Chapter 1

Aims and Objectives

Chapter Overview

This chapter sets out the ambitions of the County Council to which this Local Transport Plan will contribute. From these ambitions a set of objectives have been developed together with a longer-term strategy for improving transport in the context of the county's overall economic development.

Overall County Council Aims

This Local Transport Plan is part of a wider strategic framework through which Oxfordshire County Council, working with its partners, is tackling the challenges Oxfordshire faces over the next decade.

The county has experienced exceptional economic and population growth, but this has not been sufficiently matched by physical infrastructure and has also has brought with it problems of housing affordability, skill shortages and access. The county remains the most rural in the South East. Our outstanding built and natural heritage is not only an environmental asset but part of our economic competitive advantage. Environment and economy need to support each other.

The Oxfordshire Community Partnership has carried out a consultation called 'Understanding Oxfordshire' to create a strong evidence and stakeholder base for assessing the extent of these challenges and considering how they should be addressed. The Partnership agreed the following overall shared vision:

> *"We want Oxfordshire to be a thriving county which adapts to a changing world but remains a special place in which to work, live and visit"*

Within this vision, the County Council has agreed the following strategic priorities:

> - Help the economy grow as fast as possible with a real choice of access to jobs, homes, leisure and services and in a way that does not prejudice the future of our environment;
> - Give all of us – throughout our lives – the opportunity to enjoy effective teaching and learning;

> Safeguard our communities and maintain our rural character;
> Help our disadvantaged residents to live fulfilling and independent lives;
> Keep improving our services by listening to users' views; and
> Make Oxfordshire – its city, towns, villages and countryside – welcoming, safe and exceptional places to live, work, learn and visit.

These priorities are supported by the County Council's three corporate objectives:

'*low taxes, real choice and value for money*'.

This Local Transport Plan contributes to all of these priorities and objectives. At its heart is the need to enable the economy and population to continue to grow without generating or perpetuating unsustainable impacts on the physical environment and in a way which helps those most excluded. But it contributes to the wider picture in many other ways, not least the emphasis being given to value for money and customer responsiveness in our new arrangements for programme delivery.

This Plan sits alongside other key plans such as the Local Area Agreement, our Children and Young Persons' Plan and our Structure Plan. Each has a complementary role in a shared strategic framework.

Local Transport Plan Objectives

Within this wider framework the County Council have set the following overall Aim and Objectives for the Local Transport Plan.

Aim

To improve access to jobs and services, particularly for those most in need, in ways which are both safe and sustainable

Objectives

> Tackling congestion
> Delivering accessibility
> Safer Roads
> Better Air Quality
> Improving the Street Environment

The first four of these objectives are the priority areas agreed between the Government and Local Government Association. The fifth was added to reflect our local corporate priorities. All were supported in consultation. As a package they also have a close fit with the County Council's wider

corporate objectives and those of Local Area Agreement Objectives, and also with regional and national policy.

The objectives will be at the heart of the County Council's transport strategy for the next five years, and have been rigorously followed in scheme selection.

Tackling Congestion

Traffic jams cause delays which cost people and businesses time and money. Congestion can also result in poor air quality and often makes bus services less punctual and more expensive to deliver.

Delivering Accessibility

Accessing jobs and services is fundamental to a good quality of life. The availability of public transport and good walking and cycling routes is essential to minimising the risk of social exclusion, particularly for people without access to a car. Targeted public transport is fundamental to quality of life.

Safer Roads

In 2005, 40 people were killed and 300 seriously injured as a result of road accidents in Oxfordshire. Nationally, road accidents are the single biggest killer of school age children. Safer roads are therefore essential in helping to safeguard our communities.

Better Air Quality

Although the quality of Oxfordshire's air is generally very good, there are some locations where traffic related air pollution exceeds recommended levels. Targeted action to address air quality problems will improve overall health for those affected.

Improving the Street Environment

Streets that are dominated by traffic or poorly designed can be unpleasant to spend time in, particularly for pedestrians. A high-quality street environment, on the other hand, can add to the vitality of a street, attracting visitors, boosting Oxfordshire's economic competitive advantage and creating a pleasant public space for people to enjoy. Poorly designed streets can be dangerous to everyone particularly parents with pushchairs, children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

Other Quality of Life factors

Although the objectives above cover most of the areas where transport plays a major role, there are other issues upon which transport can have an impact. These include:

> Landscape and Biodiversity
> Community Safety, Personal Safety and Crime
> Healthy Communities

> Sustainable and Prosperous Communities
> Noise
> Climate Change and Greenhouse Gases

Transport policies and actions, particularly at the local level, are unlikely to be the major factor in changes observed in any of these areas. Consequently, it is not considered appropriate for these to be included as objectives within this Plan itself. The Strategic Environmental Assessment of this plan covers many of these aspects within its assessment objectives. However in the planning and design of schemes to meet the Local Transport Plan objectives opportunities to address these wider quality of life objectives will be actively pursued.

Local Transport Plan Delivery

Programme development

The first Local Transport Plan for Oxfordshire covered the period 2001-2006. In preparing that document the County Council attempted to define specific policies and strategies for a broad range of mode and topic areas related to a wide ranging set of objectives. During the course of the first Plan, though, a number of problems have been revealed by this approach:

> The monitoring programme did not cover the complete set of objectives set out in the Plan;
> Individual strategy objectives did not always support each other and in some cases could cancel each other out; and
> There was no clear progression through from objectives to schemes and only an imprecise idea of the problems that the Plan, as a whole, was seeking to resolve.

Subsequently, a number of lessons have been learnt over the first Plan period, including the need for:

> A much more robust and measurable system of target setting in relation to outcomes and to link this explicitly with performance and programme management;
> Improved processes for the management of the programme as a whole, and the individual projects within it, to ensure that it continues to give the best value for money;
> A more focused approach to public transport provision, especially high quality welcoming bus services for key journeys, backed up by improved infrastructure and better information should be pursued;
> Considering all the sources of funding together, using partnership and other sources of funding in order to get the best overall value for money; and
> Planning schemes in a longer term context, relating them to future development proposals.

As a consequence of this, this Plan has developed a single, focused set of objectives and developed its strategy directly from this. It was the County Council's intention that the set of objectives should be small but attempt to cover the full range of transport issues current in Oxfordshire. Based upon these objectives, criteria were set out to define and prioritise the problems to be treated. In this way a programme of measures has been developed and targets set based upon the expected outcomes from this programme.

This approach has meant that, for the first time, the County Council has been able to put together a comprehensive 5-year delivery and investment programme with strong links between transport policy and implementation practice.

Programme implementation

The first Local Transport Plan represented a step change increase in the funding for transport improvements in Oxfordshire over that of the previous decade. This enlargement has brought many benefits but it also exposed a number of weaknesses in the management and delivery of the Council's transport programmes.

The County Council has now created innovative partnering arrangements to greatly strengthen the reliability, value for money and customer responsiveness of our scheme delivery. The County Council's operational delivery transport staff have been brought within a single organisation 'Oxfordshire Highways' together with our term contractors for engineering design and for highway work. They are overseen by a single Partnering Board and Management Team with a unified performance management and programme delivery framework. Processes are being re-engineered to cut out duplication and unnecessary activities with a single "face" being presented to the public.

This is part of a wider determination to deliver full value from the available resources, whether they be from developer contributions, supported capital or revenue sources. Working across the Council, the other main initiative being progressed is a combined review of all funded transport, whether serving schools, people in care, or the general public to deliver the maximum overall efficiency and accessibility.

Oxfordshire's Long-Term Transport Strategy

This Local Transport Plan provides a five-year programme for 2006-11. This is a relatively short period compared with the time horizons of other plans. The Structure Plan covers the period up to 2016, the South East Plan up to 2026. Developers will be considering proposals beyond 2011, transport operators will be investing in fleets with much longer lives, stakeholders disappointed that schemes are not included in this Local Transport Plan programmes to 2011 are also interested in the longer term.

For all these reasons the Local Transport Plan needs to sit within a wider and longer term strategy up until 2026. This strategy looks at the wider policy context, assesses the transport impacts, and provides a strategic framework for transport solutions in this and future Local Transport Plans.

Wider policy context

This strategy takes account of:

> Continued household and demographic growth, which on all forecasts is likely to continue at the levels of the last 10 years, but with fastest growth in elderly age groups;
> Proposed location and numbers of new housing not only in Oxfordshire but in neighbouring areas, especially Milton Keynes and Aylesbury, the Thames Valley and Swindon;
> Locations for potential major employment growth, including for example Milton Park and Harwell, but again beyond as well as within Oxfordshire;
> Oxford's further growth as a regional hub (being a key destination for employment, healthcare, leisure, tourism and shopping), taking particular account of the proposed renaissance of the West End;
> Existing demand for travel and future changes likely over time (where we can expect increases both in long distance commuting and in home working);
> Key constraints on the transport networks, from affordability and environmental considerations, now and in the future;
> Possible technological advances, especially in information systems;
> Stakeholder and public aspirations, as expressed through a variety of methods of consultation and participation; and
> The need to provide real choice and value for money.

Key transport impacts

To develop the strategy a multi-modal transport model was used, as part of a comprehensive Networks Review study, to assess the likely demand for travel in the longer term. This took account of national and local policies and trends including development proposals emerging from the South East Plan.

Growth in all traffic in Oxfordshire is predicted to be over 25%, over the period to 2026 - well above the national average of 18%. This is partly as a result of higher than average population growth and goods vehicle forecasts. A comparison of average hour traffic flows entering and leaving the county showed that traffic flows across the county boundary could increase by 20% in the north, 26% in the south, 36% in the east and 28% in the west.

In general, those routes that are currently closest to capacity will experience lower than average percentage increases, due to their limited scope for accommodating additional traffic. A 'do minimum' approach would lead to large traffic increases on alternative routes, including a number of B-class and unclassified roads. In many of these cases the

existing flows are low, and there would be capacity available to absorb the increases, but clearly there could be adverse impacts on safety and the environment.

The overall impact of this growth, if nothing is done, would be:

> Severe congestion on major routes causing unreliable journey times, increased delays and diversion of traffic onto more minor routes - such congestion would increase the costs of moving goods to and through the county and add to bus journey times, reduce bus punctuality and increase operating costs;
> Lengthening of traffic "peak" hours;
> Increased levels of noise, vibration and townscape/landscape impact, especially on more minor routes, with a potentially significant quality of life impact;
> Overcrowding on railways unless more seating capacity is provided through the use of longer trains, in the short term, and the provision of extra track capacity in the longer term; and
> Travelling by foot or by cycle would be likely to be less popular due to increased traffic flows.

The strategic response

Oxfordshire is a mostly rural county, in many parts of which the car is (and will continue to be) the predominant mode of travel. However a significant minority do not have access to a car which affects their ability to reach services and employment. The County Council therefore aims to:

> Improve the reliability and safety of car (and bus) trips by tackling key congestion 'hotspots';
> Support the provision of high quality, welcoming public transport, both where it can provide a real alternative to car travel and ensure access for those without a car; and
> Influence travel behaviour through enhanced information and better travel planning.

A real choice needs to be provided, and approaches tailored to fit local circumstances. This Strategy is a balanced package to achieve all of these things in order to tackle the highest priority problems and achieve the best value for money.

Roads and Routeing

The following criteria are being be used in deciding whether and where to increase highway capacity:

> A range of traffic management measures will be considered to deal with identified problems before considering new roads or increasing capacity on the existing network. These will be introduced as part of the Council's Network Strategy and Traffic Management Duty;

> Where traffic management measures are not sufficient to address problems, consideration will be given to improvements such as bypass schemes. The case for these will be prioritised in terms of the scale of environmental problems (e.g. in terms of route layout and proximity to buildings, levels of congestion, numbers of HGVs and predicted traffic increases). In addition, any wider impacts that an improvement may cause have been identified, so that routes are considered as a whole. The environmental implications of building traffic relief schemes have also been taken into account. Where there is clearly no prospect of a by-pass being built in the foreseeable future, the line will no longer be protected;

> Route improvements (such as bypasses or widening) will not be provided for capacity reasons alone. However, where severe capacity problems exist at certain 'bottleneck' locations, improvement measures will be considered (again taking account of potential wider impacts), with the aim of ensuring that benefits for public transport are 'locked in'.

The Council will follow similar considerations in proposing enhancements of the trunk road network (particularly the A34), which is the responsibility of the Highways Agency, and will work closely with the Agency where issues interrelate.

Public Transport

Oxfordshire has high levels of bus patronage, especially to the centre of Oxford – and buses remain at the heart of our transport strategy. The County Council will invest in infrastructure to support bus use, including Park & Ride sites, information systems, greater priority at traffic signals, bus priorities and enforcement of them and bus stop furniture. It will look to bus operators in return to invest in their fleets and ticketing so that bus travel is a quality and welcoming experience for users with minimum pollution and physical intrusion for communities served. In partnership with the rail industry, the Council will further improve bus links to rail stations, by improving interchange facilities, arranging bus services to serve railway stations and timing them to connect with trains wherever appropriate, improving information about bus-rail connections and further extensions to through ticketing arrangements. Other partnerships will improve bus links to healthcare and other key facilities.

Wherever possible, the County Council will deliver these improvements through creating the conditions in which commercial bus services can thrive. Quality Partnerships with bus operators will ensure joint development of these commercial services. The Council will also ensure that subsidised services are provided where necessary to supplement the commercial network, which best meet local needs and provide best value for money.

A Premium Routes network with services of at least a 15 minute frequency will be provided by:

> Promoting high quality public transport on the most heavily travelled corridors in the county;
> Working with operators to improve punctuality and reduce boarding times;
> Giving priority to buses at locations where congestion is experienced;
> Within Oxford, achieving stronger priority between the Park & Ride sites and central Oxford;
> Considering Remote Park & Ride sites to serve key travel movements;
> High quality infrastructure at stops, including wherever possible new clearer signs, raised kerbs, shelters and good access; and
> Real-time information and clear timetable displays.

A second tier (frequency at least every 60 minutes) network will be promoted where higher frequency services cannot be provided commercially:

> Linking all settlements of over 1000 population with at least one centre offering a wider range of services, also linking together all settlements of 25,000 or over;
> Offering strong accessibility and social inclusion benefits;
> Routes as direct as possible and regular interval timetables;
> Subsidy to be provided where services cannot be provided commercially; and
> High quality bus stop and interchange facilities where two or more second tier services come together and at the busiest stops elsewhere on the routes.

Local services at lower frequencies will be provided, usually with subsidy, to ensure essential links for more remote areas.   As well as providing direct links to local centres, they will be arranged to connect with the more frequent services at convenient points where this will enable useful links to destinations further afield.

The County Council's priorities for improving Oxfordshire's railways are:

> Implementation of East-West Rail (initially from Oxford to Bedford via Bletchley/Milton Keynes);
> An enlarged Oxford Station to provide extra track capacity, and an improved interchange within the regeneration of the city's West End;
> Improvements to services along the Cotswold Line, focusing initially on the principal stations; and
> Working with Train Operating Companies to improve facilities and access at local rail stations, including a new interchange at Didcot; and
> Working with the DfT and the Rail Industry to promote increased use of the existing railway and to seek appropriate train services,

particularly to major centres where housing growth is proposed, and to secure access to education and employment.

Influencing Travel Behaviour

The Council will encourage or promote sustainable travel choices, primarily through:

> Use of Intelligent Transport Systems to provide more information to travellers and enable them to make better travel choices;
> Encouraging further introduction and promotion of travel plans for schools and employment development;
> Parking controls and pricing mechanisms;
> More co-ordination between development planning and transport planning, to ensure that these are considered together through the planning process;
> Seeking opportunities to streamline transport provision, including provision for education and healthcare and the voluntary sector; and
> More partnership working in areas where the County Council does not have direct control itself but where policy decisions impact on transport.