced carbon emissions, and more people participating in active and healthy travel.
2. A timetable confirms the development of a detailed scheme and a DfT compliant business case would be undertaken between January/February 2020 and Autumn 2021, with the scheme designed and assessed to ensure any adverse impacts are mitigated. The necessary funding for the next stage of work (estimated to be £1.602m) has already been secured from the Housing & Growth Deal.
3. Initial proposals were recently subject to an extensive engagement exercise with the feedback confirming there is recognition that doing nothing is not an option. Overall, only a minority of online survey respondents – both among the public (25%) and stakeholders (32%) – believed the proposed WPL would make journeys worse. Feedback on the proposed traffic restrictions was more balanced, with a minority of the public (42%) responding that these would make their journey worse, while a small majority of stakeholders (53%) believed their journeys would be worse.
4. Further consultation and engagement would be undertaken as part of the next phase of work. This includes the creation of the 'Connecting Oxford Partnership' to help shape proposals and involving employers and businesses affected by the WPL, including those representing health and education sectors and the private sector. Further engagement would also be carried out with those affected by traffic restrictions, including residents and community groups, smaller employers and businesses.

Introduction

5. This paper outlines Connecting Oxford proposals – further traffic restrictions across Oxford and a workplace parking levy in Oxford’s Eastern Arc – and the potential transport, environmental and other benefits it would bring to Oxfordshire. It confirms the findings of a recent engagement exercise including views on proposals from members of the public and stakeholders. The paper also includes a timetable and costs for work required to develop a detailed scheme proposal and business case.

Background

6. The Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP), [Connecting Oxfordshire](#), which includes the [Oxford Transport Strategy](#) (OTS), sets out a vision and strategy to transform how people travel to and within Oxford to overcome existing problems of congestion and pollution and ensure future growth can be accommodated.
7. The OTS confirms that doing nothing is not an option with a 25% increase in commuting journeys to and within Oxford predicted by 2031 which, if current travel behaviours persist, could result in 13,000 more commuter car trips each day. This amount of additional car traffic in Oxford is simply not sustainable and would severely overburden the transport network and impact on people’s quality of lives.
8. To overcome these challenges the OTS sets out an integrated strategy based on the following components:
 - A better **public transport network**, primarily bus-based, with more capacity (including new, more remote Park & Rides) and faster journey times.
 - A **walking and cycling network** that is continuous and high-quality with space for very high levels of cycling and more pedestrians in areas of high footfall.
 - A **reduction in traffic levels** to enable the above bus and walking and cycling improvements, partly through substantial road space reallocation, as well as reducing traffic emissions.
9. The councils have been very successful in securing funding for these plans, with over £80 million available over the next five years for schemes in and around Oxford including Banbury Road, Botley Road, Woodstock Road, A40 and A44. Additional funding for other schemes will be required including further transport ‘corridor’ improvements inside and outside Oxford, rail improvements at Oxford station and, in the longer term, the Cowley branch line.
10. Associated with implementation of Connecting Oxford, there will also be a further roll-out of Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ) across areas not covered and in addition to the nine CPZ schemes that the county council [approved in April 2019 for formal consultation](#).

11. The councils also continue to work towards the implementation of a Zero Emissions Zone (ZEZ) for the city, which would see all road traffic become zero emission by the mid-2030s. And in combination with other proposals set out in the OTS, including those contained within Connecting Oxford itself, will help to improve air quality and therefore people's health and wellbeing.
12. The provision of dedicated infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport – bus lanes, cycle lanes, footpaths and public realm – have helped manage the growth in travel movements over past years. However, all parts of the transport network are now under pressure. If we are to transform how people travel to and within Oxford and provide enough capacity to meet future travel demand, investment is needed to improve pedestrian, cycle and public transport routes to make sure these are more attractive to users. We must also focus on measures that provide sustained traffic reduction and support increased modal shift away from private car travel.
13. In recognition of this, the OTS proposes a workplace parking levy, traffic restrictions and parking controls. Whilst these measures would be applied within Oxford, the improvements they would enable and directly deliver would have benefits across the county, particularly for the large number of people who currently regularly travel in and out of Oxford for work, education or leisure and those who will do so in the future as the county grows.
14. Traffic reduction would also reduce carbon dioxide emissions, with transport in the UK estimated to contribute about 33 per cent to overall emissions – and 17% within the city of Oxford - and therefore supports Oxfordshire councils in their own commitments to zero carbon.

Connecting Oxford Proposals

15. Proposals contained in [Connecting Oxford](#) are based on the policies and strategy in the county's LTP which includes the OTS. An illustration of the proposals is provided at **Annex 1**, with a summary below including potential benefits.

Traffic restrictions

What are they?

16. Traffic restrictions are places where the road would be closed to most traffic in both directions. They would be similar to the existing "bus gate" traffic restrictions in the High Street and other locations in Oxford city centre, which were introduced in 1999.
17. Buses, cyclists, taxis and private hire vehicles, and all emergency vehicles, would be allowed to pass through the traffic restrictions. There may also be exemptions for other vehicles including those with Blue Badges.

18. Like existing restrictions in the city centre, the new restrictions would be enforced using cameras. There would be no rising bollards or barriers.
19. Like current restrictions, the new restrictions may not all operate over the same time period. Some may only operate during peak times.

What are the benefits?

20. Traffic restrictions reduce the number of vehicles taking up valuable space on the roads. This means road space can be reallocated to create better, cleaner space for other modes of transport:
 - Wider, segregated cycle lanes to allow for all abilities of cyclist;
 - Safer, more pleasant walking and cycling environment;
 - Buses will be able to flow freely, even in places where there is no road space for bus lanes;
 - Less pollution and noise; and
 - Essential vehicles will move around the city more easily.
21. On major routes within the city (e.g. A- and B- roads) it is estimated that traffic levels need to be reduced by about 25% to create free-flowing traffic movement. In the two years after the 1999 city centre traffic restrictions were introduced, traffic reduced by around 60% in Oxford High Street, around 40% on Magdalen Bridge, and around 20% in the city centre overall. Over the longer term, city centre traffic flows have continued to reduce slightly, with overall flows into the city centre 25% lower today than in the 1990s.
22. Reduced traffic levels would have major air quality and carbon reduction benefits, and more people travelling by active modes would benefit from improved physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Where would they be?

23. In Oxford city centre three new traffic restrictions are proposed at Worcester Street, Oxpens Road / Thames Street and South Parks Road / St Cross Road to reduce the number of motor vehicle trips which pass through the city centre. In the Eastern Arc of Oxford two new traffic restrictions on Marston Ferry Road and Hollow Way are proposed to reduce traffic on the B4495.
24. Other traffic restriction and other traffic management schemes, including 'low traffic neighbourhoods', might be required to ensure traffic is not displaced and residential roads are not used as rat-runs.

Workplace parking levy

What is it?

25. A Workplace Parking Levy (WPL) is an annual charge paid by employers for each parking space they provide, on or off-site, that is used for employee

(commuter) car parking. Operational parking is exempt from a WPL as are fleet, visitor and customer car parking spaces. Whilst employers are responsible for paying the charge, they may choose to pass some or all of it on to employees who park at work.

26. In Nottingham, where a WPL was implemented in 2012, the annual charge per space is currently £415. In Oxford, the annual charge would likely be £400 - £600. This is a current working assumption based on the need to fund new bus services, and cycle and pedestrian infrastructure which is estimated to cost between £60-£100 million. The levy in Nottingham has been used as a guide, as well as consideration of the cost of an annual SmartZone bus pass (£565) in Oxford. The actual figure will need to be established as part of the development of a business case and directly relate to the investment needed to improve alternatives to car journeys.
27. The powers to introduce a WPL are contained in the Transport Act 2000. Although a WPL scheme is developed, consulted on and implemented by the local transport authority, it must be approved by the Secretary of State for Transport. It must also be promoted, and income collected, by the Local Transport Authority (in Oxfordshire, the county council).
28. By law, net proceeds from a WPL are only available for the purpose of directly or indirectly facilitating achievement of local transport policies including those set out in the Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan and Oxford Local Plan.

What are the benefits?

29. A WPL incentivises employers to reduce their car parking supply and/or incentivises employees not to drive to their place of work, and travel by public transport, walk or cycle instead, which would help to reduce traffic and congestion, especially at peak times. There would also be other health and mental wellbeing benefits from greater uptake in active travel modes and traffic reduction would also reduce carbon emissions.
30. It would also provide a substantial, predictable, locally controlled source of funding which can be used for both capital and revenue projects, so new and improved bus services as well as funding for additional Park & Ride capacity and better walking and cycling routes. Employer and employee benefits, including grants for car parking management and discounted bus fares and Park & Ride parking could also be offered.
31. The funding from the levy would also be used to provide travel planning and car parking management advice and assistance to support sustainable travel but also assist businesses and employers to implement and comply with the scheme, and to negate any adverse impacts of the scheme.
32. Nottingham City Council estimate that for every £1 raised by WPL, £3 of external funding has been levered in. This combined investment has in total delivered £10 of economic benefit to the city per £1 raised by WPL.

Where would it be?

33. The initial proposal for the WPL area, which was the subject of the recent engagement exercise, covered a strip around the Eastern Arc of Oxford, as shown in **Annex 1**. The area is an irregular shape because it follows the path of a proposed 'core' route for new high frequency bus services, linking major employers in the area to Park & Ride sites and the larger towns in Oxfordshire. The area covers everywhere within the Ring Road that is within around 10 minutes' walking distance from the core bus route as shown in **Annex 2**.
34. This Eastern Arc area was chosen because it:
- Contains just under half of the city's commuter car parking spaces, and so generates a significant amount of the traffic and congestion in and around Oxford; and
 - Because it is not as well served by bus, pedestrian and cycle routes as it needs to be – and so needs significant investment in transport infrastructure and services.
35. Alternative options including expansion of the WPL will be considered at the next stage, as required as part of the DfT business case process (see paragraph 45).

Public and Stakeholder Engagement - Sep-Oct 2019

36. An extensive engagement exercise to obtain feedback from the public and stakeholders on the Connecting Oxford proposals was held between 18th September and 20th October 2019. Over 3,000 responses were received in total; 2932 responded via an online survey (95% of which responded in a personal capacity with the remainder (5%) responding on behalf of a business, employer or other organisation). In addition, some further written feedback was received in emails and letters. Respondents included employers comprising businesses and other organisations, as well as parish councils and a variety of different community interest groups. **A detailed breakdown of the consultation responses is in Annex 3.**
37. In summary, the feedback confirms there is recognition that doing nothing is not an option. Overall, only a minority of online survey respondents – both among the public (25%) and stakeholders (32%) – believed the proposed WPL would make journeys worse. Feedback on the proposed traffic restrictions was more balanced, with a minority of the public (42%) responding that these would make their journey worse, while a small majority of stakeholders (53%) believed their journeys would be worse.
38. Across the public responses as a whole, generally there was strong support for both sets of measures among those that used a car for only part of their journey to their regular destination, or travelled entirely by other means – public

transport, cycling or walking; and strong opposition among those that travelled solely by car.

39. Nevertheless, half of online survey respondents (50%), including car drivers, wanted to see improvements for cycling and buses to and within Oxford.
40. Several individuals and stakeholders, including the University of Oxford, indicated that proposals should go further – including extending the current proposed WPL zone to other parts of the city - or requested further justification for not extending the current proposed WPL zone to other parts of the city.
41. However, there were also real concerns among others around the potential impact of proposals including reduced access to facilities, services and work, displacement of traffic and pollution, increased cost and time spent travelling. A significant number of online survey respondents (28%) supported exemptions from traffic restrictions for Blue Badge holders.
42. Many respondents – particularly among stakeholders - indicated that they wanted more detail including on potential impacts and the alternatives modes of travel and a reassurance that these alternatives are in place and implemented in a timely way.

Recommended next steps

43. Officers consider that many of the concerns raised at this stage could be addressed and mitigated through careful design of the proposals. And so, in light of feedback received, it is recommended that the following aspects of proposals are considered further and as part of the detailed scheme design and business case. This will also include further engagement and consultation (as outlined further below) to ensure proposals meet wider objectives but also provide transport and environmental benefits to those directly affected including residents, employees or employers.

Traffic restrictions

- The exact location of the traffic restriction points;
- Whether further restrictions or other traffic management schemes are required;
- The timing of the restrictions to determine when they should operate including consideration of these operating all day or just part-time;
- Whether there should be further exemptions and how these would be administered in practice; and
- The supporting transport strategy.

Workplace parking levy

- The level of charge;
- The exact boundary of the WPL;
- Whether there should be any exemptions and/or discounts; and

- The supporting transport strategy including establishing priorities for investment of income raised and, as required by the enabling legislation, a detailed 5-year investment plan and outline plan of investment covering a 10-year period.
44. Several individuals and organisations, including some large employers, expressed support for alternative options, including a congestion charge or expansion of the WPL area. Alternative options will be considered at the next stage, as required as part of the DfT business case process. Any alternative options pursued would need to be deliverable and proportionate, and it is important that any WPL scheme delivers clear benefits to employers who pay for it and their employees.

Financial and Staff Implications

Business case tasks and costs

45. The financial implications of developing a detailed scheme up to and including submission of a draft WPL scheme Order and full business case for approval by DfT is estimated to be £1.602m. This includes a 20% contingency.
46. These costs are specifically associated with:
- Transport & emissions modelling and research
 - Supporting transport strategy development & highway design
 - Social & economic impact assessments
 - Cost & income models
 - Preparation of the business case documentation
 - Stakeholder engagement & consultation, including a possible public inquiry
 - Legal advice & support
 - Project management support
47. Note, this excludes costs associated with further scheme development and implementation following approval by DfT. Further scheme development would include more detailed design of highway schemes (traffic restrictions, bus and cycle priority schemes, and supporting traffic management schemes) which are assumed to be funded by money either secured from the DfT or future WPL income (see para. 50).

Funding the business case

48. Project funding has been secured from the Housing and Growth Deal, as the project supports housing growth and sustainable access in and around Oxford.
49. The DfT have confirmed that costs associated with developing and implementing the WPL scheme can be covered by net proceeds generated by future WPL income up to a period of 10 years. In-year costs, i.e. those incurred when the scheme is up and running and where they directly or indirectly support

the aims and objectives of the Local Transport Plan, can also be deducted from net-proceeds.

Future Engagement and Communications

50. Effective engagement and communications will be critical to developing and securing support for a detailed scheme. Through the recent engagement exercise stakeholders have confirmed they want to be more involved in shaping the WPL proposals and further engagement including with community groups will also be required to better understand concerns and access needs in relation to designing more detailed traffic restriction proposals, both in the city centre and Oxford's Eastern Arc. The LEP and other Oxfordshire district councils will also need to be involved.
51. In 2011 government policy in relation to a WPL was: *"[Government] will require any future [WPL] schemes to demonstrate that they have properly and effectively consulted local businesses, have addressed any proper concerns raised and secured support from the local business community. This will make sure that future schemes will not impose a burden on business."*
52. Therefore, before carrying out formal consultation, and a possible Public Inquiry, further engagement will take place, including:
 - A 'Connecting Oxford Partnership' will be established involving employers and businesses affected by the WPL, including those representing health and education sectors and the private sector. The intention would be to use the Partnership to help shape WPL proposals and to try to accommodate stakeholder requests or at least mitigate their concerns.
 - Face-to-face meetings and other events with resident and community groups, smaller employers and businesses and other stakeholders affected by traffic restrictions and/or WPL, will also be undertaken.
53. In addition, there will continue to be a regular flow of communications through media and social media countywide to ensure high levels of public awareness over the proposals. This will be increased significantly as detailed proposals move towards the next phase of public consultation.

Equalities & Sustainability Implications

54. A Service & Community Impact Assessment (SCIA) has been completed, see **Annex 4**. The precise impacts of the proposals will depend on the details of the final scheme and the package of infrastructure and services that it enables or directly funds and supports. As part of the business case process an Equalities and Distributional Impact Assessment will be carried out to ensure impacts are fully captured.
55. However, positive outcomes are expected because WPL funds will enable a range of major transport projects, which will greatly improve the city's

accessibility, particularly by public transport, walking and cycling, and in areas where access other than by car is particularly poor such as Oxford's Eastern Arc. This will increase the number and quality of travel options available to the public, particularly for those without access to a car. As at paragraphs 31 & 32, it is also proposed that WPL income is used to provide a range of employer and employee benefits reducing the impact of the charge, and for those in scope, the cost of using bus services and Park & Ride.

56. Access restrictions and WPL, and the transport projects it can fund, will also have positive benefits for air quality and pollution by helping to reducing traffic levels and by encouraging more people to travel by public transport, walking and cycling. So also increasing uptake of more active travel options, which would have both mental and physical health and wellbeing benefits.
57. The main potential negative impact might be the increased cost, duration and length of car journeys. It is possible there is a negative impact on recruitment and retention of staff and those undertaking operational travel, including those working for the council. Any impacts would have a different effect depending on the individual or group affected. However, there is a greater risk to the economy and employment in not taking action to reduce traffic volumes.
58. The Service & Community Impact Assessment confirms the following actions will be taken as a result of the assessment:
 - Detailed modelling and economic/social impact assessments;
 - Further discussion with communities/individuals at risk of negative impact and groups representing them;
 - Formal consultation to include all communities/individuals at risk of negative impact, and groups representing them; and
 - Consideration of changes to the proposals, including discounts and exemptions, to address residual risks identified after actions above have been completed.
59. The Connecting Oxford proposals to reduce traffic and congestion would reduce traffic emissions because there would be fewer vehicles on the road, covering fewer miles. Vehicles also emit less pollution in free-flowing traffic than they do in congested stop-start conditions. Connecting Oxford would therefore significantly reduce road transport emissions in and around Oxford, contributing to better air quality and reducing the city's contribution to climate change.

Legal Implications

60. The scheme development will be led by the county council as the Transport Authority. The county council's own Legal team will provide legal advice and support on the scheme with external support also brought in including to help draft the WPL scheme Order.

Risk Management

61. The councils are at a relatively early stage in developing these proposals and, whilst a project risk register has been established, a full risk assessment has not been undertaken. A thorough analysis of risks associated with Connecting Oxford will however be undertaken as part of the business case which will be prepared at the beginning of the project and updated throughout. It will also be presented to county and city Cabinets later in 2020.
62. At this stage, there are potential risks around the economic impact and potential for proposals to effect economic growth in the city and beyond. This may reduce opportunities for retention and growth in local employment opportunities. There is however no evidence that traffic restrictions introduced in Oxford city centre in 1999 had this effect, nor has this been the result in Nottingham; recent reporting in the Financial Times in fact confirms that since Nottingham introduced a WPL in 2012 the number of businesses has increased by almost a quarter (+2,350) and there has been a net increase in jobs of 23,400.
63. However, there is a greater risk that business and jobs growth will be constrained if congestion continues to increase and further transport capacity and improved connectivity does not materialise. For example, the OTS estimates that by 2031, under a do-nothing scenario, the impact of the resulting congestion is forecast to result in a loss of around £150 million from the economy of the city per year. Car journey times from the surrounding Oxfordshire towns are also anticipated to increase on average by 18% to the city centre and 14% to Headington.

Timetable

64. The proposed project programme is at **Annex 5**, with an outline of key milestones given below.

21st and 22nd January 2020 – county and city councils Cabinets to decide whether and how to proceed developing Connecting Oxford.

January-October 2020 – develop more detailed proposals and continue discussions with stakeholders.

Winter 2020/21 - formal consultation on a detailed proposal.

May/June 2021 - possible Public Inquiry.

Autumn 2021 - request for Department for Transport approval (as required).

65. The programme allows time to develop a scheme that is right for Oxford, and – more importantly – allows time for the council to talk to the city's employers, Oxfordshire residents and other stakeholders to shape and build support for the scheme before proceeding.

66. In addition to reports to county and city Cabinets at appropriate stages, monthly or more regular Project Steering Group meetings will take place with county and city members including the county's Cabinet Member for Environment and Cabinet Member for Finance, and the city's Cabinet Member for Planning and Transport and Cabinet member for Zero Carbon Oxford. And whilst the Project Steering Group will give overall strategic direction for the project, any final decisions including on matters concerning consultation and implementation will be made by the county's Cabinet.
67. If the councils are satisfied that the case has been made and sufficient support from employers has been secured, specifically linked to the WPL, then a draft scheme Order will be submitted to the Secretary of State for Transport (who must approve the scheme) around autumn 2021.

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Background papers: none

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