

Divisions Affected - All

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 13th September 2023

Area weight restrictions

Report by Corporate Director for Environment and Place

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee are RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) **Provide any comments on the area weight restriction next steps and proposed approach to the management of Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) issues in Oxfordshire.**

Executive Summary

2. This covering report provides the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the area weight restriction feasibility study and proposed approach to the management of Heavy Goods Vehicle issues in Oxfordshire.

Background

3. The [Freight and Logistics Strategy](#) is a supporting strategy to the county council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP). The strategy was adopted alongside the LTCP by full council in July 2022. The Strategy builds on the high-level freight policies in the LTCP, outlining how we will address some of the challenges associated with the movement of goods in Oxfordshire and sets out the actions required to deliver our key principles.
4. The document includes three distinct sections. These are long distance movement, local movement and last mile movement. This approach has been taken to reflect the complexity of the freight system and that different solutions will be required to address the issues at each level. The actions in each section are all seeking to deliver our key principles. In total, the strategy identifies 47 actions that we are working to deliver.
5. Following adoption of the strategy, officers have been working to progress the actions identified. The first action progressed was a countywide study to establish an approach for area based weight restrictions (action 10). The findings from the study and proposed approach to HGV issue management moving forward are outlined in the following sections.

Area weight restriction study

6. The Freight and Logistics Strategy recognises that local HGV trips will always be required to service Oxfordshire. These trips are essential to support the local economy and residents' everyday lives. Therefore, when trips are required, it is important these are on the most appropriate routes.
7. The Freight and Logistics Strategy outlines a number of measures to promote use of appropriate routes. However, it is recognised that promotion alone will not be sufficient, and some action may be required.
8. In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary to restrict HGV traffic. This is primarily done by establishing environmental weight or width restrictions to discourage HGVs from entering an area.
9. This has often been through "point based" weight restrictions. These restrictions have been considered and developed on a case by case basis subject to funding. However, we have found that in many cases this approach does not address the issues with inappropriate movement and often pushes HGVs onto surrounding roads creating a new issue elsewhere.
10. The Freight and Logistics Strategy therefore identified the need for a countywide area weight restriction feasibility study. The aim was to consider how we can keep HGVs on appropriate routes in larger geographic areas and stop issues being moved from one road to another. A summary of the study is provided in the rest of this section, the full draft report can be found in annex 1.
11. The study was conducted in 2 phases between January and June 2023:
 - Phase 1 - Stakeholder engagement and data collection.
 - Phase 2 - Development of approach and decision making framework.
12. Stakeholder engagement was conducted via two online workshops and a map-based online engagement activity. The workshops included OCC officers and external stakeholders such as representatives of national freight and logistics groups and neighbouring local authorities. The map-based online engagement was shared with local stakeholders, including OCC councillors and parish councils, to collect feedback on current HGV issues.
13. Alongside the stakeholder engagement, a range of data was also collected and analysed. Data analysed included HGV traffic, HGV trip generators/attractors, congestion analysis, accident analysis and environmental and heritage data.
14. Due to the complexity of weight restrictions, it was not possible to achieve the initial goal of the study and identify restriction proposals from a countywide level. A key factor for this was the need for granular local data, particularly HGV origin-destination data, to understand local HGV movements and issues.
15. The study highlighted the cost, complexity and potential impacts of weight restrictions. It also highlighted that weight restrictions are only one potential solution and that other solutions should be considered.

16. A key finding was the need to fully understand any HGV issues and then work with a range of stakeholders to develop the appropriate solution. The study therefore produced an overarching process and set of criteria to assist with prioritisation.
17. Using the available data and prioritisation criteria, the study also identified some areas where action may be required and recommended that further investigation would be beneficial. As a result, we will now conduct more detailed studies in 2 initial areas: the Windrush Valley and Henley-on-Thames, to improve understanding of local HGV issues and if applicable develop solutions. Work to progress these studies is underway.

HGV action request process

18. To build on the findings from the area weight restriction feasibility study, we are also implementing a consistent countywide approach and process for how requests for action to address concerns over HGV movement can be made.
19. The process will provide communities with clarity about how they can request action, how the county council will assess requests and if applicable, the stages of work required before any action is taken. A detailed overview of the process can be found in the guidance document (annex 2).
20. The process will ensure that where applicable, evidence collection, stakeholder engagement and partnership working is conducted to understand issues and develop the appropriate solution. It will also ensure that options appraisal considers a range of options such as advisory signage, advanced warning signage, bollards and awareness raising before weight restrictions. Where weight restrictions are being considered, the process sets out clear criteria and appraisal work required to improve the consistency and quality of weight restriction development work.
21. Formal applications can be made by the relevant local council or forum (e.g., parish council, town council or neighbourhood forum in Oxford) with support of the relevant local County Councillor.
22. An all-member briefing was held on 6th September 2023 to make county councillors aware of the proposed process. The application form and supporting webpages will be made available on the county council's website. A dedicated [freight mailbox](#) has also been established for any questions regarding the process or freight matters more generally.

Supporting measures

23. As previously highlighted, a range of measures will be required to encourage use of appropriate HGV routes and address any issues. We are therefore working to deliver a number of supporting measures.
24. As part of the Freight and Logistics Strategy, we produced a HGV route map to show appropriate HGV routes in Oxfordshire (action 7). The map has been

published on a dedicated webpage to help raise awareness with haulage companies and HGV drivers.

25. We are now seeking to promote this map in a range of ways (action 9). This includes via the Oxfordshire Freight Steering Group which was established in March 2023 to improve partnership working (action 46). The group includes representatives from neighbouring local authorities, district and city councils and the freight industry.
26. There are a number of other actions identified in the Freight and Logistics Strategy that seek to reduce the negative impacts of HGVs. These primarily include the creation of rest stops, lorry parking facilities and zero-emission vehicle refuelling facilities on strategic routes and promotion of rail freight. There is not any specific work on these actions at present, but opportunities will be investigated to work with partners moving forward.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

27. The County Council's strategic plan, 2022-25, sets out a vision to lead positive change by working in partnership to make Oxfordshire a greener, fairer and healthier county. Delivery of the actions identified in the Freight and Logistics Strategy will help to deliver this vision.
28. The Freight and Logistics Strategy builds on the 9 strategic priorities of the Council and will be key to delivering the following four:
 - Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work
 - Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire
 - Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents
 - Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network.
29. The proposed area weight restriction next steps and HGV action request process will help to tackle inequalities and improve health due the negative impacts of inappropriate HGV routes on residents' quality of life, health and the environment.
30. Encouraging use of appropriate routes and reducing freight traffic in our towns and villages will also help to encourage active travel as perception of safety is a key barrier. Increased active travel will have positive benefits on residents' health and help to tackle the climate emergency.

Financial Implications

31. The area weight restriction feasibility study was undertaken utilising funding from the Local Transport Authority Capacity Grant. The proposed next steps outlined in this report do not have any immediate financial implications.
32. However, in order to fully deliver the Henley-on-Thames and Windrush Valley studies (or any future work identified through the HGV action request process), funding will be required. This will be raised through business case development.

Comments checked by:

Rob Finlayson, Finance Business Partner (Environment & Place),
rob.finlayson@oxfordshire.gov.uk (Finance)

Legal Implications

33. The Freight and Logistics Strategy is a supporting document to the county council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) and was adopted by full council in July 2022. The LTCP is the county's statutory Local Transport Plan, which is a statutory document required under the Transport Act 2000. The strategy approach is also in accordance with the network management duty imposed under the Traffic Management Act 2004.
34. The area weight restriction feasibility study and next steps do not have any legal implications at this stage.

Comments checked by:

Jennifer Crouch, Principal Solicitor (Environment Team),
Jennifer.Crouch@Oxfordshire.gov.uk (Legal)

Staff Implications

35. The area weight restriction feasibility study was undertaken by consultants with support from officer resource in the Infrastructure Strategy and Policy Team. It is proposed that next steps for this work are undertaken by existing officer resources, including the additional officer resource for freight agreed in the 2023 Council budget, now being recruited to.

Local Transport and Connectivity Plan Implications

36. The Freight and Logistics Strategy is a supporting document to the LTCP and will therefore support its delivery. The key principles of the Freight and Logistics Strategy are aligned with the LTCP to ensure the actions identified support its delivery.
37. The area weight restriction feasibility study and next steps outlined in this report will help to deliver LTCP objectives around improved road safety, health and wellbeing.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

38. It is not considered that there are any equality and inclusion implications associated with the area weight restriction feasibility study and next steps at this stage. Moving forward, full equality impacts assessments will be undertaken in support of the Windrush Valley and Henley-on-Thames studies and any specific work arising through the HGV action request process.

Sustainability Implications

39. The proposed area weight restriction next steps and HGV action request process will help to reduce the negative impacts of inappropriate HGV routes on the environment. Encouraging use of appropriate routes and reducing freight traffic in our towns and villages will also help to encourage active travel and deliver the associated benefits due to reduced emissions.
40. A climate impact assessment has not been conducted at this stage. Moving forward, full climate impacts assessments will be undertaken in support of the Windrush Valley and Henley-on-Thames studies and any specific work arising through the HGV action request process.

Risk Management

41. A comprehensive risk register was kept as part of the area weight restriction feasibility study. Risk registers are being developed in support of the Windrush Valley and Henley-on-Thames studies and will also be developed for any projects identified through the HGV action request process. Key risks affecting all of the next steps for this work are summarised below.
42. *Risk:* Lack of resource to progress next steps.

Mitigation: Officers from Infrastructure Strategy and Place teams are working jointly to progress next steps. Officers are currently developing detailed project plans for the Windrush Valley and Henley-on-Thames studies which will assist with prioritisation and work planning. Additional officer resource for freight is also proposed as part of the Environment and Place transformation.

43. *Risk:* Lack of funding to progress next steps - there is currently no funding allocated to freight work

Mitigation: The Windrush Valley and Henley-on-Thames studies will develop business cases to identify the funding required for full completion of the studies to inform the budget setting process.

Consultations

44. The Freight and Logistics Strategy and associated actions were consulted on via the LTCP public consultation between January 2022 and March 2022. The area weight restriction feasibility study was informed by targeted stakeholder engagement. This included neighbouring local authorities, freight industry, OCC councillors and town and parish councils.
45. Moving forward, consultation and engagement with a range of stakeholders will be a key part of any future work on specific areas.

Bill Cotton, Corporate Director for Environment and Place

Annex: **Annex 1:** Draft area weight restriction study report
Annex 2: HGV action request process guidance document

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: John Disley, Head of Transport Policy, 07767 006742

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