

Divisions Affected – All

Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee

16 NOVEMBER 2022

OXFORD TRAFFIC FILTERS

Report by Bill Cotton

Corporate Director for Environment and Place

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- a) **note the emerging summary of the public consultation and scheme impact assessments for the proposed trial traffic filters in Oxford;**
- b) **note the changes proposed to be made to the scheme in light of (a)**
- c) **note the draft officer recommendations to Cabinet.**

Executive Summary

1. Across Oxfordshire, Oxfordshire County Council wants to reduce unnecessary journeys by private vehicles and make walking, cycling, public and shared transport the natural first choice. This will help deliver an affordable, sustainable and inclusive transport system that enables the county to thrive whilst protecting the environment and making Oxfordshire a better place to live for all residents.
2. Traffic filters are an important tool to achieve this in Oxford. They will:
 - (a) make walking and cycling safer and more attractive
 - (b) make bus journeys quicker and more reliable
 - (c) enable new and improved bus routes

- (d) support investment in modern buses (including the ZEBRA project to fund up to 159 electric buses)
 - (e) help tackle climate change, reduce local air pollution and improve the health and wellbeing of our communities.
3. Traffic filters on main roads have been part of Oxford's transport strategy since 2015, including the recently adopted Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. They are a key tool to reduce motorised traffic in the city, and were subject to public consultation in 2019, alongside a citywide workplace parking levy.
4. The council engaged extensively with community groups, resident associations, businesses and stakeholders on amended traffic filter plans (alongside proposals for a workplace parking levy and expanded zero-emission zone) between February and September 2022.
5. Many of our partners requested that we phase the consultation and implementation of the three schemes. Based on this feedback it was decided to bring forward the traffic filter proposals first and introduce them as a trial under an experimental traffic regulation order (ETRO). Such a process would allow the council to monitor the impact of the traffic filters, seek views on how they are working and make changes, if necessary, before any long-term decision about them.
6. Further changes were made to the proposals based on feedback received from stakeholders during this engagement process.
7. Regulations require a highway authority to consult with statutory consultees such as emergency services before introducing an ETRO. Given the wide-ranging nature of this scheme, a more comprehensive public consultation was undertaken, to include the statutory consultees, but also to invite comment from the wider public.
8. A public consultation on the amended traffic filter proposals, to be implemented as a trial rather than permanent scheme, ran from 4th September to 13th October 2022, concurrently with a public consultation on an updated transport strategy for the city, the Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan (COTP) including a variety of communications, and events.
9. This report summarises:
 - The proposed scheme (as consulted on)
 - The scheme's alignment with corporate policies and priorities
 - Alternatives considered

- Benefits and impacts
- Emerging outcomes of the recent consultation
- Changes to the scheme in response to engagement and emerging consultation results
- Costs
- Implementation programme
- Draft officer recommendations to Cabinet

Proposed scheme (consultation proposals)

10. Six trial traffic filters are proposed in Oxford at:
 - St Cross Road
 - Thames Street
 - Hythe Bridge Street
 - St Clements
 - Marston Ferry Road
 - Hollow Way
11. The consultation brochure at Annex 1 provides full details of the proposals, as consulted on.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

12. In July 2022, Oxfordshire County Council adopted its new Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) which sets a clear vision to deliver a net-zero transport system that enables Oxfordshire to thrive, protects the environment and makes the county a better place to live for all residents. This includes ambitious targets to:
 - replace or remove 1 in 4 car trips in Oxfordshire by 2030
 - deliver a net-zero transport network by 2040, and
 - have zero, or as close as possible, road fatalities or life-changing injuries by 2050.
13. To help deliver the LTCP vision, the emerging Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan proposes a set of 22 actions to support a more sustainable and reliable transport system across the central Oxfordshire area, including proposals for traffic filters which are required to address several challenges including the need to:

- reduce exposure to air pollution and rapidly reduce carbon emissions from all transport related activities
- reduce congestion and its negative impacts on bus services and economic productivity and vitality
- encourage more sustainable development, making greater use of limited road space and prioritising public transport, walking and cycling
- improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.

Alternatives considered

14. Several potential alternative options to manage traffic and travel demand have been considered to inform previous engagement on traffic filter and workplace parking levy (WPL) proposals in 2019 (Connecting Oxford), and before that, the Oxford Transport Strategy (OTS), which was adopted in 2015. Options considered were:
- Public parking reduction
 - Workplace parking levy
 - Road user charging
 - Traffic filters
 - Road building and highway capacity improvements
15. The preferred measures in the OTS and Connecting Oxford combined a workplace parking levy with traffic filters across the city and which would support strategy objectives by bringing about sustained traffic reduction and modal shift from private car travel as well as funding for transport investment. Concerns around fairness of a city-wide road user charging scheme, particularly on low income and other vulnerable groups, plus high implementation and administration costs, meant this option was unlikely to be achievable and so was not taken forward. Conversely, traffic filters were seen as providing a more equitable and cost-effective solution and which had greater support (linked to experience with city centre bus gates).

Scheme impacts

16. The development and assessment of the traffic filters have been supported by a range of supporting analysis, which indicates the scheme will:
 - Reduce traffic levels by around 20% across the city within the ring road
 - Reduce traffic levels by more than a third within the city centre
 - Increase bus and Park and Ride use by up to 10%
 - Enable new and improved bus routes
 - Reduce overall accidents by around 9%
 - Significantly improve air quality due to traffic reductions
 - Increase cycle mode share by over 10%
17. A more detailed summary of the impacts and benefits is in Annex 2.

February to September 2022 engagement

18. In February 2022, proposals for traffic filters, an expanded zero-emission zone (ZEZ), and a workplace parking levy (WPL) were announced. Following the announcement, officers have held over 100 meetings with community and residents' groups, schools, employers, faith organisations and a wide range of other stakeholders.
19. The main concerns raised were that:
 - responding to three such major proposals at the same time is difficult;
 - the traffic filters may create access problems, particularly for residents living near them and for businesses across the city;
 - the traffic filters will displace traffic and pollution to other parts of the city, including the ring road; and
 - more evidence is needed on the impact of traffic filters to form a final view on them, particularly in relation to the wider congestion and air quality effects of the scheme

September/October 2022 public consultation

20. A public consultation ran from 4 September to 13 October 2022 on amended proposals designed to address the four concerns above. The changes included:

- focusing on the traffic filters alone initially, with consultations on the ZEZ and WPL deferred until 2023;
 - a range of new exemptions and permits to address residents' and businesses' access concerns; and
 - progressing the scheme as a trial in the first instance, with a six-month consultation period while the trial is in progress to allow people to see the impacts first hand.
21. Although the scheme will initially be a trial – implemented using an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) – the relevant regulations require the council to consult specific organisations – “statutory consultees” – affected by the proposals (e.g. emergency services) before the trial begins. Given the wide-ranging nature of this scheme, a wider public consultation was completed and widely publicised in addition to the limited consultation required by the regulations. This included online and in-person events open to all, as well as one to one discussions with stakeholders.
 22. The council received 5526 responses via Let’s Talk Oxfordshire, along with a further 488 emails and 173 paper copies of the survey (6187 responses in total).
 23. A petition signed by 3210 people was received opposing the Marston Ferry Road and Hollow Way traffic filters, on the grounds that the proposals would “separate communities within Oxford, disproportionately discriminating against elderly, vulnerable, pregnant and disabled individuals.” The petition argues that “the county council has not adequately made the case for traffic filters on key connecting roads outside of Oxford city centre, and this petition signals a significant public opposition towards filters proposed on Marston Ferry Road & Hollow Way.”
 24. A second petition signed by 1842 people was received expressing concerns about traffic increases on Botley Road, stating “Oxfordshire County Council's plans for new traffic filters in Oxford centre would result in Botley Road being the main access route for all the traffic for Oxford Train Station, Osney Mead, the new Oxpens development and the Westgate Shopping Centre. People who use or live near Botley Road also deserve to benefit from a big reduction in traffic, congestion and pollution. We call on Oxfordshire County Council to change these plans so that traffic to some of these destinations, particularly the Westgate Shopping Centre, is directed elsewhere.”
 25. During the consultation period, Oxfordshire Liveable Streets (a local interest group) commissioned research by YouGov to ascertain views of Oxford residents about traffic filters. 249 people were asked the following question: “Six new 'traffic filters' are being considered which are designed to reduce traffic

levels across Oxford, making bus journeys quicker and walking and cycling safer. When they are operating, most private cars will not be allowed through without a permit. All other vehicles including buses and emergency services will be allowed at all times. Having read the above, would you support or oppose such a measure?" In response, 60% supported and 31% opposed the measure.

26. Officers have not been able to verify exactly what information about the proposals was made available to those signing the petitions or participating in the YouGov survey.
27. The main concerns arising from the consultation are summarised in Annex 3, along with officer responses.

Proposed changes to the scheme

28. Annex 4 outlines changes to the scheme recommended by officers to address the points raised in the consultation.
29. Officers will be seeking delegated authority (in consultation with the relevant Cabinet member) to make further minor changes to the trial scheme before it comes into force, if necessary.
30. An Experimental Traffic Regulation Order allows the council to adjust the scheme once it is in force, subject always to consultation.
31. There remains some confusion over the residents' day passes being offered to Oxford and selected neighbouring areas. A maximum of 100 day passes would be available per person and per vehicle (with a maximum of one vehicle per person). An individual with two cars would still only be eligible for up to 100 day passes. To be eligible for 200 day passes, a household would need to have two cars, each registered to a different owner living in the household. No more than three cars would be eligible per household.

Complementary measures and other supporting actions

Trial scheme

32. Table 1 below summarises complementary schemes to be introduced (subject to consultation and funding) in time for the start of the trial, apart from i) some temporary cycle schemes which may not be possible to introduce until the trial is underway and traffic effects have been observed, and ii) bus electrification (part-funded through Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas – ZEBRA – funding), which will be introduced over the next two years.

33. If the trial is not made permanent, some of the measures in Table 1 may need to be removed or amended. The reversal of the Woodstock Road bus lane is the only major infrastructure change but is justified (and supported by bus operators) now, without the traffic filters, so this scheme would remain in place even if the traffic filters are not made permanent.

Table 1: complementary measures for trial	
Measure	Cost range
ZEBRA: 159 electric buses on routes across Oxford	Over £50m
Bus services – Eastern Arc and North-West route	£3m - £5m
Woodstock Road bus lane reversal (from southbound to northbound)	£1m - £3m
East Oxford Low Traffic Neighbourhood (selected filters)	Under £1m
Removal of on-street parking on Hollow Way	Under £1m
Bus and P&R fare deals (operator-led)	N/A
New e-scooter locations	Under £1m
Additional cycle parking	Under £1m
Temporary cycle schemes	Under £1m
Westgate monitoring & car parking management	Under £1m
Travel planning	Under £1m
50mph limits on ring road and A34 (subject to funding and National Highways approval)	Under £1m

34. If the trial is approved, officers will continue to investigate opportunities and funding for further complementary measures to support the trial.
35. Four of the local traffic filters (Divinity Road, Southfield Road, Rectory Road and Princes Street) forming part of the East Oxford Low Traffic Neighbourhood trial currently in place (under an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order) would play an important role in supporting the six 'strategic' traffic filters. The East Oxford Low Traffic Neighbourhood trial has not yet concluded, and a decision about whether to make some or all of it permanent will not be made until 2023. After this decision has been made, the council will need to consider whether any further supporting measures are needed to support the trial of the 'strategic' traffic filters.

Wider measures to support a permanent scheme (if approved)

36. Table 2 below summarises the main Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan actions. These will be developed and implemented (subject to funding and consultation) whether the trial traffic filters are made permanent or not. If the traffic filters are made permanent, there will be opportunities to progress many of these actions significantly further and faster.

Table 2: further complementary measures for future permanent scheme (in addition to measures listed in Table 1)
Measure
Zero Emission Zone
Workplace Parking Levy
Public parking management
Cycle network: Quickways, Quietways and Connector routes
Pedestrian/cycle wayfinding and signage
Junction safety improvements
Cycle parking and cycle hire
Bus priority measures
Zero emission buses across central Oxfordshire
Oxford station and Cowley branch line
Transport hubs
Freight consolidation
HGV reductions and safer lorry scheme
Public realm improvements
Tourist coach management improvements
E-scooter hire
Electric vehicle charging points

Implementation programme

37. The consultation proposal was for the scheme to be implemented in summer 2023. However, Network Rail has recently confirmed that Botley Road will be closed from January to December 2023 for major upgrades to the station and rail bridge over Botley Road. This makes it impossible to proceed with a trial traffic filter scheme, because the closure of a major arterial route into the city will severely disrupt travel behaviour and would therefore render any trial invalid

and undermine its aims. This approach is supported by the bus operators due to the impact of the Botley Road closure on the wider network.

38. Officers will therefore be recommending that the trial starts in 2024, once Botley Road re-opens.

Financial and staffing implications

39. The total capital costs of the trial filters are not expected to exceed £6.38m. This budget estimate includes:
 - Signage, back office systems and enforcement cameras
 - Directional signage across Oxford and on the ring road
 - All staff costs
 - Professional fees for scheme design and assessment
 - Extensive monitoring and evaluation
 - Allowances for risk, contingency, optimism bias, and inflation
 - Removal of infrastructure should the scheme not be made permanent
40. The capital costs will be funded by government grants (Bus Service Improvement Plan and Growth Deal) and income from penalty charges.
41. The scheme will also result in significant ongoing operational expenditure (permit administration, processing of penalty charges, systems and infrastructure maintenance, and communications). These costs are expected to be covered entirely by income from penalty charges.

Monitoring and evaluation

42. Monitoring of the traffic filters is fundamental to understanding their effectiveness in supporting objectives to reduce traffic levels within Oxford and which in turn reduces bus journey times and supports increased walking, cycling and public transport use. Monitoring will also help to identify whether any changes to the scheme design and/or supporting measures are required as well as informing any final decisions about whether to make the traffic filters permanent or not.
43. A monitoring framework has been prepared setting out a range of data collection and information collation and reporting cycle requirements to monitor the effects of the trial traffic filters. This proposes a broad range of activities to be able to monitor, for example, air quality exposure, changes in traffic and travel behaviour, journey times and journey time variability, impacts on residents and

businesses, and compliance. Should a decision be made to go ahead with the trial, a detailed monitoring plan will be prepared well in advance of the start of the trial.

Climate action

44. A Climate Impact Assessment is at Annex 5. The scheme will have a net positive impact particularly in terms of reducing travel by private car and increasing use of walking, cycling and public transport. Also, the traffic filters will support the introduction of brand-new electric buses accelerating electrification of transport in Oxfordshire.
45. Separately, an assessment of changes in CO₂ by 2024 as a result of the traffic filters, compared to a scenario without the filters in place, shows a 6% reduction in total annual CO₂ emissions from road transport in Oxford.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

46. An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and is currently being updated to reflect the proposed changes to the scheme following consultation. The traffic filters are likely to have a net positive impact, including Protected Characteristic Groups. This is because traffic filters will help to make bus journeys quicker and more reliable, support the introduction of brand-new electric buses, make cycling and walking safer and more attractive, and reduce local air pollution to improve the health and wellbeing of Oxford's communities.
47. Improved conditions for buses will particularly benefit those who currently use buses, including some disabled people, women (who are more likely to use public transport than men), and 'Black/African/Caribbean/Black British' residents who have the highest public transport mode share by ethnic group in Oxford. There are also likely to be benefits for those who cycle (predominantly those aged 16-24 and those aged 25-44) due to reduced traffic. This will create a safer and more accessible environment for people cycling and has the potential to encourage people from all backgrounds to cycle.
48. It is acknowledged that the traffic filters may inconvenience some drivers and some of those who rely on cars, e.g. older and/or disabled people and people from certain ethnic groups. Where the traffic filters increase journey times, this may have a disproportionately negative impact on non-professional carers for disabled and/or older residents who are more likely to be making regular trips by car.

49. However, it is important to recognise that motor vehicle access to all locations has been maintained. Exemptions for Blue Badge holders, people with short- and long-term mobility problems, disabled tax class vehicles, taxis and private hire vehicles, and both professional and non-professional health and care workers will mitigate these potential impacts. Indeed, for those with exemptions, the traffic filters are expected to improve these journeys by reducing congestion and improving journey time reliability. The ability for residents to obtain day passes will also help mitigate impacts on people making fewer regular journeys.

Draft Cabinet recommendations

50. The draft Cabinet recommendations are quoted below:

“Following consideration of the outcome of the public consultation, scheme impact assessments and [report/feedback] from the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:

- i. approve the making of an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (or Orders) introducing six traffic filters in Oxford as described in [relevant Cabinet paper annex detailing updated scheme proposals] to this report, subject to further minor changes to allow the scheme to operate as intended without affecting the scheme outcomes;*
- ii. authorise delegation to the Corporate Director for Environment and Place to make and implement the necessary Experimental Traffic Regulation Order(s);*
- iii. authorise the Corporate Director for Environment and Place, in consultation with the Director for Law and Governance and the Cabinet Member for Travel and Development Strategy, to make any further minor changes to the scheme before it comes into force, to enable it to operate as intended without affecting the scheme outcomes (noting that an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order allows the council to adjust the scheme once it is in force); and*
- iv. approve the development and implementation of the infrastructure and supporting systems required for the traffic filters, at an estimated cost of £6.38m.”*

NAME

[SLT Member]

Annexes:

Annex 1 – Consultation brochure

Annex 2 – Scheme impacts and benefits

Annex 3 – Consultation feedback

Annex 4 – Proposed changes to scheme
Annex 5 – Climate Impact Assessment

Background papers: None
Contact Officer: TBC
November 2022