

Cllr Linda Smith

Please do not vote for the report on traffic filters today. The forced delay in being able to implement these plans until 2024 gives the county council an opportunity to step back and reconsider these proposals, to do further work and consult deeper with local communities and businesses ready to come back with proposals which can command popular support, while also delivering on the vital goals of bus prioritisation, modal shift, reduced private vehicle traffic, and road safety.

Because the proposals you have before you today are unpopular and deeply flawed. The report admits that the traffic filters will cause vehicles to divert onto radial roads within the city, particularly the Woodstock Rd, and onto the ring road affecting the A34, Eastern by-pass Rd and A40. Your own modelling has shown that there is insufficient capacity on these roads to accommodate this increased traffic. The result will be gridlock.

The permit system being proposed is hideously bureaucratic and complicated, with massive ongoing costs to administer. Penalty fines may cover the costs for the first few years but in later years will the county council pick up the bill, or will residents be charged for the permits currently being offered for free?

Nearly 4,000 people have signed the petition against the traffic filters on Hollow Way and Marston Ferry Rd, and it is especially hard to understand the logic for these two which will force many local residents who need their car to go about their daily business to drive further distances on more heavily congested roads. This will cause more pollution as well as difficulty and stress for those affected as they try to get around Oxford for essential journeys.

The payback for Oxford residents for all the pain this scheme will cause is just too small. An improvement of bus journey times of only 6.5%, which equates to less than a 2 minute saving on a 30 minute journey. So please, reject the report today. Ask your officers to go back and consult further with local people and businesses, and this time really listen to what is being said.

Please ask them to work with local schools, workplaces, entertainment venues, sports clubs and places of worship on better travel plans.

Please ask them to prioritise rolling out a network of safe segregated cycle paths across and beyond the city.

Please ask them to crack on with School Streets and implementing a Vision Zero approach to road traffic accidents. Please take action to limit HGVs coming into the city during peak hours.

Please investigate more intelligent solutions to bus prioritisation like the Selective Vehicle Detection system used in London which has successfully reduced travel times and improved bus services while delivering operational savings. Oxford deserves an intelligent system not the blunt instrument of bus gates.

Please support Oxford bus passengers by making adjustments to the East Oxford LTNs which are currently causing unprecedented levels of congestion in the area. Even if you approve the report today, the situation around St Clements is unacceptable and cannot be allowed to continue until a bus gate is installed in 2024.

Looking ahead please support the plan to re-open the Cowley Branch Line to passenger trains and create two new stations for South and East Oxford. Please lobby the government for the necessary powers for councils like Oxfordshire County Council to regulate or even directly provide bus services, so that the needs of local communities and passengers are put before private shareholders.

We are in a recession and a cost-of-living crisis, we are suffering the fall-out from Brexit and recovering from the pandemic, now is the time to support communities and local business, not experiment upon them.

Finally, I'm concerned that the reduced hours of operation for the filters on Marston Ferry Rd and Hollow Way are being presented as merely a "phase" of the trial and if councillors approve the report today the hours may be extended by council officers without reference back. Please don't give the green light to this.