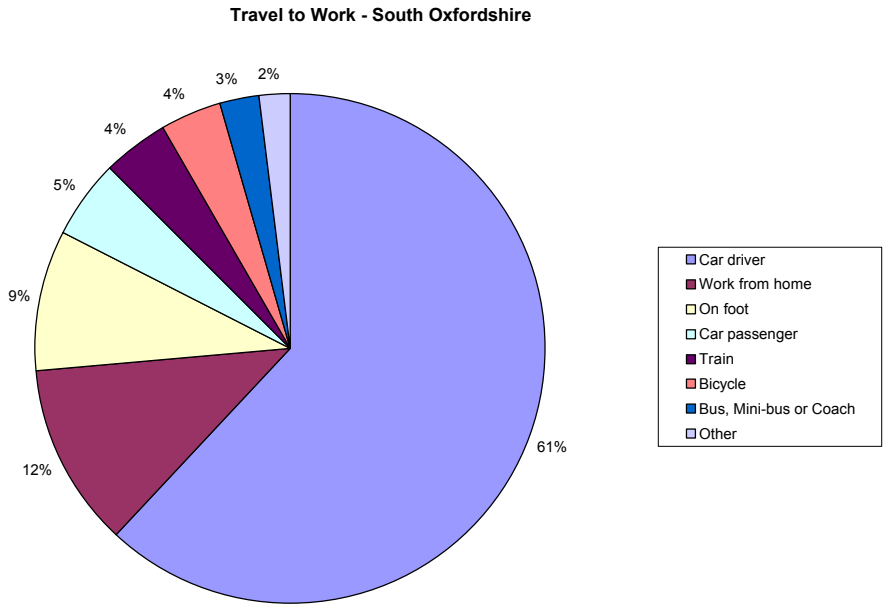
Chapter 9

South Oxfordshire

Background

With a population of approximately 130,000, South Oxfordshire is the third largest district in Oxfordshire. Roughly a third of the South Oxfordshire's population lives in its three main towns - Didcot, Thame, and Henley-on-Thames - with populations of 23,000, 11,000 and 10,000 respectively. The remainder lives in settlements of less than 10,000 people, making South Oxfordshire predominantly rural and home to some of the county's most attractive countryside. Around 28% of South Oxfordshire's workforce travel outside Oxfordshire to work - compared to a countywide average of 15%.

There were 67,000 people recorded in employment living in South Oxfordshire in the 2001 census. The working population usually travelled to work by the following main modes:



Transport Network

The major towns of South Oxfordshire are relatively well connected but the network is substantially thinner in the more rural parts of the district - particularly where public transport is concerned. As the majority of the population live in small settlements, the major towns provide employment,

shops and services for a relatively large, but sparsely populated area. The travel patterns that result from this mean that car ownership in South Oxfordshire is relatively high, with around 45% of households having two cars: the highest proportion of two-car households in Oxfordshire.

Local Plan Policies

The Local Plan for South Oxfordshire sets out transport requirements for new developments including access by all modes, provision for parking and loading, submission of transport assessments and travel plans.

The key elements of the Local Plan for South Oxfordshire are to:

- Improve public transport facilities
- Existing or former rail facilities will be protected from development.
- Improve the footpath and cycleway network
- Current levels of car parking in towns and villages will be maintained
- Additional parking will only be provided where there is special justification.

Major housing sites are identified at Didcot West to accommodate 2700 dwellings in South Oxfordshire District by 2011. Didcot town centre is also undergoing a major redevelopment. To support this expansion and development, a range of transport improvements will be required in the Didcot area.

Community Strategy for South Oxfordshire

South Oxfordshire's Community Strategy sets out seven themes relating to 'Safe Towns and Villages', 'Healthy Communities', 'Education and Life Long Learning', 'Rural Transport', 'Quality Environment', 'Housing Provision', and 'Thriving Economy'. Rural transport is the theme most directly influenced by the Local Transport Plan, and the action plan lists four specific actions:

- South Oxfordshire District Council to work with the County Council to produce data on bus services in South Oxfordshire and set a future target for improvement
- Complete phase two of the Didcot area integrated transport strategy;
- Produce a best practice guide on community transport; and
- Undertake additional research into additional support required to meet local people's transport needs.

Tackling Congestion

Set in the context of the countywide priorities for tackling congestion, South Oxfordshire has relatively few serious congestion problems. These are largely confined to the main approaches to Oxford, Henley, Thame and Abingdon. The County Council therefore intends to focus its efforts over the next five years on the following congestion hotspots in the district.

Actions for Tackling Congestion in South Oxfordshire

The actions for tackling congestion, as outlined in chapter three, are:

Action 1	Manage, develop and maintain the county's road network to reduce the impact of bottlenecks (including roadworks) and make better use of existing road capacity to improve the flow of traffic
Action 2	Make public transport faster, more reliable and more user-friendly
Action 3	Make walking and cycling safer and more convenient
Action 4	Enable people to make better informed travel choices
Action 5	Manage parking to support transport improvements and initiatives
Action 6	Ensure that new development is planned in such a way as to minimise congestion problems from being created or exacerbated

The County Council intends to focus its efforts over the Plan period on the following congestion hotspots in South Oxfordshire (in order of severity of current problem, but not necessarily the order in which it will be possible to address them). Using the Problem Prioritisation Framework highlighted in Chapter five these problems have been identified as high, medium and low level problems.

High Ranking Congestion Problems in South Oxfordshire

A40 approach to Oxford
Problems on this route are likely to have an impact on the role of Oxford as a sub-regional centre. Therefore, this problem is being addressed as part of the Central Oxfordshire Transport Area (chapter six)

Medium Ranking Congestion Problems in South Oxfordshire

A4130 western approach to Henley
Several kilometres of congestion can build up on this route during a typical peak morning peak. As the only direct route from Didcot, Wallingford and much of South Oxfordshire's rural areas - as well as the main route from Oxford to Henley, this congestion seriously affects access to Henley at times.

A4155 Reading Road, Henley

The queues on the A4155 from the south can often stretch as far as two or three kilometres back from the town centre to the edge of town. This hampers traffic movements within Henley, and affects access by car and bus from Reading to Henley particularly during the morning peak.

Low Ranking Congestion Problems in South Oxfordshire

A415 eastern approach to Abingdon
The A415 is the only route into Abingdon from the south east. Bus services on this route provide some of the only links to employment for people in villages along the A415 between Wallingford and Abingdon, and as such this congestion has some potentially significant accessibility implications.

A418 and A4129 approaches to Thame
Congestion on the A418 delays bus services on the 280 service and affects access into South Oxfordshire's second largest town. Delays for all traffic are not as severe here as the other routes above, and are confined to relatively short periods of the day. However, the effect of this problem on bus services between Thame and Oxford (the only direct link by public transport between the two places) make the effect of this congestion more significant. This problem is mirrored on the A4129 approach to Thame, with similar consequences.

A418/A40 Junction
Two important routes from South Oxfordshire to Oxford and the north meet at this junction - the A418 from Aylesbury and Thame to Oxford, and the M40 from London to Birmingham. Congestion here affects the A418 predominantly, with implications for access to the M40 and Oxford for people living in the northern part of South Oxfordshire.

A4074 south-eastern approach to Oxford
Problems on this route are likely to have an impact on the role of Oxford as a sub-regional centre. Therefore, this problem is being addressed as part of the Central Oxfordshire Transport Area (chapter six).

Delivering Accessibility

The mapping has shown that much of Oxfordshire shares similar accessibility characteristic, particularly with regard rural bus accessibility, the notable exceptions are the following:

> Those in the south of the District look southwards towards Reading for many of their needs.

Access

Supermarkets:

> Accessibility is generally good to supermarkets by car, within 15 minutes, depending upon the time of day in line with the rest of the County
> Roughly half the population of South Oxfordshire is with a 30 minute bus journey of a supermarket.

Major Centres:

> By car, about half the District is within 20 minutes of a major centre by car, with the remainder of the District being no more than 40 minutes car journey.
> Only about 10% of the District is within 60 minutes of one of the two major centres by bus, the remainder is either more than 60 minutes or is not served bus.

Town Centres:

> Over half of District is within 10 minutes of a town centre by car and the remainder within 25 minutes.
> By bus roughly 30% of the District is within a 60 minute bus journey. The remainder is above 60 minutes or not served at all by bus.

Further Education:

> Nearly 100% of the District has access to further education by car within 30 minutes.
> About 60% of those living in the rural areas of South Oxfordshire have no bus access under 60 minutes of higher education.

Primary and Secondary Schools:

> Nearly 100% of the District's population has access to primary schools within a 15 minute period by car.

- Access is less good by the conventional bus network, with about 50% of the population being within a 40 minute bus journey.
- Nearly 100% of the Districts population has access to their nearest secondary school by car of under 20 minutes.

- About 60% of the District that have no access to secondary schools by conventional bus services, but these are filled in by the contracted school transport.

Employment:

- The analysis shows that about half of the population of South Oxfordshire are within a 5 minutes car journey of selected places of employment and 75% of ward places of employment.
- Nearly the entire population is within a 20 minute car journey of both ward based and their selected employment sites.
- About half of the population has access to employment of under 60 minutes by bus.

Healthcare:

- All of the District is within 25 minutes of a hospital by car, whereas by bus only about 10% have access of under 60 minutes by public transport.
- In general access to hospitals is poorer than to other facilities reflecting the concentration of provision in the Oxford and in Banbury, outside South Oxfordshire.
- Deprived areas which have poor access to hospitals include those in Berinsfield, Chinnor and Didcot.
- In addition there is also poor access from other settlements including Henley-on-Thames and Wallingford.
- Nearly everybody has access to GP surgery of less than 20 minutes by car.
- About half of the population is within 60 minutes of a GP surgery by bus.
- About 75% are within 10 minutes of a dentist with the remainder being within 25 minutes of a dentist by car.
- By bus, roughly 50% of the District is within 60 minutes of a dentist.

Social Exclusion
South Oxfordshire is generally a relatively affluent district, though there are a number of areas in Didcot and Berinsfield that are highly deprived relative to the rest of the county. Some of the findings of a study commissioned by the County Council from Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion relating to South Oxfordshire are given below:

Employment:

> It has a total "worklessness" rate of 3.4% with particular concentrations of worklessness in the more urbanised areas.

Education:

> Berinsfield is in the three wards in Oxfordshire with the lowest performance in the attainment of A-C grades at GCSE, with less than one in six pupils achieving five or more A-C GCSE passes.
> Didcot and Berinsfield have a relatively high proportion of adults with no qualifications.

Low Income:

> The District has a rate of people on a low income of 3.7%
> The proportion of people aged over 60 living on a low income is 6.7%.

Healthcare:

> Large parts of the districts have very healthy populations.
> Only two wards have proportions of the population defined as unhealthy, higher than the England average.
> There are wards with among the highest proportion of people needing higher rates of care.

Safer Roads

In a countywide context, South Oxfordshire suffers from relatively few major road safety problems. There are, however, some sites at which accident rates are higher than average, and the County Council plans to investigate solutions to these problems as an urgent priority.

Actions for Safer Roads in South Oxfordshire

The actions for safer roads, as outlined in chapter three, are:

Action 1	Improve the design and layout of the highway where necessary to address known safety problems
Action 2	Better management of vehicle speeds
Action 3	Provide effective road safety education, training and publicity
Action 4	Ensure that new development is planned in such a way as to minimise road safety problems from being created or exacerbated

Developing Solutions to Road Safety Problems

By their nature, road safety problems and their causes vary enormously from one site to another. The actions above represent general approaches to reducing casualties, both at specific sites such as those listed below and more widely across the network.

In addressing the site-specific problems identified below, the Council will investigate carefully all possible causes of incidents, and use this information to develop appropriate solutions.

The County Council intends to focus its efforts over the Plan period on the following accident blackspots in South Oxfordshire (in order of severity of current problem, but not necessarily the order in which it will be possible to address them). Using the Prioritisation Problem Framework highlighted in chapter five these problems have been identified as high, medium and low level problems.

Medium Ranking Road Safety Problems in South Oxfordshire

A423 Heyford Hill roundabout, Sandford on Thames (Oxford Ring Road)
There have been 54 injury accidents (4 serious and 50 slight) between 2000 and 2004. Of particular concern are conflicts between vehicles exiting Oxford to join the A4142 Oxford Eastern bypass and those continuing around the roundabout to exit to the Sainsbury's store or the A4074. Remedial measures were introduced in February 2005.

A418 at bends west of A329 roundabout, Great Haseley

Between 2000 and 2004 there were 11 injury accidents (5 serious and 6 slight). Accidents were primarily due to loss of control by eastbound vehicles; remedial measures were introduced in 2003 and are being monitored.

A40 Aston Hill
There have been 15 injury accidents (1 fatal, 2 serious and 12 slight) between 2000 and 2004. These were predominantly loss of control accidents on the bends.

Low Ranking Road Safety Problems in South Oxfordshire

B4009 crossroads junction with Cottesmore Lane (East of Benson)
Between 2000 and 2004 there were 12 injury accidents (4 serious and 8 slight). The accidents include crossing movements from the minor road and right turning movements. Remedial measures were introduced in 2003 and are being monitored.

Better Air Quality

Air Quality in South Oxfordshire is generally very good. It is likely that all national Air Quality Objectives will be met across the district, with the exception of the 2005 objective for the annual mean concentration of nitrogen dioxide, of which exceedances are *likely* in one location, and *possible* in two others.

Actions for Better Air Quality in South Oxfordshire

The actions for better air quality, as outlined in chapter three, are:

Action 1	Manage, develop and maintain the county's road network to reduce the impact of bottlenecks (including roadworks) and make better use of existing capacity to improve the flow of traffic through polluted areas
Action 2	Make public transport faster, more reliable and more user-friendly
Action 3	Make walking and cycling safer and more convenient
Action 4	Enable people to make better informed travel choices
Action 5	Manage parking to support transport improvements and initiatives
Action 6	Find ways to encourage the use of vehicles with lower exhaust emissions
Action 7	Restrict vehicles from areas of poor air quality
Action 8	Provide alternative routes for traffic to avoid areas of poor air quality
Action 9	Ensure that new development is planned in such a way as to minimise air quality problems being created or exacerbated

Developing Solutions to Air Quality Problems

Where pollutant concentrations exceed national standards, local authorities are required to declare an Air Quality Management Area covering the affected streets. Authorities must then develop an Air Quality Action Plan which sets out how they reduce concentrations of the pollutants concerned to meet national air quality objectives.

All designated air quality problems in Oxfordshire are caused predominantly by road traffic emissions, so Air Quality Action Plans in Oxfordshire will focus on reducing pollution from traffic using the actions identified in the table above.

Nitrogen Dioxide

The national objective for the annual mean concentration of nitrogen dioxide is likely to be exceeded in Duke Street in Henley. Duke Street was declared an Air Quality Management Area in 2002, and an Air Quality Action Plan is being developed jointly by the County and District Councils, in the context of the County Council's wider transport strategies.

It is possible that the same objective may be exceeded in High Street in Wallingford, and at Adwell Cottages (two properties which are situated adjacent to both the M40 and A40, around 5km south of Thame). Further assessment of these locations will be carried out to establish more accurately the likelihood that the objective will be exceeded, and an Air Quality Management Area will be declared if necessary.

Other Pollutants
The national objectives for all other air pollutants will be met across South Oxfordshire.

Improving the Street Environment

The actions for improving the street environment, as outlined in chapter three, are:

Action 1	Improve the design and layout of the streets with a poor quality environment, using the high quality materials and street furniture wherever possible
Action 2	Restrict vehicles from areas of poor street environment
Action 3	Make walking and cycling safer and more convenient
Action 4	Enable people to make better informed travel choices
Action 5	Manage parking to support transport improvements and initiatives
Action 6	Provide alternative routes for traffic to avoid streets with a poor environment

Developing Solutions to Street Environment Problems

By their nature, street environment problems and their causes vary enormously from one site to another. The actions above represent general approaches to improving the attractiveness and ambience of streets.

In addressing the street environment problems identified below, the Council will review the quality of the streets concerned, their transport function, and their current and potential usage as a public space. The Council will use this assessment to develop appropriate solutions based on the actions outlined in the table above.

The following areas have been identified as being areas where transport contributes to an overall problem in quality of the street environment:

Broadway, Didcot
Broadway has traditionally been the main shopping area of Didcot, as well as being one of the town's main through routes. The construction of Hitchcock Way and the Orchard Centre and the closure of Station Road, mean that traffic patterns on Broadway and its role within the town's overall road network have been significantly altered. This offers the prospect of re-designing the road to improve the overall town centre environment and bind together the old and new shopping areas.

Wallingford High Street
Although through traffic was reduced with the construction of the Wallingford Bypass in the 1990s, little has been done to reap the benefits of this. It remains an unattractive environment for pedestrians with footways that are narrow (and in places almost non-existent). Better traffic management for this section of road could reduce queueing, free roadspace for wider footways and further discourage through traffic from using this route.

Watlington town centre
Watlington suffers from being on one of the main traffic routes toward the M40 from southern Oxfordshire. It has narrow roads on which traffic has to give way to oncoming traffic. Footways are unattractive and are of irregular width - in places very narrow. The street scene is dominated by signing and lining significantly detracting from the built environment. A small scale bypass is recommended as a long term aspiration in the Transport Networks Review but in the short term improvements that could be made to the traffic management arrangements and the use of sympathetic materials to reduce the dominance of the road.

Thame High Street
There is scope for extending improvements made in recent years to other parts of the town centre, to enhance the overall street environment and address car parking problems.

Henley Duke Street & Bell Street
Two of Henley's main shopping streets, they both suffer from narrow footways and being dominated by traffic, with Duke Street designated as an Air Quality Management Area. Henley ITS includes proposals which should reduce traffic levels and impact and provide the basis for an improvement in air quality and the street layout.

Integrated Delivery

The County Council recognises the importance of tackling transport problems of all kinds in a strategic and integrated way to ensure the full impacts of proposed schemes and initiatives are fully understood. The Council has put in place two main mechanisms – the Transport Networks Review and Integrated Transport Strategies - for ensuring schemes and initiatives developed in response to the problems above are considered as strategic elements of a package wherever appropriate, rather than measures implemented in isolation from one another.

Intra-urban Networks: Integrated Transport Strategies (ITS)

ITSs have been developed for Oxford and many of Oxfordshire's larger towns. In South Oxfordshire, the Didcot Area and Henley-on-Thames have Integrated Transport Strategies. The role of the ITSs in the second Local Transport Plan period will be to help the Council deliver the five objectives of the Plan in an integrated, efficient and cost-effective way. To this end, the ITSs will have three key functions:

> Ensuring transport problems in larger urban areas are addressed in an integrated way, recognising the complex inter-relationships that often exist between different parts of an urban transport network;

> Providing an established structure for consultation with local communities, stakeholders and local government partners;

> Providing a framework for integration between transport and land use planning.

Inter-urban Networks: Transport Networks Review (TNR)

The TNR study has helped to guide the County Council's longer-term transport objectives and strategy, as set out in Chapter 1. The study has also provided a strategic framework for the development of schemes which are likely to impact significantly on the operation of the County's strategic transport network. In developing solutions to the problems outlined above, the methods and conclusions of the TNR will be referred to as necessary to ensure any wider network considerations are taken fully into account.

A number of the problems identified in South Oxfordshire do not fall within Didcot or Henley, and measures to tackle these problems will be developed. Existing countywide strategies, such as the TNR, will help to address some of them. The TNR makes the following recommendations for improvements to the road network in South Oxfordshire:

- A40 between junctions 6 and 8 of the M40: downgrade to B Road
- B4015: downgrade to unclassified between A4074 and A329

- B4027: downgrade to unclassified with weight limit between A40 and A34

The recent structural assessment of road over rail bridges has identified a number of sub-standard bridges unable to carry 40 tonnes. The two rail bridges on Foxhall road in Didcot will need to have permanent weight restrictions limiting access to the parkway car park are to vehicles less than 18 tonnes. At this time there are no proposals to strengthen the bridges.

Cross-Boundary Issues

The area covered by the Thames Valley Multi Modal Study included parts of South Oxfordshire. The study reported in January 2003 and the government issued its response in July 2003. Local transport recommendations accepted by the Secretary of State included the development of a 'hub and spoke' transport system, including new inter-urban bus/coach services on corridors not well served by public transport and the promotion of measures to reduce travel demand and encourage more sustainable transport choices.

The study also recommended that the case for a new Thames crossing should be considered further. This would need to part of a package for the Reading urban area which also considered the scope for re-allocation of existing north-south capacity across the river to public transport. Although the Secretary of State made no comment on this specific issue, the study recommendation for closer working between local authorities and other stakeholders to develop coherent cross-boundary transport strategies was strongly endorsed. Accordingly, a new sub-regional group comprising Oxfordshire County Council, the two Berkshire unitary authorities (Reading and Wokingham) and South Oxfordshire District Council has been established to oversee this work. Options testing for the provision of an additional cross-Thames travel capacity are now underway using the Reading Transport Model.