

Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet, 29 November 2022

Statement by Cllr Calum Miller, Cabinet Member for Finance on item 6 – Traffic Filters

I am very sorry not to be able to attend all of the extraordinary meeting of the Cabinet today. When the level of public interest in our decisions today became clear, I supported the Leader's decision to extend the meeting so that all those who had applied to speak could do so. Unfortunately, however, this means that I cannot stay beyond 12 noon due to a long-standing previous commitment.

I am particularly sorry not to have heard all the views of members of the public and fellow councillors on this important topic for our county. I have, however, received a number of written representations and read the results of the public consultation and the input of the scrutiny committee. I am grateful to everyone who has taken the time to get in touch and share their opinion.

Over recent years, Oxford city has seen worsening congestion levels that routinely bring the city's medieval centre to a standstill and discouraging people from walking or using a bike to get around. The air pollution levels are a danger to public health while carbon emissions are contributing to climate change. We need to take action.

The traffic filters before Cabinet today are part of the wider Central Oxford Transport Plan, which Cabinet has discussed earlier, and are a necessary part of that overall vision for creating a healthier, greener, fairer transport system. By increasing the use of public transport and active travel, it will help reduce carbon emissions and unlock investment in a sustainable transport network. If we make public transport and active travel more accessible, it will address inequality since the poorest in our communities have no access to private vehicles and it will also create more opportunities for children and young people who cannot drive.

I therefore support the overall goals of the scheme.

I want to stress five key points:

- **This is not a scheme to stop car usage in the city.** City residents will receive passes that allow them unlimited access to the city on nearly one in three days of the year. On other days, they can still access all parts of the city but may need to adjust their routes or timings. There are many, targeted exemptions in the scheme for those who have to travel across the city for work or to provide care as volunteers. At the same time, travelling by bus, bike or foot should be easier.
- **I welcome the recommendation to provide 25 passes per vehicle per year to residents living outside the city.** The original proposal drew too stark a distinction between those inside and outside the city limits. This restores some balance.
- **I also welcome the flexibility shown in limiting the two outer filters to peak times.** While the city centre experiences strong traffic volumes throughout the day, Marston Ferry Road and Hollow Way have more peak-time congestion so it is appropriate to flex the proposal to see if a peak-time filter delivers sufficient impact.

- **This is an experimental scheme and we should retain the flexibility to adapt it in response to changes in context and new information.** It is regrettable that Network Rail's enforced closure of the Botley Road in 2023 will delay the start of this scheme. But it is really important that we ask officers to use the time to prepare for implementation and to set up the mechanisms for monitoring this experimental scheme. Regular, reliable data will allow us to adjust the scheme to ensure it is achieving the goals we have set.
- **The introduction of this scheme should be accompanied by improvements to bus journey times and reliability for all Oxfordshire residents: both inside and outside the city limits.** In particular, there is a need for progress with mobility hubs and local transport solutions in some of our rural areas, to give residents a realistic choice to use public transport and connect to services within Oxford city. Funding remains a challenge which is why I hope Cabinet will press for the rapid implementation of other elements of the Central Oxford Transport Plan that can help to generate revenues to reinvest in sustainable transport.

We are trying to reshape travel within the county and city. Current trends are bad for people, bad for the economy and bad for the planet. We need to break the cycle and create the conditions for cleaner, greener and healthier travel. I believe these proposals will contribute to that goal, so long as they are adopted with humility and a commitment to learn and adapt from the evidence following initial implementation.