

CABINET
14 July 2026

Citizens' Assembly Update

**Report by Director of Environment and Highways and Director of
Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships**

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to
 - a) **Note the progress being made to deliver against recommendations from the Travel and Transport Citizens' Assembly since July 2025.**
 - b) **Note the additional engagement that has taken place with assembly members over the past year, in support of deeper involvement of communities in transport policy development, and scheme design and delivery.**

Executive Summary

2. In February and March 2025, a citizens' assembly was conducted to explore how Oxfordshire's transport system could support people's health, the local economy, and the environment by 2050. The council commissioned MutualGain to design and deliver the assembly.
3. The travel and transport citizens' assembly's purpose was to make recommendations on how the vision and targets set out in the council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) can be achieved in ways that best meet the needs and preferences of the people of Oxfordshire and other stakeholders.
4. On 23 March 2025, Cabinet received the citizens' assembly's recommendations and committed to considering and responding to these at a future meeting in July 2025. Cabinet requested the council officers' response be considered by Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee in advance of Cabinet's meeting in July and this happened on 25 June 2025. Cabinet subsequently approved the council's initial response to the assembly's recommendations at its meeting on 15 July 2025.
5. This covering report provides Cabinet with background information about the citizens' assembly on travel and transport, its 20 recommendations and the council's continued response to these. It is supported by:

- Annex 1 - the full report of the citizens' assembly prepared by MutualGain
- Annex 2 – a report outlining the citizens' assembly's feedback on the council's response to the recommendations
- Annex 3 – a report summarising a citizens' assembly workshop on the proposed Oxford congestion charge which took place in July 2025
- Annex 4 – a report summarising a citizens' assembly workshop on the OxRAIL 2040 plan which took place in September 2025
- Annex 5 - a table providing an update on progress against the citizens' assembly's 20 recommendations

Background

6. A citizens' assembly is a broadly representative group of residents who are chosen by democratic lottery. Citizens' assemblies follow agreed standards and usually adopt a three-step process whereby participants:
 - learn by hearing evidence from a wide range of experts and questioning these;
 - deliberate with one another, carefully considering what they have heard and weighing up the pros and cons; and
 - reach collective recommendations on what they think should be done, with each recommendation aiming for 80 per cent agreement across all assembly members.
7. In February and March 2025, 34 Oxfordshire residents selected by democratic lottery took part in Oxfordshire County Council's first citizens' assembly, delivered by MutualGain.
8. Independent facilitation, and an advisory group with cross-party political representation and academic and industry experts, helped to ensure balance, inclusion and transparency.
9. Participants dedicated 45 hours across nine meetings and 14 separate sessions to answer the following challenge question:

'What steps do we need to take so Oxfordshire's transport system enables our county's health, economy and environment to thrive in 2025?'
10. The assembly's purpose was to make recommendations on how the vision and targets set out in the council's LTCP can be achieved in ways that best meet the needs and preferences of the people of Oxfordshire and other stakeholders. Part of the scope of the assembly was to consider congestion in central Oxfordshire and the core schemes in the Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan.
11. More information about the assembly can be found in Annex 1, including how the assembly was designed and delivered.
12. Overall, the assembly developed 20 recommendations based on their deliberations. These are set out in section three of the Citizens' Assembly report

(Annex 1, pages 22 - 27) and analysed in more depth in section four of the same.

13. All recommendations arising from the citizens' assembly were carefully considered by council officers, including by specialists in transport policy, in place planning, and in communications and engagement. Consideration was given to the context of the council's priorities, the adopted LTCP and its underlying policies and supporting strategies - such as the Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan, and existing and planned schemes of work arising from the previous Local Transport Plan 4, 'Connecting Oxfordshire'.
14. The council's initial response to each of the assembly's recommendations was agreed by Cabinet in July 2025. It was noted that the responses would be subject to further technical development and engagement work to properly assess whether the recommendation could be progressed; this included policy, legal and financial considerations.
15. The council was able to respond positively to many of the recommendations. Overall, it was considered that the citizens' assembly recommendations aligned well with ongoing or planned county council work.

Progress since the council's initial response to the Citizens' Assembly's recommendations

16. Since the Cabinet meeting in July 2025, when the council's initial response to the citizen's assembly's recommendations was agreed, assembly members were invited to take part in a focused workshop to give feedback on the council's response.
17. The workshop took place in July 2025 and provided an opportunity for the assembly members to respond to the council's initial response to their recommendations. Sixteen members of the assembly attended the workshop.
18. Members of the assembly welcomed the council's continued engagement and the opportunity to ensure that implementation plans remained aligned with the assembly's original intent. Through workshop discussions and a follow-up survey, participants offered RAG-rated feedback and qualitative comments on each recommendation.
19. A report was prepared by MutualGain and is included at Annex 2.
20. Overall, the assembly broadly supported the council's direction of travel but did ask for greater clarity and ambition in relation to some recommendations. Key themes included the need for clearer timelines and funding commitments; stronger communication and public engagement; bolder action on bus service reform and city centre traffic reduction; and more concrete commitments to rural connectivity. Assembly members strongly endorsed ongoing dialogue, co-design and transparent decision-making.

21. Since then, further work has taken place to progress the recommendations and the council continues to develop workstreams around most of the recommendations, with progress being made against many of them since the last update.
22. Annex 5 provides more detail on the council's work against each recommendation, including setting out the impact the temporary congestion charge has had on progressing the recommendations. For example, in relation to recommendation 1, the council has been able to introduce free Park & Ride bus travel and service enhancements on Park & Ride routes.
23. There has also been progress in the wider communications and marketing of travel and transport information, as specified in recommendations 3 and 5. The council has launched transport and travel choice campaigns using digital media, outdoor advertising and radio, supported by location-specific webpages and the Better Travel search tool to help residents identify sustainable travel options.

Additional engagement with assembly members

24. The use of a citizens' assembly was a first for the council and supports the council's ambitions to more deeply involve communities in transport policy development, and scheme design and delivery. While the citizens' assembly has proved extremely valuable, it is a very resource-intensive and expensive engagement methodology, and it is not an approach that the council can use extensively.
25. Since the citizens' assembly presented its recommendations to the council last summer, its members have so far been invited to two further workshops to explore specific projects, one focused on the proposed (now implemented) temporary congestion charge and another on the council's long term strategy for rail, OxRAIL 2040.
26. At a workshop in July 2025 the citizens' assembly members were invited to discuss the proposed temporary congestion charge for Oxford. The assembly broadly supported the proposal, recognising its potential to reduce traffic and improve bus reliability during the Botley Road closure. Many felt the £5 daily charge might be too low to meaningfully change behaviour, suggesting a higher fee and emphasising the need for visible reinvestment into alternatives such as free or cheaper Park & Ride, more reliable buses and clearer, standardised fares.
27. Fairness was a concern, particularly for low-income workers and residents with limited alternatives. Suggested mitigations included income-based discounts and clearer communication around exemptions, the charge's purpose and transport options.
28. The assembly's perspective was considered by cabinet members taking the decision to implement the scheme, and it continues to help inform its delivery.
29. The full report from the session is included at Annex 3.

30. An additional follow up session was arranged, inviting assembly members to a workshop specifically focused on the OxRAIL 2040 Plan, the county council's long term strategy for rail.
31. Fourteen members of the Citizens' Assembly reconvened in September 2025 to help shape the OxRAIL 2040 Plan. Participants explored how the rail system could better meet the needs of communities across urban, rural and market-town areas. Participants welcomed the ambition to reopen lines and deliver new stations but emphasised the need for better integration with buses and active travel, improved accessibility, clearer information and stronger safety measures.
32. The assembly members made six recommendations for consideration in the Plan's development. The five recommendations which had support of over 90% were reflected in the actions included in the Plan.
33. The full report from the rail workshop is included at Annex 4.
34. Officers continue to seek opportunities to involve assembly participants in different workstreams where appropriate to do so and where they are willing to be involved.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

35. The citizens' assembly recommendations support the council's Strategic Plan 2025-2028, which sets out a vision for Oxfordshire to be a greener, fairer and healthier county.

Greener: Informing net-zero transport policy, supporting active travel, reducing emissions and improving air quality.

Healthier: Improving safety, boosting physical activity, and improving access to health infrastructure.

Fairer: Ensuring diverse representation, addressing inequalities, incorporating community feedback, and embedding fairness into strategy and implementation.

36. The council's adopted consultation and engagement strategy provides a framework to support innovative and new ways to undertake public engagement and consultation - the citizens' assembly falls within the scope of that strategy.

Financial Implications

37. There are no new budgetary implications arising from this report. £50k revenue is available within 2026/27 specifically to support the recommendations of the

citizens' assembly on travel and transport. In addition, existing council budgets and funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) are supporting the delivery of a number of the recommendations through existing work programmes.

38. The financial implications of each of the recommendations, arising out of the citizens' assembly, will need to be considered as part of the further technical development and engagement work referred to in this report. Accordingly, the financial implications of the recommendations are not dealt with in this report.

Comments checked by:

Filipp Skiffins, Finance Business Partner (Filipp.Skiffins@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Legal Implications

39. The decision to hold a citizens' assembly is an executive function. Whilst there is no general legal duty to hold a citizens' assembly, the council has wide powers to engage with its residents. Primary amongst these is the general power of competence (section 1 Localism Act 2011) and the 'best value' duty requiring the council to seek improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised.

The legal implications of each of the recommendations, arising out of the citizens' assembly, will need to be considered as part of the technical development of each project taken forward. Accordingly, the legal implications of the recommendations are not dealt with in this report.

Comments checked by:

Karen Jordan, Senior Solicitor and Team Leader
(Karen.Jordan@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Staff Implications

40. There are no new or additional staff implications arising from this report. Where specific citizens' assembly recommendations are taken forward, staffing implications will be considered or will already have been considered related to specific planned pieces of work.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

41. There are no specific equality implications arising from this report. Equality and inclusion impacts were core to the design and delivery of the citizens' assembly. Where specific citizens' assembly recommendations are taken forward, Equalities Impact Assessments will be completed or will already have been completed related to specific planned pieces of work.

Sustainability Implications

42. There are no specific sustainability implications arising from this report. Where specific citizens' assembly recommendations are taken forward, sustainability implications will be considered or will already have been considered related to specific planned pieces of work.

Risk Management

43. Where specific citizens' assembly recommendations are taken forward, risk assessments will be considered or will already have been considered related to specific planned pieces of work.

Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways

Susannah Wintersgill, Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships

Annexes:

- Annex 1: Final OCC Citizens' Assembly Report (prepared by MutualGain)
- Annex 2: Keeping the Dialogue Moving: Assembly Feedback on Council Plans (prepared by MutualGain)
- Annex 3: An Assembly Perspective on the Proposal for Temporary Oxford Congestion Charge (prepared by MutualGain)
- Annex 4: Citizens' Assembly Follow-Up Workshop on OxRAIL 2040 (prepared by MutualGain)
- Annex 5: Updated response to citizens' assembly recommendations

Background papers: Nil

Other Documents: Nil

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