CABINET

10 September 2025

Oxford temporary congestion charging points

Report by Director of Environment and Highways

Cabinet is recommended to:

a) approve the implementation of six temporary congestion charging points in Oxford as described in Annex 1, for a maximum of two years from the date of implementation

b) authorise the Director of Environment and Highways (in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport Management) to make any necessary changes to the scheme to ensure its successful delivery; provided that these do not substantially alter the scheme's impact

c) authorise the Director of Environment and Highways (in consultation with the Director for Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer) to make and implement the necessary Charging Order under the Transport Act 2000

d) approve the development and implementation of the necessary infrastructure and supporting systems at an estimated cost of £190,000

e) instruct officers to develop and implement the investment plan outlined in paragraph 96 along with any additional measures in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport Management

Executive Summary

1. Network Rail's ongoing closure of Botley Road at Oxford station means the Cabinet decision in November 2022 to introduce six trial traffic filters in Oxford cannot be implemented until at least August 2026. The trial was initially due to start soon after the November 2022 decision but was initially delayed until November 2024 due to the Network Rail work. It was then further delayed until August 2026. This has meant that the scheme benefits of quicker and more reliable buses, safer and more attractive walking and cycling, and environmental benefits cannot be realised. The continued closure of Botley Road has worsened the situation for business travel in

the city including community-based healthcare professionals and mobile trades, who will benefit from the trial traffic filters.

2. In early 2025, organisations, including Oxford City Council and Oxford Bus Company, urged Oxfordshire County Council to investigate short term mitigations given the continued closure of Botley Road and the resultant delay to the trial traffic filters. The city council specifically stated "Oxfordshire County Council, as the highways authority, must take action now to tackle congestion and speed up bus journeys in Oxford. We cannot leave residents wasting hours every day sitting in traffic jams for another year and a half".

3. In June 2025, the Cabinet approved a public consultation on six temporary congestion charging points in Oxford, operating at the same locations and times as the six trial traffic filters approved in November 2022, along with a number of smaller schemes to address congestion in the city.

4. This report outlines the case for action, alternative options considered, the results of the consultation, and the expected impacts of the temporary congestion charging points.

The case for action

Congestion in Oxford

5. Oxford has grappled with road congestion for many years. In 2011 the Oxford Mail reported that Oxford was ranked the "13th most congested city in Europe". Annex 2 shows average traffic speeds in the morning and evening peaks in Oxford in 2024.

6. Public transport and active travel provision in the city must be improved to tackle congestion, however, congestion must also be tackled to meaningfully improve public transport and active travel provision. Better public transport and active travel provision are therefore not an "alternative" to traffic restraint policies: they are the outcomes such policies seek to deliver.

7. Oxford does not have space for new bus lanes or more road capacity. The network on which the city's bus network operates is mostly shared with other traffic and will always be congested at busy times unless traffic levels are reduced.

8. With high traffic levels, pedestrian crossings cannot be added at junctions which lack them, and cycle lanes cannot be provided where they are most needed, because doing so would reduce traffic capacity and create more congestion, further damaging the bus network. If traffic reduction can be achieved, priority can be given to the bus, walking and cycling networks; three of the most space-efficient modes that are usually competing with general motor traffic for the same limited space.

9. However, cars (along with commercial vehicles) will always have a vital role in the life and economy of the city. Therefore, a balance has to be struck and in particular it is important to prioritise those who rely most heavily on private cars and have fewer viable alternatives (such as tradespeople using cars to carry tools, community-based health and care workers, or those with disabilities).

10. The city and county are growing, with thousands of new jobs and homes planned over the coming years. These will only add to the city's transport pressures.

Traffic filters delay

11. Proposals for traffic filters (in one form or another) have been part of the council's traffic restraint policies since 2015, but similar measures have been debated in the city since the 1970s as a solution to the city's congestion. In November 2022, the Cabinet approved a trial of six traffic filters in Oxford for up to 18 months. Their main purpose is to reduce traffic flows and congestion where it most delays buses and where active travel improvements are most needed.

12. Network Rail's ongoing closure of Botley Road at Oxford station means the traffic filters cannot be implemented until at least August 2026. Following news of the further delay to the reopening of Botley Road, Oxford City Council urged 'Oxfordshire County Council to take action now to tackle congestion.' Oxford Bus Company warned that 'congestion in Oxford is at "emergency levels"' and urged the County Council to come up with a 'Plan B solution', saying it "should not wait until the introduction of the traffic filters to tackle growing congestion". Representations have been received from carers and tradespeople struggling with congestion in the city, two groups of essential road users that would have benefited from the introduction of the trial traffic filters in November 2024.

13. The closure of Botley Road has increased congestion, slowing buses by up to 17% on Abingdon Road and lengthening journey times on Banbury and Woodstock roads. This has made conditions tougher for pedestrians and cyclists. Workers such as healthcare professionals and tradespeople are affected by longer traffic queues. There is a risk of losing more bus services, creating a negative cycle of deteriorating public transport and increasing congestion. The council has already stepped in to financially support previously commercial bus services in the city due to increased congestion, but this is not financially sustainable in the longer term.

14. A citizens' assembly was held in early 2025 to discuss and debate the council's transport policies. There was strong support for traffic reduction measures and cheaper and more reliable public transport. Around 70% supported the implementation of a congestion charge which meant it did not meet the threshold for a formal recommendation.

Options considered

15. In June 2025, Cabinet considered the recommendations set out in the "Traffic Filter Delay – Mitigation Proposals" paper and the Cabinet authorised officers to consult on six temporary congestion charging points at the six locations where the trial traffic filters are planned, using the infrastructure and systems largely completed for the traffic filters in 2024, principally the ANPR cameras and the back office system (related to administration of permits and charges). Cabinet also authorised officers to develop various smaller schemes across the city to tackle congestion.

16. The June 2025 report to Cabinet outlines the other options considered by officers during spring 2025. Many of the options considered will be implemented alongside traffic restraint measures. The report and minutes can be viewed here.

17. In addition, a number of alternative options have been put forward by those responding to the temporary congestion charge consultation.

18. By far the most frequent suggestion was to remove the low traffic neighbourhood schemes (LTNs) introduced in 2021/22. Officers have considered this suggestion carefully and would make the following observations:

    (a) It is clear that acute congestion has affected the city's road network for many years before LTNs were introduced –in 2018, the average morning rush hour inbound traffic speed in Oxford was 10.6mph.

    (b) In the first half of 2019, there were 65 days when traffic speeds on at least one route into Oxford fell to under 5mph.

    (c) In 2018, average bus speeds in Oxford had been under 10mph since 2016.

    (d) The average bus speed within the ring road in the first half of 2025 was 11.6mph.

    (e) Whilst LTNs appear to have slightly increased congestion in a small number of places (as noted in previous cabinet reports), it is clear that congestion existed across Oxford before LTNs. Removing LTNs might slightly reduce congestion close to the LTNs (at least temporarily), but their removal would not lead to traffic reductions in other parts of the city.

    (f) LTNs are part of a wider strategy to deliver the aim of reducing car trips in the county by 1 in 4 by 2030 and 1 in 3 by 2040. Reducing short car trips in urban areas will be key to reaching those goals. The LTNs were designed to be implemented alongside the trial traffic filters. However, given Network Rail's continued and lengthy closure of the Botley Road has meant a delay to the

trial traffic filters. This means an essential complementary scheme to support the LTNs has been delayed. The traffic reduction expected as a result of the trial traffic filters means that it is possible to prioritise walking, cycling and bus travel whilst also providing residents with quiet and low traffic streets, to enable them to make sustainable travel choices.

(g) Using narrow residential routes as "relief roads" to reduce congestion on main roads is not a practical long-term solution to congestion in Oxford. The benefits of LTNs for residents and those walking or cycling through LTN areas are significant and contribute to the wider policy objective of improving active travel infrastructure and reducing car trips in the city. Prioritising motor traffic over those walking and cycling does not accord with Oxfordshire County Council's adopted transport user (road) hierarchy in the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP). Transport user (road) hierarchy is what sets the direction for the whole LTCP and clearly outlines the order in which we will consider different modes of transport in scheme design.

(h) The evidence from LTNs is that people are adapting car journeys or using their cars less and walking and cycling more for short journeys, even by those opposed to LTNs (Understanding Mobility and Activity in the Low Traffic Neighbourhood).

(i) Oxford has many long-standing residential 'no through-roads' which, if opened to all traffic, may temporarily relieve congestion on major routes. There appears to be no good reason to adopt a "last in, first out" approach, so unless *all* residential no through-roads that might relieve congested major roads were opened, it would be difficult to determine on what basis to open some and leave others closed. Given the inappropriate nature of residential streets for large volumes of traffic and the resultant impact on quality of life, many new developments are now designed on a cul-de-sac basis without through routes for motor vehicles. Primary or boundary roads are used for through-roads and the main access routes into and out of development sites.

(j) Bus operators have expressed concerns about the impact of LTNs on bus delays without the other parts of the Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan coming forward, but they recognise the role of LTNs in boosting sustainable transport in the city alongside other measures (such as the traffic filters). The recent Citizens' Assembly did not call for the removal of LTNs.

19. The Independent Oxford Alliance (IOA) has suggested an alternative solution to the problem of congestion in Oxford. The IOA solution is based on the removal of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTN) in East Oxford and Cowley, accompanied by unspecified targeted road layout changes to tackle congestion. Traffic would be reintroduced along the affected streets between main roads but only by introducing one-way streets (although some already are, or historically have been, one-way

streets). This would return heavy traffic flows into streets that since the introduction of LTNs, have become quieter, safer, and more attractive routes for residents and notably for people using them as key parts of their walking and cycling journeys across the city. An additional risk of one-way traffic circulation is excessive vehicle speeds. Allowing vehicles to travel through existing LTN areas again would also reintroduce risks of turning vehicle collisions with pedestrians and cyclists at junctions with the main roads.

20. A number of suggestions/options have been put forward by Open Roads for Oxford Ltd (OROL) and Reconnecting Oxford. The response to these can be found in Annex 3. OROL and OBAG have objected to the temporary congestion charge.

21. To confirm, officers do not recommend removing the LTNs as an alternative to the temporary congestion charge or any other traffic restraint policies for the reasons given above.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

22. Developing a scheme that gives similar benefits to the proposed traffic filters during this extended closure to the Botley Road will support the council's nine priorities:

- Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work
- Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire
- Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents
- Support carers and the social care system
- Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network
- Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces
- Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential
- Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy
- Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit

23. 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 and safer 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, and
- a county-wide target to increase cycle trips from 600,000 to 1 million per week by 2031.

24. To help deliver the LTCP vision, the Central Oxford Travel Plan (COTP) proposes a set of 23 actions to support a more sustainable and reliable transport system across the central Oxfordshire area, including proposals for traffic filters which are required to address several challenges, 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

25. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed and is at Annex 7.

26. The proposed temporary congestion charging scheme is intended to:

- make bus journeys quicker and more reliable,
- support the introduction of brand-new electric buses, (predominantly made possible by the future introduction of the trial traffic filters), and new bus routes,
- make cycling and walking safer and more attractive, and
- reduce local air pollution to improve the health and wellbeing of Oxford's communities.

27. These outcomes are likely to have a net positive impact on the city's residents, including Protected Characteristic Groups pursuant to the Council's Corporate Policies and Priorities as set out at paragraph 22 above.

28. It is acknowledged that the temporary congestion charging scheme may inconvenience drivers (by potentially needing to take a longer route) or increase the cost of travel by car (increased journey distance or paying the charge), especially for those who rely on cars, such as older and/or disabled people and people from certain ethnic groups. Several additional disproportionately negative impacts have also been identified in this assessment, with varying implications.

29. Where the temporary congestion charging scheme increases journey times, this may have a disproportionately negative impact on non-professional carers for disabled and/or older residents who are more likely to be making regular trips by car. However, it is important to recognise that motor vehicle access to almost all locations has been maintained. In addition, permits providing a 100% discount on the charge for Blue Badge holders, disabled tax class vehicles, taxis and private hire vehicles, and both professional and non-professional health and care workers will mitigate the potential negative impacts. The ability for residents of Oxfordshire (including unlimited permits and 50 visitor day passes per year for those living in the Central Permit Area) to obtain day passes (avoiding a charge), will also help mitigate impacts on people making fewer regular journeys for caring purposes.

30. The temporary congestion charge is also forecast to reduce traffic volumes and create improved conditions for buses, leading to reduced journey times by public transport. According to census data, this will disproportionately benefit those who currently use buses, including some disabled people, women (who are more likely to use public transport than men), and 'Black/African/Caribbean/Black British' residents who have the highest public transport mode share by ethnic group in Oxford.

31. There are also likely to be benefits for those who cycle (predominantly those aged 16-44) due to the reduction of traffic resulting from the temporary congestion charging scheme. This will create a safer and more accessible environment for people cycling and has the potential to encourage people from all backgrounds to cycle.

Sustainability implications

32. A climate impact assessment has been completed and is at Annex 8.

33. The proposed temporary congestion charging scheme is intended to make bus journeys quicker and more reliable, support the introduction of brand-new electric buses and new bus routes, make cycling and walking safer and more attractive, and reduce local air pollution to improve the health and wellbeing of Oxford's communities. It is expected to have a strongly positive climate impact, as well as benefits for air quality, public health and liveability. The total daily vehicle distance travelled in the city (including the effects of traffic re-routing to the ring road) is forecast to reduce by 1% - a reduction of 33,800 vehicle kilometres in a 24-hour period.

Other impacts

34. The proposed temporary congestion charge was modelled prior to the consultation. The modelling data does not therefore reflect the impact of changes made in

response to the consultation, the proposed investment plan, or bus service improvements proposed by operators, as a result of the temporary congestion charge. These factors are expected to have a positive impact on the scheme's outcomes, but not fundamentally alter the broad impacts described.

Bus journey times

35. The council's Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme targets a 10% improvement in bus productivity from a 2019 base by the end of 2025: bus productivity refers to the number of buses and drivers required to operate a given frequency of bus service and is driven by bus operating speeds (slower = less productive) and the variability of bus journey times (more variable = greater schedule recovery time = less productivity).

36. Peak time bus speeds in Oxford between 1 March and 30 June 2025 are shown at Annex 9. As expected, bus speeds are broadly correlated with traffic speeds (Annex 2). The temporary congestion charge is forecast to reduce traffic flows at many of the locations where traffic and bus speeds are slowest, including the approaches to the Plain, the approaches to major junctions on the B4495, Abingdon Road and the inner sections radial routes. However, the scheme is also forecast to increase traffic flows on some bus routes, notably outer sections of radial routes and on Marston Ferry Road and Hollow Way during the interpeak period when the congestion charge locations on those roads are not in operation.

37. The forecast flow reductions and increases follow the same broad pattern as the trial traffic filters, which were forecast to result in an overall bus productivity improvement across the Oxford SmartZone of 6.5% compared to a 2019 base. The traffic filters and congestion charge are forecast to achieve average traffic reductions across city centre and outer sites of around 12% and 10% respectively across all time periods. Assuming a linear relationship between traffic reduction and bus productivity, the bus productivity benefit of the temporary congestion charge would be around 5.4% - a significant contribution to the 10% target.

Active travel

38. The scheme is expected to improve conditions for active travel in the city, primarily by reducing traffic flows. The charge itself is also likely to encourage some short trips currently being made by car to switch to walking or cycling. In the year after the London congestion charge was introduced, the number of cyclists entering the charging zone increased by 19% (London Congestion Charge Impacts Monitoring Third Annual Report, April 2005).

39. During the relatively short period when the congestion charge would operate, it will not be possible to introduce significant new active travel infrastructure. However, active travel users will benefit from substantial improvements made in the city in recent years, including "quickway" schemes and low traffic neighbourhoods.

Traffic flows and congestion

40. All traffic modelling is subject to uncertainties; the modelling data given below is from a strategic model designed to forecast the broad impacts of the scheme (please see Annex 10). Forecasts (whether increases or decreases) for specific roads should therefore be approached with caution. The scheme is forecast to:

- Decrease city centre traffic by 15-20% on average
- Decrease "outer city" traffic by 2-5% on average
- Increase traffic on some outer city roads and parts of the ring road
- Decrease total mileage in the city (including the ring road) by 1%

41. The introduction of the temporary congestion charge is expected to reduce traffic over a wide area of Oxford city as illustrated in Figures 3-2 and 3-3 in the Modelling and Income Forecasting Report. These figures also show where there may be increases or limited change in traffic flows. Traffic along St. Clement's Street is expected to significantly reduce (as would be expected) and is shown in Figures 3-2 and 3-3. This reduction will result in improved junction performance at The Plain as well as London Place. This will be same at other locations, such as Abingdon Road and Thames Street, Banbury Road and Marston Ferry Road, Garsington Road and Hollow Way, Cherwell Drive and Marston Lane to name a few. The traffic impacts of the proposals will be strategic and city-wide (noting that the Botley Road is currently closed) not just confined to the streets where congestion charge enforcement will be carried out. Therefore, considering these streets in isolation does not give an accurate indication of the whole picture.

42. The forecast traffic flow changes on the main roads in the city are shown in the traffic and income forecasting report in Annex 10 (figures 4-4, 4-5 and 4-6). Existing peak time congestion "hotspots" are shown in Annex 2.

43. Concerns were raised during the consultation about the traffic increases forecast at outer sites, such as Woodstock Road, Banbury Road, Marsh Lane and Garsington Road, and inter-peak traffic increases forecast on Marston Ferry Road and Hollow Way.

Table 1 summarises the roads where the largest increases are forecast.

Table 1: forecast % flow change on roads with largest forecast traffic increases

Road	Direction	AM peak	Interpeak	PM peak	24 hours
Woodstock Road (northern section)	Northbound	+23%	+12%	+29%	+18%
	Southbound	+10%	+3%	+18%	+8%
Banbury Road (northern section)	Northbound	-12%	-8%	-2%	-7%
	Southbound	+11%	-17%	+14%	-1%
Marsh Lane	Northbound	+9%	+8%	-1%	+5%
	Southbound	-1%	+15%	+7%	+8%
Garsington Road (southern section)	Eastbound	+27%	0%	+22%	+12%
	Westbound	+10%	+1%	+33%	+11%
Marston Ferry Road	Eastbound	-38%	+24%	-51%	-7%
	Westbound	-60%	+25%	-62%	-16%
Hollow Way (central section)	Northbound	-17%	+25%	-36%	-2%
	Southbound	-19%	+11%	-17%	-3%

44. Traffic on the northern section of Woodstock Road is forecast to increase in both directions, but more in the northbound direction. These are similar increases expected as part of the approved trial traffic filters and to address this, the bus lane has been changed from southbound to northbound between Squitchey Lane and Wolvercote Roundabout. This may result in more congestion for general traffic on the northern section, but flows are expected to decrease on the southern section.

45. Traffic on the northern section of Banbury Road is forecast to decrease northbound across all time periods but expected to increase southbound in the morning and evening peaks. A bus lane is already in place southbound to mitigate the impact of congestion for buses. Traffic flows are forecast to decrease on the southern section of Banbury Road, in both directions, south of Marston Ferry Road.

46. Traffic on Marsh Lane is expected to increase northbound in the morning and interpeak hours, and southbound in the afternoon and interpeak hours, with minor decreases in the opposite directions at those times. Overall, Marsh Lane will see more traffic during the day, but predicted decreases on Marston Ferry Road and adjustments to signal timing at Marsh Lane and Cherwell Drive (see paragraph 48) should help manage this. Additional junction improvements could also be explored.

47. Traffic on the southern section of Garsington Road is forecast to increase both eastbound and westbound across all time periods, except eastbound in the interpeak, when there is expected to be no change. However, large decreases in traffic on Hollow Way and smaller decreases on Between Towns Road, in the morning and evening peaks (see paragraph 48), enables changes to signal timings at the Original Swan junction that will help to mitigate the increases on Garsington Road.

48. Marston Ferry Road and Hollow Way are expected to see significant traffic reductions during the morning and evening peaks, in both directions, but interpeak traffic is forecast to increase This is likely to be due to the operation of the congestion charge

points at peak times only (traffic is displaced from the four central charging points, which operate all day) and the changes in driver behaviour for example, by changing the time of day they make trips to avoid the charge.

Air quality

49. The forecast air quality impacts of the congestion charge follow the same broad pattern as the trial traffic filters – i.e. more significant improvements in and around the city centre, smaller improvements in some outer areas and some worsening in outer areas and near the ring road. An air quality technical note is at Annex 11.

50. The greatest negative impacts on air quality are forecast at monitoring sites along the northern section of Woodstock Road and along the south-east section of the A4142 Oxford ring road. It is estimated that AADT increases by 9 – 17 %, and results in an NO2 increase of 1.2 – 1.5 µg/m3. The monitoring sites on the northern part of Woodstock Road are not at risk of exceeding annual mean NO2 limits. Further analysis is in Annex 3.

Road safety

51. The 2022 road safety impact assessment of the **trial traffic filters** forecast a total reduction in road casualties of 34 casualties per year, almost entirely due to the reductions in traffic within the ring road. Cycling casualties, which are more spatially concentrated in areas where traffic was forecast to reduce, were estimated to decrease by 18 per year, whereas motorised casualties were estimated to reduce by around 11 and pedestrian casualties by 5 per year. The forecast increase in traffic on the ring road was forecast to result in an increase in 3 casualties on the ring road per year.

52. Assuming the same relationships between traffic flows and collisions as in the 2022 analysis, the change in the annual number of casualties resulting from the **temporary congestion charge** would be as follows:

- All casualties -28
- Cyclists -18
- Motorised traffic -7
- Pedestrians -4
- Total -28

The total reduction of 28 casualties includes:

- A reduction of 29 casualties inside the ring road
- An increase of 2 casualties on the ring road

- A decrease of 1 casualty on other roads.

53. Road safety audits have been completed as part of the design process and are at Annex 16 and 17.

Business & Economy impacts

54. Officers have considered the 2022 business and economy impacts assessment of the trial traffic filters in the context of the main differences between the temporary congestion charge and traffic filters (Annex 12). Taking into account the new positives and negatives of the congestion charge (together with the Botley Road closure) compared to the original traffic filter scheme assessed in 2022, the impacts are expected to remain broadly the same and balanced (albeit for different reasons in some cases).

55. Businesses responding to the consultation have highlighted major concerns about the impact of the congestion charge, with 92% of business responses to the survey saying the scheme would affect them negatively or very negatively. Business have also expressed concerns about the timing of the scheme's introduction, in the pre-Christmas trading period, particularly concerns about short to medium term transport disruption during the initial operating phase.

56. Most of Oxford (including a third of city centre public car parking) will continue to be accessible by car without passing a congestion charging point. In the city centre, approximately two-thirds of public car parking spaces would only be accessible by passing a congestion charging point.

57. Surveys completed in 2022 showed around 90% of city centre visitors arrive in the city centre by modes other than private car. Based on this, together with data on spend per visit and frequency of visit, it is estimated that non-car modes account for around 90% of city centre spending. The congestion charge will increase the attractiveness of the city centre for those arriving by non-car modes.

58. Residents of Oxford and Oxfordshire will be eligible for 100 free days and 25 free days respectively. In the 2022 survey, 74% of city centre visitors who arrived by car said they visited the city centre once a fortnight or less. Many car-borne city centre visitors who come from Oxford or Oxfordshire may therefore find they rarely need to pay the congestion charge, if they use their day passes for city centre visits. This could enhance access, even by car-borne visitors, due to less congested streets.

59. Officers recommend the net proceeds from the scheme are used to offer substantial park and ride discounts, including free park and ride bus travel in November and December 2025, to enhance the attractiveness of the city centre and other locations during the busy Christmas period, whilst also managing limited city centre car

parking. This will provide cheaper car access to the city centre and other parts of Oxford (via the city's 6,000 park and ride parking spaces). Park and ride services are expected to be faster and more reliable as a result of the congestion charge.

Monitoring of impacts

60. A monitoring plan is at Annex 13. Officers recommend that data on the scheme's impacts is published every month where possible, and as often as possible for data that is updated less frequently.

61. Officers recommend establishing numerous lines of communication for residents, businesses and others to provide feedback on the scheme once it is in operation. This should include:

    (a) Let's Talk Oxfordshire
    (b) A dedicated email address
    (c) Face-to-face or online meetings with officers (particularly for businesses)
    (d) Monitoring of social media

62. The preparation and publication of monitoring data and the gathering of feedback will have financial and staffing implications, summarised later in this report.

Public consultation

63. A public consultation on the temporary congestion charge proposals ran from 23 June to 3rd August 2025. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the responses received to the survey.

64. 63,444 people viewed the project landing page on the Let's Talk Oxfordshire portal. 4,657 people downloaded at least one of the accompanying documents and 2,281 people read the frequently asked questions.

65. As would be expected for a traffic restraint scheme, opposition has emerged from the consultation. The context that the proposal is temporary and purely intended as a necessary stop-gap measure to reduce congestion until the approved traffic filter trial can start (following the delay in reopening Botley Road), is an important consideration. It is the view of officers that this is the only initiative that can achieve this promptly and achieve benefits now due to the delayed traffic filter trial. It is worth also stating that the proposal aligns with adopted transport policy and the Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan.

66. Important issues that were identified during the consultation have informed the scheme and, should a decision be made to go ahead with the temporary congestion charge, changes to the consulted scheme are recommended around additional

permit areas and types, to address specific issues arising from the Botley Road closure.

67. 17,489 people visited the survey itself and 7,140 people completed the survey online.

Table 2: consultation survey responses	
Response type	**Number received**
Online via Let's Talk Oxfordshire	7,140
Paper/email questionnaire	25

68. Feedback comments were also received from 78 people by email.

69. All consultation responses have been fully considered, and a full report of the consultation analysis is at Annex 6. Tables 3 to 5 summarise responses to some of the key questions, across all response types.

Table 3: responses to: "what you do think of the level of charge [£5]?"		
Response type	**Number**	**%**
Too low	659	9.2
About right	1,254	17.6
Too high	513	7.2
There should be no charges at all	4,715	66

70. Of the responses through Let's Talk Oxfordshire, 73.2% of respondents thought that the charge was too high or there should not be a charge at all. 26.8% thought it was too low or about the right level.

Table 4: responses to: "what overall impact will this proposal have on you or people you represent"?		
Response type	**Number**	**%**
Very positive	884	12.4
Positive	563	7.9
Neutral	327	4.6
Negative	943	13.2
Very negative	4,347	60.8
No impact	81	1.1

71. Of the responses through Let's Talk Oxfordshire, 74% of respondents thought the proposal would have a negative or very negative impact overall. 20.3% thought it would have a positive or very positive impact overall. 5.7% thought it would have a neutral or no impact.

Table 5: priorities for transport improvements to be funded by the scheme	
Improvement type	**Number of selections**
Make buses cheaper for all	3,878
Make bus services more frequent	2,934
Make Park and Ride parking cheaper	2,436
Add new bus routes	2,219
Make Park and Ride buses cheaper	2,018
Other suggestion	1,598
Extended hours of operation for buses	1,406
Add public cycle parking	1,137
Make buses cheaper for young people	648

72. Most people thought that revenue generated by the proposal should be spent on new bus routes, more frequent buses, and cheaper buses including making P&R (Park and Ride) cheaper. Other suggestions included not implementing the proposal at all, removing LTNs, fixing potholes, improving cycling infrastructure and specific bus service enhancements. Some thought it was important to extend the hours of operation of bus services (earlier and/or later in the day, at the weekend). A smaller proportion thought more public cycle parking should be funded. An even smaller group thought the revenue should be used to make buses cheaper for young people specifically.

Table 6: responses to "What impact would the introduction of a central Oxford area residents' permit have on you or those you represent?"		
Response type	**Number**	**%**
Very positive	794	11.3
Positive	554	7.9
Neutral	1,019	14.5
Negative	734	10.4
Very negative	2,551	36.2
No impact	1,398	19.8

73. Of the responses through Let's Talk Oxfordshire, 46.6% thought it would have a negative or very negative impact. 19.2% thought it would have a positive or very positive impact. 34.3% thought it would have a neutral or no impact.

Table 7: responses to "What impact would a central area commuters' permit have on you or those you represent?"		
Response type	**Number**	**%**
Very positive	777	11
Positive	616	8.7
Neutral	1,160	16.4
Negative	851	12.1
Very negative	2,211	31.3
No impact	1,439	20.4

74. Of the responses through Let's Talk Oxfordshire, 43.4% thought it would have a negative or very negative impact. 19.7% thought it would have a positive or very positive impact. 36.8% thought it would have a neutral or no impact.

Table 8: responses to "Do you think that charges should vary, with drivers of larger cars paying more and smaller cars paying less?"		
Response type	**Number**	**%**
Yes	1,978	27.9
No	4,224	59.6
Not sure	888	12.5

75. Of the responses through Let's Talk Oxfordshire, the majority of people thought there should not be charges based on the size of cars. Just over a quarter thought there should and 12.5% were not sure.

Key concerns and objections raised in comments

76. In free text fields of the survey, a summary of the key objections and concerns raised are:

(a) **Effectiveness of the scheme**: Responses showed scepticism about whether the congestion charge will effectively reduce traffic congestion. This was either alongside concern about redistributing traffic, or the number of permit types available.

(b) **Public transport**: Responses talked about bus and train services being insufficient for their needs. Either too expensive, infrequent or not serving required routes. Particularly for families, people with mobility problems, rural residents and those preferring a radial route around the city.

(c) **Local businesses**: Responses expressed concern that journeys would be more difficult, people would be deterred from visiting the city and businesses and other organisations would struggle with a loss of customers and difficulty recruiting staff and delivering services.

(d) **Fairness**: Responses expressed concern that the charges would more negatively impact those with lower incomes who would find it harder to pay, or those with mobility problems, key workers who can't work at home, working families with children at school or nursery, older people, and some parts of the city more than others.

(e) **Financial impact**: Respondents highlighted the additional cost burden the congestion charge could add for them, especially those who need to drive frequently because they don't have an alternative. In some cases, respondents said they would no longer be able to take part in activities or work in the city because of the added cost.

Positive representations

77. In free text survey question responses, the following is a summary of positive representations made:

(a) **Reduced traffic congestion**: Responses were positive about the prospect of reduced traffic congestion, speeding up occasional car travel and improving other modes.

(b) **Environmental benefits**: Responses highlighted the benefits of a reduction in air pollution.

(c) **Improved bus services**: Responses expressed hope that bus journeys would be quicker and more reliable.

(d) **Enhanced wellbeing**: Reponses reference improvement in wellbeing due to less noise and air pollution, and more physical activity, with improvements to walking and cycling experience and making the city more pleasant to visit.

(e) **Funded improvements**: Responses expressed support for measures to improve public transport, funded by the scheme.

Other key themes

78. Other key themes, less directly associated with the proposal were:

(a) **Remove LTNs**: Many responses suggested that removing LTNs would reduce traffic and said that LTNs had caused more traffic and more difficult journeys.

(b) **Addressing school traffic**: School traffic was identified by many respondents as a major cause of traffic and suggestions were made to address that, including providing more dedicated school transport and working with schools to help them reduce the number of car journeys to site.

(c) **Improving bus services**: Many responses said that bus journeys needed to improve and suggested additional routes, extended hours, improvements to comfort, facilities and price.

(d) **Impact of Botley Road closure**: Many respondents expressed frustration about the impact of the Botley Road closure on travel in the city and urged more action to get Network Rail to complete the work and re-open the road.

Suggested amendments to the scheme

79. In free text responses, people suggested a variety of amendments to the scheme. A range of these is listed below:
    (a) Making the payment system more lenient/simple
        (1) Allowing longer to pay
        (2) Ensuring offline option
    (b) Adjusting hours of operation
        (1) Finishing at 6pm instead of 7pm
        (2) No charge on Sundays
        (3) Operating only in am and pm peak
    (c) Removing some charge locations from the scheme, commonly Marston Ferry Road, Hollow Way and Thames Street
    (d) Providing additional permits for certain groups including:
        (1) Car sharing
        (2) Teachers and nursery staff
        (3) Parents with children at schools or nurseries in the city
        (4) NHS workers
        (5) Ice rink users
        (6) Golf club users
        (7) Those accessing health services and leisure
        (8) Working people with no alternative option but car travel, e.g. from rural areas or other reason for essential car use
        (9) Access to education
        (10) Electric cars
        (11) Students on moving days
        (12) Factory workers
        (13) Self-employed health and care workers
        (14) Residents living close to a congestion charge point
    (e) Providing fewer exemptions and permits

80. Officer responses to key stakeholder consultation comments can be found in Annex 5. Officer responses to key concerns and objections raised can be found in Annex 19. A full list of redacted consultation responses can be found in Annex 18.

81. Detailed responses were received from Open Roads for Oxford Ltd, Reconnecting Oxford and Oxford Business Action Group (OBAG). Therefore, these have been responded to separately with their own annexes – Annex 3 (Open Roads for Oxford Ltd and Reconnecting Oxford) and Annex 4 (OBAG). However, detailed responses in Annex 3 and Annex 4 will also be relevant to concerns in Annex 5 and Annex 19.

82. Committee members are directed to the full submitted documents from OBAG (Annex 20), Open Roads for Oxford Ltd including appendices (Annexes 21, 21a, 21b, 21c and 21d), and Reconnecting Oxford (Annex 22).

Citizens' assembly feedback

83. Participants of the Citizens' Assembly on Travel and Transport reconvened on 15 July 2025 to discuss the proposed temporary congestion charge for Oxford. The assembly broadly supported the proposal but raised concerns about its effectiveness in changing behaviour.

84. Many participants questioned whether a £5 daily charge would be sufficient to deter car use, suggesting a higher fee of £10–£15 instead. They emphasised the need for visible reinvestment in alternatives like free Park & Ride shuttles and standardised, affordable bus fares. Fairness was a concern, particularly for low-income workers and residents with limited alternatives.

85. Suggested mitigations included income-based discounts and clearer communication around exemptions. Transparency was deemed vital for public trust, both in explaining the charge's purpose and showing how revenue would be used to support travel behaviour change.

86. The full report from the session is included at Annex 14.

Young people's focus group

87. During a focus group event held on 6 August 2025, ten young people aged 11 to 17 shared their thoughts on the temporary congestion charge proposals.

88. They expressed hopes that the charge would lead to improved and cheaper bus services, safer and more considerate driving, and a better environment with less noise and pollution. They also hoped it would encourage more cycling and walking.

89. They were particularly positive about the proposal's potential to protect the environment and improve safety for cycling.

90. The participants had concerns about the potential for increased traffic congestion in other areas, the impact on people who rely on cars, and the possibility of overcrowded buses. They also considered the financial burden on those less able to pay and the accessibility of digital permits for older people.

91. The full report from the session is included at Annex 15.

Petitions

92. Officers understand that a petition is being circulated. However, at the time of writing, this has not been submitted/presented to the council.

Changes proposed in response to consultation

93. The scheme is purposely largely based on the approved trial traffic filters. The traffic filters scheme went through a number of rounds of consultation and engagement, and as a result of the consultation and engagement responses, significant changes were made to the details of the proposals. For example, resident permits were not originally included in proposals in 2019 and 2020 but were added in early 2022. Further changes were made during 2022 as a result of the consultation undertaken in September/October 2022. A full list of the revisions can be found here. Further minor changes were made after the cabinet decision in response to points raised by road users. However, further changes related to the temporary congestion charge are proposed and recommended below.

94. **Unlimited day passes for Oxford Ice Rink users who are members of clubs.** Members of clubs associated with the ice rink often have to carry heavy/bulky equipment and/or visit early in the morning as part of linked trips e.g., figure skating training followed by school. Offering this permit is not expected to have an impact on the expected scheme benefits. Occasional/casual visitors to the ice rink will not qualify for unlimited day passes. Unlimited day passes to the Ice Rink for club members would only be available during the temporary congestion charge and not during the traffic filters trial because the ice rink will be accessible via Botley Road without passing any traffic filters.

95. **Permits for company pool cars**. Permits for pool cars will be available under the trial traffic filter scheme for healthcare providers and registered car clubs. This additional permit would cover all pool cars operated by employers in the Oxford permit area. The scheme aims to reduce personal car use. However, it is recognised that employees may need to occasionally use cars for work. The availability of pool cars will help people travel sustainably for their commute whilst having access to a car for work purposes. It is intended that this permit would also carry through to the traffic filters trial. It is expected to have a beneficial impact on the scheme outcomes.

Proposed investment plan

96. Based on the consultation responses, the impact assessments and the income forecasting, officers recommend net income generated by the scheme is used to discount Park & Ride bus fares to/from all city-edge P&R sites. The total projected net income of £3.2m is based on the scheme being in place for 10 months, from November 2025 to August 2026, subject to decision-making. The importance of

attractive and affordable travel in the lead up to the Christmas period for both visitors and businesses is recognised by officers, and as such a commitment to free P&R bus travel for the first two months of the scheme is proposed. This is estimated to cost £1m. Following this period, an estimate on the level of discount that is affordable for the remainder of scheme can be calculated.

Bus service improvements proposed by operators

97. In addition to the improvements funded by the council through the investment plan above, bus operators propose to introduce a number of service improvements, without financial support from the council, if the congestion charge scheme proceeds. Congestion results in longer bus journey times. To manage this, bus operators typically add more buses and drivers to maintain the frequency and reliability of an affected service. The bus operators have indicated that, due to a reduction in traffic expected through the congestion charge scheme, they can reduce the number of buses and drivers on some routes and redeploy them at no additional cost, in order to improve existing routes and to add in new routes. Whilst further information is commercially sensitive at present, the bus operators have confirmed the principle and are actively looking at which routes could be improved if the congestion charge is implemented. It is expected that this will benefit a range of city bus services and significantly enhance the network.

98. As demand grows for bus services, within and outside the city, the bus operators can respond to this demand by extending, amending and/or adding in new services, creating a virtuous circle of growth as opposed to the vicious circle of increased congestion and worsening provision.

Financial implications

99. The proposal would largely utilise the infrastructure, including the back-office systems, approved for the trial traffic filters (through a separate Cabinet approval, in November 2022, and business case).

100. However, additional capital investment of £0.5m has been provisionally approved to develop the scheme, for new signs and adaptation of the back-office systems to add a charging module. This has been funded through the Congestion Relief Fund, within the council's approved capital programme, allocated to the Botley Road Mitigation package.

101. The operating expenditure (OpEx), including additional staff costs and maintenance, would be funded by the temporary congestion charge income.

102. A predicted surplus of £3.2m is expected to be generated for the 10-month period of the scheme. This would be spent on the transport improvements as outlined in paragraph 96 above. Any shortfall against commitments would need to be funded from a reduction in revenue commitments elsewhere in the council's budget.

Comments checked by:

Rob Finlayson, Strategic Finance Business Partner,
rob.finlayson@oxfordshire.gov.uk (Finance)

Legal implications

103. The consultation was carried out pursuant to the Gunning consultation principles and in line with relevant legislation. The Gunning consultation principles criteria for public consultations as laid out in 1985 are:

- Gunning Principle 1: Consultations must occur while proposals are still at a formative stage.
- Gunning Principle 2: Sufficient information needs to be supplied for the public to give the consultation 'intelligent consideration'.
- Gunning Principle 3: There needs to be an adequate time for the consultees to consider the proposal and respond.
- Gunning Principle 4: Conscientious consideration must be given to the consultation responses before decisions are made.

104. The temporary congestion charge would be introduced and managed using powers available in the Transport Act 2000 and related legislation.

105. All highways authorities have a duty under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991(NRSWA) and the Traffic Management Act 2004 (TMA) to manage its road network with a view to achieving, so far as may be reasonably practicable having regard to its other obligations, policies and objectives, the expeditious and safe movement of traffic, including pedestrians, on its road network. Managing congestion on its road network is an essential element and the options in this report would assist the council in complying with this duty.

106. Any decision of the Council can be subject to challenge via the courts. If the Council decides to implement the proposed congestion charge scheme, an unsuccessful challenge against the Council's decision would have no impact on the scheme. A successful challenge could result in the Oxford Congestion Charging Order 2025

being struck down, with consequential impacts on the charges levied under the scheme as well as liability as to costs.

Comments checked by:

Jennifer Crouch, Head of Law (Environmental) jennifer.crouch@oxfordshire/gov.uk

Staff Implications

107. Additional staff are required in Customer Services and Parking & Enforcement. The costs of this operational expenditure are planned to be funded by the temporary congestion charge income.

Risk Management

108. A risk register has been developed and will be maintained for the duration of the project. The primary risks identified at this stage include:
    - legal challenges and / or negative media coverage resulting from opposition, which could influence the scheme's progress.
    - This is a controversial scheme with inherent uncertainties related to modelling and income forecasts and the balance multiple and sometimes conflicting interests among stakeholders and communities.
    - incurring abortive costs if the scheme does not proceed.
    - further delays to Network Rail's Botley Road works could extend the duration of the temporary congestion scheme and further delay the start of the traffic filters trial.
    - delays to the back-office IT system upgrade, to accommodate the new charging module, exemptions/permits, and integration requirements which would delay the launch of the temporary charging scheme.
    - the temporary congestion charging scheme, implemented during the Botley Road closure, may be conflated with the trial traffic filters scheme.
    - the use of shared infrastructure—such as cameras, back-office systems, and permits—by both the temporary congestion charge scheme and the trial traffic filters could cause confusion when the trial traffic filters are implemented, expected in August 2026.

109. These risks and others identified in the risk register are being managed by officers working closely with our partners and stakeholders. It should be noted that realisation of any of these risks could impact on reputation and/ or require additional finance.

Paul Fermer
Director of Environment and Highways

Annex 1 - Final scheme definition
Annex 2 - Congestion hotspots 2024
Annex 3 - Open Roads for Oxford_Reconnecting Oxford officer response
Annex 4 - OBAG officer response
Annex 5 - Officer responses to key stakeholder consultation comments
Annex 6 - Consultation analysis report
Annex 7 - Equalities impact assessment
Annex 8 - Climate impact assessment
Annex 9 - Bus speeds Mar-Jun 2025
Annex 10 - Modelling and income forecasting report
Annex 11 - Air Quality Technical Note
Annex 12 - Business impacts technical note
Annex 13 - Monitoring plan
Annex 14 - An Assembly Perspective on the Proposal for Temporary Oxford Congestion Charge
Annex 15 - Young people pizza and perspectives temporary congestion charge
Annex 16 - RSA2 Response Report
Annex 17 - RSA2 MFR report
Annex 18 - Full list of redacted consultation responses
Annex 19 - Key concerns and objections raised in comments
Annex 20 - OBAG response _ Oxford temporary congestion charge for cars consultation
Annex 21 - Open Roads for Oxford Ltd response Oxford temporary congestion charge for cars consultation
Annex 21a - Appendix 1 Sources of Congestion in Oxford
Annex 21b - Appendix 2 The missing Headington Hospitals problem analysis, impact assessment and mitigation plan
Annex 21c - Appendix 3 Pollution and vehicle movement analysis
Annex 21d - Appendix 4 Buses in Oxford – solutions
Annex 22 - Reconnecting Oxford congestion charge consultation response, 3 August 2025 (final)
Annex 23 – Full stakeholder response (email)
Exempt Annex 24 – Email responses (data protection)

Background papers:
Traffic Filter Trial Delay - Mitigation Proposals, Cabinet 17 June 2025

Other Documents:
Understanding Mobility and Activity in the Low Traffic Neighbourhood

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