

REPORT OF THE PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: SCRUTINY OF OXFORD TRAFFIC FILTER PROPOSALS

Cllr Kieron Mallon
Chair of the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee
November 2022

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
 - a) Agree to respond to the recommendations contained in the body of this report, and
 - b) Agree that relevant officers will continue to update Scrutiny for 12 months on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations, or until they are completed (if earlier).

REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee hereby requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and its recommendations.

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

3. At its meeting on 16 November 2022, the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the draft Oxford Traffic Filter proposals.
4. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Andrew Gant, portfolio holder for Highway Management for presenting the report and answering questions, and Councillor Duncan Enright, Cabinet Member for Travel and Development Strategy also for attending the meeting, Bill Cotton, Corporate Director for Environment and Place, for authoring the report and supporting the meeting, as well as John Disley, Head of Transport Policy, Joanne Fellowes, Growth Manager Central, and Aron Wisdom, Programme Lead, for supporting the meeting.

SUMMARY

5. Cllr Andrew Gant, Cabinet Member for Highway Management, introduced the report. The traffic filter proposals outlined in the report aimed to reduce

unnecessary journeys by private vehicles., This would help deliver an affordable, sustainable and inclusive transport system that enabled the county to thrive whilst protecting the environment and making Oxfordshire a better place to live for all residents. Traffic filters were an important tool to achieve this in Oxford and have been part of Oxford's transport strategy since 2015, including the recently adopted Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. They were subject to public consultation in 2019.

6. In response, the Committee devoted significant discussion to the displacement effect, public consultation and engagement, expected outcomes and monitoring, filter passes, and practical ideas for improvements.
7. Following this discussion, the Committee makes recommendations concerning i) the number and operation of the free passes available to allow access through the traffic filters, ii) ensuring representative consultation iii) addressing potential loopholes, iv) transparency over the rationale for the proposals, v) amendments to the proposals put forward to the Cabinet, and vi) specific suggestions for improvements. On these issues it makes a total of twelve recommendations.
8. One issue to note is that the recommendations are made based on the papers received by Scrutiny. It is possible that, in order to accommodate Scrutiny's requests within the documentation, the papers Cabinet receives may have been amended to reflect these suggestions. As such, Cabinet members and members of the public may find that issues being referred to in this paper are not present in the Cabinet proposals. It is advised that during consideration of the substantive paper at Cabinet that any amendments to the draft report considered by Scrutiny to incorporate its recommendations are highlighted.
9. A further caveat is that this report makes reference to the Committee's views, and what is contained within this report reflects the majority view within the Committee. However, it should be noted that there was a significant degree of scepticism by a minority of members over whether traffic filters would actually lead to lower carbon emissions and/or modal shift, or whether it would simply slow existing traffic and lengthen queues, exacerbating existing carbon emissions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

i) Traffic Filter Passes

10. Although the Committee is keen that the Council be evidence-led, its initial assessment of the number of residential passes available to those living within the City, 100 per year, is likely to fall in a range which is ineffective in reducing vehicle journeys, but is also highly inconvenient for those who rely on their cars on a daily basis, say for work.
11. Evidence provided to the Committee by Prof. Tim Schwanen, Director of Oxford University's Transport Studies Unit was clear that to effect modal shift it is necessary to rely more on 'sticks' to change behaviour than 'carrots'. This being so, if the Council is to achieve its ambitions around modal shift it will

need to make individuals change their behaviour. This being the case, the Committee seeks that any reviews of the impacts of the residential pass scheme be undertaken from the primary perspective that modal shift is the ultimate outcome sought from this scheme, and that (at least temporary) inconvenience will be inherent in achieving that outcome. The Committee would welcome a review occurring.

Recommendation 1: That the Council reviews the number of residential passes made available, with a view to pursuing greater traffic reduction through giving out fewer residential per-person traffic filter passes during the trial period than is currently proposed.

12. The Traffic Filter proposals also have 25 'universal passes' to allow access to Oxford by those needing to come in from outside. Following discussion, the view of the Committee is that there are good reasons for these passes to be limited to residents of Oxfordshire only. Firstly, there is the issue of fairness, that in-county individuals make a contribution to the road network through their council tax which out-of-county individuals do not. Secondly, as a destination city for work, education and leisure much of Oxford's traffic is generated by those from outside the city. The number of journeys made to Oxford by a particular individual per year may be small, but there are many, many more people eligible to make those journeys. Consequently, the cumulative impact from out of county is significant. Given that the design of the traffic filters mean that all of Oxford remains accessible, albeit with longer journey times in some circumstances when there is more than one destination in the journey, the Committee's view is that it is not unduly onerous to incentivise usage of the park and rides or new train station for external visitors. The provision of universal passes to out of county visitors would undermine this.

13. The understanding of the Committee is that the Council has a strong understanding of the anticipated impacts of the proposals on Oxford City residents, but that on those coming to Oxford from outside is less well developed. The Committee encourages the development of models to understand the anticipated impacts on this group of drivers.

Recommendation 2: That the Council implements the policy that universal passes should be made available only to Oxfordshire residents

Recommendation 3: That the Council produces an additional traffic model for the scenario under which "universal" or "Oxfordshire-wide" traffic filter passes are included in the model

14. During the Committee's discussions, the academics who had coordinated the Steet Voice Citizens' Jury offered to consult Citizens' Jury participants on their views. The Committee fully recognises that the Citizens' Jury, being based on five wards in Oxford, is not fully representative of the City as a whole. However, members still represent a broad cross-section and have been recipients of significant input from experts on traffic issues. As such, the Committee sees value in hearing their opinions on the operation of the traffic filter pass scheme and encourages the Council to take up the offer.

Recommendation 4: That the Council consults with the Street Voice Citizens' Jury members on the optimal number of residential traffic filter passes

ii) Representative Consultation

15. Following on from the above, a clear message heard by the Committee from external members was that there can be a significant discrepancy between those who respond to consultations and the general public. Going beyond this, however, there are groups who are harder to reach for consultation, but who are disproportionately impacted by proposals around travel. For different reasons, those with disability and small business owners are both likely to be more impacted by changes to the way traffic is managed in Oxford, and yet face greater challenge in making their voices heard. The Committee's view is that for such an emotive topic with significant implications for residents of the City and its visitors, the Council needs to invest in securing better quality data on what the issues are and what residents think. Consequently, it suggests that representative polling, using YouGov or an equivalent polling company, would not only be representative, but give a voice to harder to reach groups which, feedback to the Committee suggests, is not currently the case.

Recommendation 5: That the Council undertakes representative polling of the public about the traffic filters alongside the ETRO consultation

iii) Potential Loopholes

16. One of the presentations given to the Committee highlighted that the definition of 'van' is such that it includes a large number of SUVs which are marketed for personal, rather than business, use, but which could be argued to constitute a van.¹ This grey area creates a perverse incentive for residents within the City to trade up to a bigger, less environmentally friendly vehicle. This is the precise opposite of the Council's intention. Even if the Council ultimately could prevail in these arguments over whether such private vehicles were cars or vans, it would be a waste of resources to need to engage with them in the first place. It would be far more effective simply to develop a more nuanced policy by banning all vans, and then seeking to identify the exceptions necessary to allow legitimate business use to occur without allowing private usage also.

Recommendation 6: That the Council adopts a default position that vans are not exempt from the traffic filters, and that it develops a definition which creates exceptions to enable legitimate business use

¹ In legislation, a van is defined as:

- A vehicle primarily constructed for the conveyance of goods or burden of any description
- A gross vehicle weight – fully laden – not exceeding 3,500kg

17. A second area which, without additional definition, could allow gaming of the system is the exceptions to car clubs from the traffic filters. The Committee recognises the reasoning for doing this. Modal shift is more likely if for those times an individual must have access to a car, they can easily and cheaply access one. Without this, people may hang on to their cars 'just in case' and end up using them more. However, there is sufficient grey area in the definition that a group of residents could simply use a joint car and call it a 'car club' to allow unfettered access throughout the City. The Committee would like to see clarification to close this loophole, so that the intended targets of this exception are protected, enterprises such as Co Wheels and Zip Car, which seek to cater to those without vehicles, and not groups of residents who simply would prefer to work together to sidestep limitations on car use within the City.

Recommendation 7: That the Council provides a clear definition to the term 'car club' in order to prevent gaming

iv) Transparency

18. The Committee recognises that there are many people in Oxford who do wish to pursue a strongly interventionist policy to provide greater impetus towards modal shift. The results of Oxford City Council's Citizens' Assembly support this. To these people, whether they are motivated by carbon reduction, a wish to support public transport or active travel, or concerns for air quality, the delay to commencement of the filters will be a source of frustration owing to the continued congestion and delays to bus services. The Committee, as mentioned below, generally recognises the trade-off between an immediate start date and the quality of data collected. However, given the Council's stated ambition to contribute towards a vibrant and participatory democracy, transparency over the reasoning for its decision should be made publicly available. To those who wish to participate in our local democracy it is important that they have access to the details of why the Council is acting as it is, and therefore the background for this recommendation should be open to the public.

Recommendation 8: That the Council publishes the advice and reasoning on which the recommendation to delay the start date of the trial is based

v) Specific Amendments to Cabinet Recommendations

19. A further element of feedback received by Prof Tim Schwanen was the importance of having a consistent and easy to understand approach for those impacted by new traffic proposals in getting the public onside. Much goodwill is lost by punishing those who break the rules by accident rather than design. Whilst the Committee understands that the reduced hours of operation are part of a phased introduction which will bring Hythe Bridge Street and Hollow Way/Marston Ferry Road in line with other filters, this detracts from the scheme's simplicity. Having differential timings at the start, when residents are getting used to the changes is the worst time to do so. The Committee does

not see value in having a short-term exception in these locations, and suggests that the clarity of having one set of timings, as originally proposed in the consultation, will be preferable for all stakeholders. In addition, the Committee is cognisant of an issue raised by external attendees, that of the displacement effect. Reduced filter times are liable to smooth traffic levels, but this would be achieved through displacing traffic from times when the filters are active to when they are not. Smoothing, whilst desirable, does not reduce the total number of journeys made, which is the ultimate purpose of the policy.

Recommendation 9: That the Council does not accept the recommendations in Annex 4 concerning changes to the timing for filters on Hythe Bridge Street and Hollow Way/Marston Ferry Road and continues with the timings proposed in the consultation

20. The Committee discussed the recommendation of officers being made to Cabinet that the Traffic Filter trial be delayed until 2024. It completely agrees with the rationale, which is to ensure that any data received is representative of normal usage, and that the impacts of works around Botley Road and station do not lead to anomalous results. However, it suggests that this specificity may actually not be helpful to the Council in the event that the works happen to be completed ahead of schedule. As such, it recommends removing reference to 'until 2024' from the proposals.

Recommendation 10: That the Council removes 'until 2024' from its recommendation to delay the start date for the trial in Annex 4

vi) Other Improvements

21. Assuming that the Traffic Filter proposals are successful in encouraging modal shift within Oxford City, the likelihood is that this will lead to an increase in demand for Park and Rides. The Committee is aware that since Covid demand is below its pre-pandemic levels so there is some room to grow without adverse impact, but it is also aware of that Redbridge Park and Ride is particularly challenging to exit, given that the Abingdon Road has priority over the road from which Park and Ride users must exit, the Old Abingdon Road. The Committee feels that there is little to be lost in assessing the likely impacts of differing levels of increased demand on Redbridge Park and Ride in light of the proposals in order to be ahead of the curve in developing mitigations should the length of time taken for egress from the site actually start to diminish its attractiveness to users.

Recommendation 11: That the Council reviews the impact of proposals with a view to improving the ease of egress for users of Redbridge Park and Ride

22. Although the Committee stands by its view that 'sticks' are more useful in bringing about modal shift than 'carrots' in reality to maximise modal shift both are required. To this end, the Committee would wish to bring to the Cabinet's attention one particularly effective 'carrot' which is Personal Travel Planning.

23. Personal Travel Planning seeks to provide targeted information, support and encouragement towards modal shift for those who are impacted by 'hard' changes to transport policy. In a report, the Department for Transport states that in the UK Personal Travel Planning is shown to 'reduce car driver trips by 11% (amongst the targeted population) and reduce the distance travelled by car by 12%' and that these impacts continue for up to five years beyond the intervention.² The cost benefit ratio of targeted interventions is estimated by the Department for Transport to be 1:30. The Committee recognises that it can be liable always to seek that the Council goes further than is proposed, but in this case the efficacy of these interventions and their cost-benefit ratio indicates that there is a compelling case for including Personal Travel Planning alongside its planned interventions as a means of maximising modal shift. Examples of places which have undertaken Personal Travel Planning from which the Council might wish to learn include Nottingham, Bristol, Brighton, Worcester, Darlington and Lancashire.

Recommendation 12: That the Council undertakes work around Personal Travel Planning alongside the Traffic Filters proposals

NEXT STEPS

24. The Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee will review the published Cabinet response to this report and its recommendations at the meeting of the Committee after Cabinet's response in accordance with part 6.2, 13(f), of the Constitution of the Council.

25. The Committee does not intend to revisit the Oxford Traffic Filter proposals as an agenda item during the remainder of the civic year.

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² Making Personal Travel Planning Work