Divisions Affected – St Clement's & Cowley Marsh, Headington & Quarry, Churchill & Lye Valley

DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT

14 NOVEMBER 2024

ST CLEMENT'S BUS LANE, OXFORD

Report by Director of Environment and Highways

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:

a) **Approve the making of a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) for the existing experimental westbound bus lane on St Clement's Street and Headington Road and retain the other measures previously introduced to accommodate it as shown in Annex 1:**

   i. **removal of the on-street parking bay between Caroline Street and Boulter Street**
   ii. **conversion of parts of the existing eastbound cycle lane from 'mandatory' (solid white road marking) to 'advisory' (dotted white road marking)**
   iii. **removal of a short section of eastbound cycle lane between Boulter Street and Bath Street, and**
   iv. **extension of existing cycle lanes in both directions at the signalled crossing west of Caroline Street by relocating the crossing zig zag markings**

b) **Instruct officers to review the need for the bus lane following the introduction of the trial traffic filters approved by the Council's Cabinet in November 2022**

Executive Summary

1. This report sets out and justifies the proposal to permanently introduce a bus lane on St Clement's Street and Headington Road for westbound buses, with pedal cyclists, e-scooters, taxis and licensed private hire vehicles also permitted following a successfully trial through an experimental order.. The main aim of this project is to reduce the delays for buses in this area.

Background

2. An 'Experimental' Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) was made on 31 July 2023 introducing a westbound bus lane on the A420 St Clements Street, London Place & Headington Hill. This followed a local pre-engagement exercise, after which the Cabinet Member for Highway Management approved the officer recommendations to proceed with an Experimental TRO.

3. An amendment to remove parts of the experimental bus lane was introduced on 7 October 2023 following feedback from road users, site visits and analysis of initial monitoring data.

4. This report summarises the consultation feedback and monitoring data for the **amended** proposal, and recommends the amended scheme is made permanent by making a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO).

Proposed Scheme

5. The proposed scheme layout is shown in Annex 1. This layout has been in place under an ETRO since 7 October 2023. No changes to the layout are proposed as part of the making of a TRO for the scheme.

Monitoring Data

6. Data from various sources on the impact of the experimental bus lane has been analysed, and the findings of each are summarised below, with more detail in Annex 2.

Bus Journey Times

7. A comparison of bus journey time data from on-bus trackers prior to the bus lane introduction (March 2023) and after the bus lane introduction (March 2024) shows significant reduction in westbound bus journey times between the Oxford Brookes University and Glebe Street bus stops of approximately 15-20% in all time periods.

8. A reduction of 25% bus journey times is shown on Morrell Avenue from Union Street to Glebe Street in the evening peak period.

9. For the other stop pairs and time periods, data shows a mixture of small reductions and small increases. Overall officers and bus operators consider the bus lane is beneficial for bus passengers.

Collisions

10. Collision reports from Thames Valley Police have been analysed. The presence of the bus lane is not considered to be contributory factor in any of the collisions that occurred after the bus lane was implemented.

General Traffic Journey Times (Congestion)

11. Analysis of Inrix and Google data (which comes from in-car navigation systems and mobile phones) from March 2023 and March 2024, before and after the bus lane was introduced, shows that journey times have remained broadly the same or reduced on most of the road links affected by the bus lane, including Headington Road, Marston Road, Morrell Avenue and London Place, travelling towards the city centre.

12. On St Clements itself, journey times have increased in both directions in the evening peak period, but have reduced in the morning peak period.

13. It is not clear why the bus lane would improve general traffic journey times, so we cannot directly attribute these changes to the scheme. Nevertheless, the data provides reassurance that overall traffic journey times have not been adversely affected.

Air Quality

14. Provisional air quality data from Oxford City Council's diffusion tube monitoring in St Clements shows that the air quality has slightly improved (by 5%) since the implementation of the experimental bus lane. Several factors affect air quality (including weather and vehicle fleet renewal) therefore we cannot directly attribute these changes to the scheme. Nevertheless, the data provides reassurance that air quality has not been adversely affected.

Traffic, Pedestrian and Cycle Flows

15. Traffic, pedestrians and cyclists flows for the St Clements area have been obtained for March 2023 and March 2024 from a sensor located in St Clements and shows that since the implementation of the bus lane, total motorised traffic flows have reduced by 5%, while the number of pedestrians and cyclists have increased by 3% and 10% respectively. We cannot directly attribute these changes to the scheme, but the data provides reassurance that cyclist and pedestrian flows have not been adversely affected and motorised traffic volumes have not increased.

Consultation Feedback and Officer Responses

16. A total of 106 online responses and three email responses were received during the formal consultation period, which ran from 7 October 2023 to 7 April 2024. The full responses are shown in Annex 3 and summarised below.

Table 1 – summary of consultation views

View	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Oppose	42*	39%
Support	45	41%
Concerns	22	20%
Total	109	100%

17. Respondents **supporting** the scheme identified the following benefits:

- Safer cycling
- Improved bus speed and reliability
- Encourages bus and cycle use as opposed to private car use
- Helps to reduce traffic
- Removal of on street parking

18. The concerns of respondents **opposing the scheme or expressing concerns** are listed below, along with officer responses:

a) Increased traffic congestion, including delays to buses

Monitoring data shows that bus journey times have been significantly reduced since the implementation of the bus lane. General traffic journey times have also improved overall.

b) Mixed bus and cycling lane dangerous for cyclists

Cycle flows increased by 10% since the introduction of the scheme, no recorded collisions can be attributed to the bus lane. However, the scheme will continue to be monitored through Thames Valley Police collision data and any informal reports from road users.

c) People's concerns not considered by OCC

The scheme was adjusted in October 2023 in response to monitoring and feedback from road users. Monitoring data has been analysed to address the concerns raised during the consultation.

d) Unsafe layout

No accidents have occurred that are directly related to the scheme.

e) LTNs have increased congestion in St Clements and other areas

The impacts of the East Oxford LTNs were analysed in detail and reported to the council's Cabinet in October 2023. It is acknowledged that traffic and congestion levels in Oxford remain too high; the trial traffic filters due to be

implemented as soon as Botley Road reopens will address this. In the meantime, measures such as the St Clements bus lane help to mitigate the impact of traffic congestion on bus journey times and reliability.

f) Will affect connectivity with other areas

The bus lane has no impact on the ability of general traffic to move through St Clements; overall traffic journey times for general traffic have improved since the introduction of the scheme (although as noted above this may not be a direct result of the scheme).

g) Harming businesses

Monitoring of pedestrian flow shows a slight increase from March 2023 without the bus lane to March 2024 with the bus lane of 3%. Whilst this change cannot be attributed to the bus lane, it provides some reassurance that footfall has not been adversely affected.

h) Waste of budget

The experimental bus lane in St Clements is consistent with and delivers on a number of the council's nine corporate priorities and transport priorities. Bus users consistently rank faster and more reliable buses as their top priorities for bus improvements (Oxfordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan, June 2024). The scheme also delivers improvements for cyclists. Monitoring data suggests the scheme has delivered significant benefits.

i) Stops free movement of cars

The bus lane has no impact on the ability of general traffic to move through St Clements. Overall journey times for general traffic have improved since the introduction of the scheme (although as noted above this may not be a direct result of the scheme).

j) Increased air pollution

Data shows that air quality has improved by 5% since the implementation of the scheme.

k) Not good for motorcyclists, they should be allowed on the bus lane

Motorcyclists and mopeds are not currently permitted to use bus lanes in Oxford. Large numbers of cyclists use bus lanes in Oxford, and we have targets to further increase cycling in the city. Officers do not consider motorcycle use of bus lanes is compatible with this aim. Furthermore:

- Motorcycles are not as sustainable or active a mode of transport compared to catching a bus or cycling

- Previous reviews of motorcycle safety in Oxford suggest there would likely be no significant safety benefit for motorcyclists in allowing them to use bus lanes

- Additional vehicle classes permitted in bus lanes may delay buses.

Responses from Stakeholders

19. There were five responses received from stakeholders raising concerns, expressing their support and offering suggestions for the experimental bus lane.

20. *Motorcycle Action Group* suggested that motorcycles should always have access to all bus lanes.

21. *Bus Users Oxford* raised concerns about bus speed and reliability and expressed that it should be improved.

22. *Oxford City Council* gave support to the introduction of the experimental bus lane on a permanent basis, stressing that it will help residents and visitors who wish to use the bus to go to work, home, study, etc. They also mention that it will improve road safety for cyclists. However, they expressed some concerns:

    - The experimental bus lane can cause more traffic towards city centre giving the narrowness of St Clement's

    - The proposal is not clear in terms of how it will impact cyclists

    - The pedestrian experience looks like it is being deprioritised, as there could be an increase in pedestrian waiting time to cross

    Points 1 and 2 are addressed elsewhere in this report; it is unclear what is meant by point 3 but there has been no change to traffic signal or pedestrian crossing timings as part of the scheme.

23. *Oxford Bus Company* and *Stagecoach* voiced their support for the experimental bus lane in St Clements becoming permanent.

Financial and staffing Implications

24. A total of £85,937 has been spent on the implementation of the experimental bus lane, funded from the Bus Journey Time Reliability Fund. No further costs are expected except some additional staff time to complete the TRO process, which will be accommodated within existing budgets.

    Comments checked by: Rob Finlayson, Strategic Finance Business Partner (Environment & Highways; Economy & Place)

Legal Implications

25. The scheme has been introduced by Oxfordshire County Council as the Traffic Authority and Highway Authority. Legal advice required for the project will be met from existing council resources.

26. The consultation that has been undertaken, which will aid development of the scheme designs, complies with the consultation requirements for the various elements as required by law including under the Highways Act 1980, the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and related regulations.

27. The relevant statutory procedures for introducing an ETRO and (if approved) a TRO have been followed.

Comments checked by: Jennifer Crouch, Head of Law (Environment Team)

Local Transport and Connectivity Plan Implications

28. The experimental bus lane in St Clements is consistent with several of the council's nine corporate priorities, including:

- Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work
- Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents
- Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network
- Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces
- Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy
- Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.

29. In July 2022, Oxfordshire County Council adopted its new Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) which sets a clear vision to deliver a net-zero transport system that enables Oxfordshire to thrive, protects the environment and makes the county a better place to live for all residents. This includes ambitious targets to:

- replace or remove 1 in 4 car trips in Oxfordshire by 2030
- deliver a net-zero transport network by 2040
- have zero, or as close as possible, road fatalities or life-changing injuries by 2050.

30. To help deliver the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan vision, the adopted Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan (COTP) proposes a set of 22 actions to support a more sustainable and reliable transport system across the central Oxfordshire area, including the need to:

- reduce exposure to air pollution and rapidly reduce carbon emissions from all transport related activities
- reduce congestion and its negative impacts on bus services and economic productivity and vitality

- encourage more sustainable development, making greater use of limited road space and prioritising public transport, walking and cycling
- improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities

Equality & Inclusion Implications

31. An Equalities Impact Assessment is at Annex 4. The proposal is not expected to have a disproportionate impact, bias, discriminate or unfairly disadvantage individuals or groups within the community.

Sustainability Implications

32. The proposals would support Oxfordshire County Councils' vision to deliver a zero-carbon Oxfordshire transport system that enables the county to thrive whilst protecting the environment and making Oxfordshire a better place to live for all residents.

Risk Management

33. A risk register has been maintained throughout the life of the project. There are no outstanding risks as the project has already been constructed. Safety checks were completed before and after construction (a full Road Safety Audit was not required due to the comparatively minor nature of the works). The scheme will continue to be monitored and reviewed through normal operational network management activities, including Thames Valley Police collision reporting.

Paul Fermer
Director of Environment and Highways

Annexes: Annex 1: Scheme Layout
Annex 2: Monitoring Data
Annex 3: Consultation Responses
Annex 4: Equalities Impact Assessment

Background papers: None

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