

REPORT OF THE PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: SCRUTINY OF CENTRAL OXFORDSHIRE TRAVEL PLAN

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 People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the draft Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan (COTP) proposals.
4. In addition to Cabinet members Councillors Gant and Enright, Corporate Director for Environment and Place, Bill Cotton, Joanne Fellows, Growth Manager Central, and Aron Wisdom, Programme Lead, the Committee sought the input of a broad group of external stakeholders. External contributors to the meeting were:
 - Patrick Davey (West-East Roads in Walton Manor)
 - Robin Tucker (Coalition for Healthy Streets and Active Travel)
 - Emily Scaysbrook (Oxford Business Action Group)
 - Richard Parnham (Reconnecting Oxford)
 - Zahura Plummer (Oxfordshire Liveable Streets)
 - Carolyn Plozynski (Head of Economic Development, Oxford City Council)
 - Alison Chisholm and Juliet Carpenter (Oxford University re Street Voice Citizens' Jury)
 - Tim Schwanen (Director of Transport Studies Unit, Oxford University)

5. Cabinet members have been sent through the presentations submitted as a way of giving a flavour of the breadth of views and concerns.

SUMMARY

6. Owing to the presentations being made available, no summary of the inputs from external members is included here.
7. Councillor Andrew Gant introduced the report. The COTP sat within 'part 2' of the local transport plan process. Along with other plans for certain area and specific corridors, the COTP sets out how policies within Part 1 of the LTCP will be applied across specific geographic areas, in this case the central Oxfordshire area.
8. Part 1 of the local transport plan (the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan) was considered by the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2022, prior to adoption at full Council in July 2022.
9. Analysis of the public consultation on the COTP (undertaken between August and October 2022) had identified a number of amendments to the COTP, which were presented to the Committee.
10. In response, the Committee explored a number of issues in detail. These included data and targets, public access, economic impacts and mitigations, consistency with other elements of Council policy, increasing public uptake and support, and means of increasing the forecast drop in modal shift. Following this discussion, the Committee makes recommendations concerning i) target-setting and the data underpinning target-setting, ii) consistency of COTP policy, and iii) suggestions around implementation. On these issues it makes a total of seven recommendations.
11. This report gives voice to the majority view of the Committee. However, similar to both the public split in opinion and amongst the external presenters at the meeting, the Committee was not unanimous in its support for these proposals. Particular concern was raised that the Council had not undertaken an Economic Impact Assessment, suggesting a willingness to move forward with proposals without a full understanding of the impacts on a specific and particularly impacted demographic group: small business owners. It was suggested by this minority that the Council, given the deeply significant impact on business owners in particular, should delay its implementation of these proposals until it has a high degree of certainty over what the impacts will be.
12. This report is based on the report received by Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee; Cabinet members are invited to seek clarification if any subsequent amendments have rendered references to the substantive report unclear.

RECOMMENDATIONS

i) Target Setting and Data

13. One of the external contributors to the discussion, Prof. Tim Schwanen, introduced his presentation with an important consideration. In its recently-agreed Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) the Council has adopted an ambitious set of targets towards modal shift. The challenge, however, is to adopt policies which actually deliver on those targets.
14. The COTP is the first of a number of geographically-focused plans developed by the Council as a way to realise, in combination, the overall ambitions of the LTCP. This being the case, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the judgement of whether or not it is successful should be whether it is delivering its share of the overall LTCP targets. To this end, the Committee suggests that the Council should adopt a set of targets based on its understanding of the COTP's expected contribution to the overall modal shift targets to ensure that, as Prof. Schwanen pointed out, roll-out of policies actually delivers the Council's ambitions.

Recommendation 1: That the Council develops a set of targets for modal shift for the COTP which correlate with the LTCP's modal shift targets

15. One of the deep concerns expressed by business owners around the COTP proposals was 'what if your projections are wrong? What is your Plan B?'. The Committee was assured that one of the benefits of ETROs is their flexibility, they are by very nature experimental and can be altered. This ability to alter course is valuable, but it is worth considerably less if the Council is unclear on how, when and in what circumstances this flexibility will be employed. Not only is proactively planning for different scenarios better than reacting to them on the hoof in and of itself, but many individuals have deep concerns over these proposals. Providing an outline of how and when the Council will react would provide assurance to those legitimately asking about the Council's Plan B as well as providing a high level of transparency and public accountability. In such a contested sphere as transport policy being demonstrably transparent and accountable are particularly important, and the Committee recommends taking steps accordingly.
16. One such step is not just the creation of measures and targets, but the sharing of performance against them. To be publicly accountable it is necessary that there is public access to this information. The Committee is keen that the Council decide a suitable forum or fora to share its performance.
17. One issue to highlight is that Oxford City Council have the capacity to measure footfall in different parts of the extended City-Centre. Footfall is a very relevant data point, but the ability to look at it with a degree of granularity makes it very useful indeed. The Committee would highly encourage the Council to be partnering with the City Council to include this data as part of its scenario-planning.

Recommendation 2: That the Council publishes its measures and targets for the COTP, and levels below which different levels of intervention will be triggered in the proposed COTP plans if the project is not working. And that the Council clarifies where this performance will be reported to.

18. In presentations made to the Committee by external guests, one of the contested points was over the impact of making access to Oxford by car more difficult. Those against the proposals were of the view that this would make Oxford as a destination less desirable, lowering visitor footfall and spend. Those in favour of the proposals argued that evidence from similar schemes showed that a reduced-traffic environment meant people were more likely to go to the shops rather than order on the internet, and that they tended to buy more when there, thereby increasing spend.
19. The truth is that what the exact impact on Oxford will be is unknown. How its unique characteristics interact with changes to transport policy are impossible to model with great certainty. The situation is that the Council is currently facing contradictory positions and contradictory evidence. It is necessary, therefore, that it gathers its own evidence; in all likelihood those from different sides of the debate are likely to find areas evidence to support their positions once the proposals begun to be implemented.
20. In Waltham Forest, where a similarly contested set of transport policies have been enacted, the Council undertook customer surveys to determine the modes of transport used to access shops. This is crucial data, particularly if gathered over time. Oxford City Council, also presenting at the meeting, have many links with local businesses and were willing to work with the County Council to enable such surveys to take place. The Committee would welcome this occurring, as well as being able to determine the economic impact of modal shift to access shops by learning about the average spend per mode, and suggests that the Council learn from the experience of Waltham Forest in doing so.
21. Speak of economic impact is deliberate. It was confirmed to the Committee that the Council had not undertaken an Economic Impact Assessment of its proposals. As business owners pointed out, for those with leases in the City, the stakes are extremely high; their livelihoods are on the line. The Committee feels that it is absolutely necessary that a full Economic Impact Assessment be undertaken; the Council should not be proceeding when unsighted on the effect on businesses already struggling amidst the cost of living crisis, spiralling energy bills and increased wage-levels of different outcomes from the COTP. It suggests that the data collected in these surveys would be a very worthwhile inclusion in an Economic Impact Assessment and that this should be pursued as soon as possible.

Recommendation 3: That taking on good practice from Waltham Forest the Council partners with Oxford City Council to undertake customer surveys relating to the modes of transport used to access shops, and the average

spend per mode, and that this work informs a forthcoming Economic Impact Assessment of the COTP proposals.

ii) Consistency

22. On p. 35 of the LTCP the policy sets out its transport hierarchy. 'In order to deliver these benefits a new approach is required that prioritises walking and cycling. We will put this approach into practice through our transport user hierarchy. The transport user hierarchy translates our vision into policy and sets the direction for the rest of the LTCP.' This is an unambiguous commitment to prioritise walking and cycling in the LTCP (and therefore its area plans, such the COTP) over other forms of transport in policy.

23. On the other hand, the COTP Cabinet report contains a recommendation around having a 'wider commitment to/ a better balance on 20mph speed limits.' As part of that recommendation, the suggestion is that the Council adopt a policy whereby 'Any introduction of 20mph limits on sections of the highway network that form part of the strategic bus network (and/or support bus infrastructure) will be carefully considered to take into account impact on bus journey times or service provision that may result' and ' Each scheme/road will be assessed on a case by case basis to assess/minimise the impact on the local transport services and infrastructure.' To the view of the Committee, this recommendation does not appear consistent with the overarching hierarchy of road users. Specific reference in the text is made to the needs of bus services and the need to consider their needs, but none to the needs of those pedestrians and cyclists whose needs take primacy under the Council's policy hierarchy. The Committee suggests that a hierarchy by nature means choosing one category over another, and that this recommended amendment subverts the Council's policy, a policy it has adopted with good reason. Consequently, it is recommended that this text is not accepted as an amendment to the COTP.

Recommendation 4: That the Council does not accept the recommended text concerning the feedback around 'wider commitment to/ a better balance on 20mph speed limits'

24. One of the major challenges faced by the Council in its COTP is reducing traffic volumes whilst ensuring that organisations in the City are able to get the supplies they need, when they need them and at reasonable cost. However, one of the criticisms levelled at the COTP by Prof Tim Schwanen was that insufficient attention had been paid to the movement of goods and freight.

25. The Council has devoted consideration to these issues in one of the LTCP's other supporting strategies, the Freight and Logistics Strategy. In particular, issues around last-mile freight are of relevance. For example, the actions to promote cycle freight and improve road safety are clearly going to be impacted by how the Council designs its travel system within the COTP area and the priorities it chooses. Linked to the recommendation above, growth in cycle freight may rely on more aggressive prioritisation of cycling over buses. Reducing road accidents and fatalities may require greater limitations on

access by certain types of vehicles to certain parts of the city and different points in the day. The same is true for tackling noxious vehicular emissions. The Committee sees a general alignment in policy between the two documents, but would like to see them informing one another in implementation also to ensure they are pulling consistently in the same policy direction, and that the important issues relating to freight are not overlooked.

Recommendation 5: That the Council ensures the COTP and Freight and Logistics Strategy are aligned with one another throughout implementation.

iii) Implementation

26. From his studies of the Workplace Parking Levy (WPL) instituted in Nottingham, Prof. Tim Schwanen drew out an important conclusion. Whilst achieving modal shift relies on a suite of measures rather than any single intervention, the single most effective measure at increasing modal shift in a short space of time is the WPL. The reason for this is that the WPL brings in resources. Clearly, it generates revenue, and this revenue provides the financial resource for the Council to pursue measures for which it is exceedingly difficult to get money from the Department for Transport or Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. This enables additional interventions to be run which would not otherwise. However, on top of that, it is possible to leverage income by seeking co-funding from government for other, more mainstream, interventions. With this feedback, the Committee's view is that the WPL should be moved forward as soon as possible to generate the resources and impetus required to achieve its ambitions for the COTP, and seeks therefore that the Council accelerates its implementation.

Recommendation 6: That the Council works to accelerate the implementation of the workplace parking levy

27. Another point of learning from Nottingham is not simply that the financial resources of WPLs can be leveraged. A crucial element is creating narratives of success, telling a story about how interventions are leading to tangible improvements for residents. This is not a factor simply aimed at increasing local support for the proposals, important as that is, but it is important in placing the Council in a favourable light with central government when assessing possible co-funded schemes. Places with momentum are attractive to those seeking to further and normalise traffic management options at a central government level, so it is an investment in the Council's future prospects to be capturing and proactively communicating the benefits accruing from the WPL or any COTP proposals. The Committee encourages the Council to be proactive in doing so.

Recommendation 7: That the Council gives high emphasis in its communications on narratives of success arising from the COTP

NEXT STEPS

28. 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.

29. The Committee does not intend to revisit the COTP as an agenda item during the remainder of the civic year.

Contact Officer: Tom Hudson, Principal Scrutiny Officer
tom.hudson@oxfordshire.gov.uk