

Divisions Affected - All

CABINET

17 September 2024

Sustainable School Travel Strategy 2024/25

Report by Director of Environment and Highways

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**
 - (a) Approve the draft strategy for adoption and publication on the County Council's website by 19th September 2024.

Executive Summary

2. This report provides Cabinet with an overview of the Oxfordshire County Council Draft Sustainable School Travel Strategy. It summarises the background to the strategy, development process and content of the strategy. It is recommended that the final draft strategy and action plan (annex 1) are approved by cabinet.
3. The draft strategy details the sustainable school travel aims, initiatives, and action plan to support modal shift on school and college journeys. There are 24 actions identified over varying periods of time, depending on funding streams available.
4. Public engagement exercises and internal stakeholder discussions have highlighted key priorities and actions needed to support sustainable travel choices for the school and college journeys in Oxfordshire.

Exempt Information

5. There is no exempt information contained in this report.

Background

6. The Sustainable School Travel Strategy sets out Oxfordshire County Council's strategy for promoting sustainable travel to and from school and college across Oxfordshire, which supports our vision:

To improve the health and wellbeing of our children and young people by enabling active and sustainable travel to school and college on a safe, eco-friendly Oxfordshire transport system.

7. Local authorities have a duty to promote the use of sustainable travel on journeys to and from places of education in their area. This duty applies to travel to and from: schools, further education institutions, and 16-19 academies. It is a further requirement for local authorities to prepare a document containing their strategy each academic year and to publish it by such a time as may be described.
8. This Sustainable School Travel Strategy complements existing strategies, including the Council's Active Travel Strategy and Bus Service Improvement Plan. It underpins the Council's Local Transport Connectivity Plan 2022-2050. It aligns with Council policies to address the climate emergency, support public health, address inequalities, and create healthier places to live and work in Oxfordshire. The key aims of the strategy are:
 - Improving health and wellbeing for children, young people, and their families
 - Facilitating more sustainable travel choices for school and college journeys
 - Making active travel (walking, wheeling, cycling, scooting) a safe and comfortable choice for school and college journeys
9. Like many rural counties, Oxfordshire faces the challenges of trying to ensure a fair level of access to services, including education, for those residents living in the more rural areas. The type and quality of transport service across Oxfordshire varies greatly. In urban areas there is usually a range of footpath and cycle route provision, however in rural areas this provision can be sparse. Public transport is typically more comprehensive and frequent within and between urban areas (such as Abingdon and Oxford), but many rural areas are served by infrequent services that are unsuitable for school journeys (tending not to run at peak commuting times), or no service at all. This inevitably makes providing sustainable options for travel to school more of a challenge.
10. In the 2023/24 academic year, Oxfordshire County Council has provided school transport for around 10,000 legally eligible young people to mainstream and special needs schools. Approximately 500 in-house and contracted vehicles are used for this purpose each weekday and costs in the region of £32m per year. Transport can also be provided by parents claiming personal budget or mileage allowances. Some pupils are provided with season tickets on buses and in a small number of cases, trains.
11. In the backdrop of budgetary constraints and the ensuing challenges of providing Home to School Transport for growing numbers of pupils, this strategy is designed to support pupils, students, and their families in making affordable, sustainable travel choices wherever possible and practical for their journeys to and from school or college.

12. A recent public engagement exercise and a young people's focus group identified some key changes that need to be made to support more sustainable travel on school and college journeys. These are all contained in the action plan appended to the draft Sustainable School Travel Strategy at annex 1 of this document.
13. The public engagement exercise also identified that car travel is the highest used mode of travel to school/college at 32.53% of journeys whereas only 12.9% of people would like to travel this way. (See annex 2 for further information on the results of the public engagement survey).

Corporate Policies and Priorities

14. The county council's strategic plan, 2022-25, sets out a vision to lead positive change by working in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer, and healthier county. The Sustainable School Travel Strategy will contribute to delivering this vision.
15. This Strategy complements the Council's Active Travel Strategy and underpins the Council's Local Transport Connectivity Plan 2022-2050. It aligns with Council policies to address the climate emergency, support public health, address inequalities, and create healthier places to live and work in Oxfordshire

Financial Implications

16. Finance for the production of this Strategy was awarded through the Council budget setting process in 2024.
17. The Strategy has been produced by staff from the Environment and Highways directorate, in collaboration with other staff across the Council, along with some external temporary support from an Interim Project Manager.
18. The route map identifies 24 actions related to county council work on sustainable school travel. These include work that is already underway to support sustainable school travel, existing work that can be expanded and new work identified through public engagement.
19. Actions related to existing work will be delivered through business as usual work and existing funding. Some new work can be delivered partially by focusing current staffing resources on the key priorities identified through public engagement. Other new work is aspirational for which it is hoped will attract external funding grants that will support the Council to deliver as co-production projects.
20. It is proposed that any further funding to help realise the strategy ambition or accelerate delivery that cannot be externally funded and deemed a priority, would be considered as part of a future budget setting process. It is not

anticipated that any additional Council funding will be requested in the current (2024/25) financial year.

Comments checked by:

Rob Finlayson, Finance Business Partner (Environment & Highways – Finance), rob.finlayson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

21. The Sustainable School Travel Strategy is a legal requirement under the Education Act 1996, S.508A (1) (c).
22. Local authorities have a duty to promote the use of sustainable travel on journeys to and from places of education in their area. This duty applies to travel to and from: schools, further education institutions, and 16-19 academies. It is a further requirement for local authorities to prepare a document containing their strategy each academic year and to publish it by such a time as may be described.
23. The Sustainable School Travel Strategy for 2024/25 requires publication each academic year.

Comments checked by:

Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor (Environment and Highways – Legal)),
Jennifer.Crouch@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

24. Once approved, delivery of the Sustainable School Travel Strategy and action plan will be undertaken by officers from across the Environment and Highways, Public Health, and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue services, along with existing and new external partners. Delivery of individual actions will primarily be covered by existing work or resources. However, additional temporary support may be necessary to deliver any key actions that the Council identifies as new priorities going forward.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

25. To ensure that we have assessed equalities implications in a fair and thorough manner an Equalities Impact Assessment has been conducted (annex 3).

Sustainability Implications

26. A Climate Impact Assessment has been undertaken (annex 4) to ensure that matters with climate implications are identified and where required, acted upon during development of the Sustainable School Travel Strategy.

Risk Management

27. Risk: The actions in the strategy are not implemented. This may cause reputational damage if the public feels that the Council has not taken on board their views and created a plan for change in accordance with their needs. This could also lead to the Council being deemed as non-compliant with the governing legislation on sustainable travel to school.

Mitigation: The proposed actions contained within the Sustainable School Travel Strategy were developed through consulting with the public and internal stakeholders. There has been cross-directorate collaboration to build a realistic and deliverable action plan using public engagement feedback. Work with colleagues, partners and external stakeholders/delivery partners will continue and be monitored to ensure that actions are progressed. An annual review of the strategy is legally required and will be undertaken to help inform the way forward.

28. Risk: The strategy does not deliver its intended outcomes.

Mitigation: The regular monitoring and annual review of the Strategy will include consideration of whether the intended outcomes are being delivered.

Consultations

29. A public engagement exercise was undertaken between 7th May and 2nd June 2024 and included a survey on the Council's 'Let's Talk' platform. There were 537 respondents, of which 78.5% were involved in school or college journeys. Over 50% of respondents were parents/carers of primary school pupils.
30. A young person's focus group exercise (Travel & Transport Sounding Board) held in March 2023 identified a number of barriers to sustainable travel choices for the school/college journey. These synergised with some of those challenges identified through the public engagement exercise.

NAME

Paul Fermer (Director of Environment and Highways)

Annex:

1. Draft Sustainable School Travel Strategy & Action Plan
2. Public Engagement Feedback Analysis Report
3. Equalities Impact Assessment
4. Climate Impact Assessment

Background papers: Nil

Other Documents: Nil

Contact Officer: Melissa Goodacre, Sustainable Transport Manager
(Environment & Highways)
melissa.goodacre@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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