

**CABINET**  
**17 June 2025**

**Traffic Filter Trial Delay - Mitigation Proposals**

**Report by Director of Environment and Highways**

**RECOMMENDATION**

**1. Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**

- a) Authorise officers to carry out a public consultation on a proposal to temporarily implement a congestion charging scheme using the systems and infrastructure developed for the traffic filter trial, to mitigate the impact of the delay of the traffic filter trial while Botley Road remains closed.
- b) Authorise officers to develop the minor schemes as outlined in paragraph 13 (e) to (i)
- c) Request officers to develop an 'income spending strategy' which will focus the net surplus income on reducing the costs of bus travel, including potential park and ride incentives, in accordance with relevant legislation.

**Executive Summary**

- 2. Network Rail's ongoing closure of Botley Road at Oxford station means Cabinet's November 2022 decision to introduce six trial traffic filters in Oxford cannot be implemented until at least August 2026. This has meant that the scheme benefits of quicker and more reliable buses, safer and more attractive walking and cycling, and improved air quality cannot be realised. The continued closure of Botley Road has worsened the situation for business travel in the city including community-based healthcare professionals and tradespeople, who will benefit from the trial traffic filters.
- 3. In early 2025, organisations such as Oxford City Council and Oxford Bus Company requested that Oxfordshire County Council must investigate short term options given the continued closure of Botley Road and the resultant delay to the trial traffic filters.
- 4. Officers have reviewed a range of potential options, and the recommended options to pursue (subject to consultation and development) have been identified. The main recommended option is a temporary congestion charge scheme based on the existing trial traffic filter proposals. Subject to a future decision by Cabinet, following the consultation, the temporary scheme could be introduced while Botley Road remains closed using the infrastructure and systems already implemented during 2024 in readiness for the traffic filters trial.
- 5. This report outlines the background, the need for intervention, and the options considered.

## Background

6. Network Rail's ongoing closure of Botley Road at Oxford station means Cabinet's November 2022 decision to introduce six trial traffic filters in Oxford cannot be implemented until at least August 2026.
7. The trial traffic filters are designed to reduce congestion enabling a transformation of the public transport experience for journeys into and around the city by drastically improving bus journey times and reliability, facilitating new and improved routes. It is also designed to create a more comfortable environment for those walking, wheeling and cycling by reducing traffic and harmful emissions while encouraging mode shift to these healthy and sustainable forms of transport. It supports the Zero Emission Bus Regional Area (ZEBRA) investment and the commitments in the Enhanced Partnership, particularly the commitment to improve bus productivity by 10% by the end of 2025.
8. At the time of the 2011 census (the latest reliable travel to work data), 53% of Oxford residents travelled to work by non-car modes. 70% of those working in Oxford city centre travelled to work by non-car modes (excluding park and ride). Additionally, 32% of Oxford residents do not have access to a car, and more than 90% of city centre visitors (including shopping, tourism, leisure and education as well as commuting) arrive by non-car modes. The County Council has committed to take action to mitigate the impact of the extended Botley Road closure that provide benefits to the majority of road users in the city.
9. The trial traffic filters will provide extensive exemptions and permits for those unable to use alternative and more space-efficient modes or for instances when these other modes (e.g. public transport or cycling) are not possible. For those with an exemption or using a permit, less traffic will provide an enhanced journey experience even when using their private car.
10. In January 2025, Network Rail announced a further delay to the full reopening of the Botley Road until August 2026. As a result, the County Council received letters and strong representations from groups and organisations lobbying the county council to take action. Oxford City Council submitted a statement (see Annex 1) imploring 'Oxfordshire County Council to take action now to tackle congestion.' The Oxford Bus Company warned that 'Congestion in Oxford is at "emergency levels"' and urged the County Council to come up with a 'Plan B solution' and it "should not wait until the introduction of the traffic filters to tackle growing congestion (Annex 2). Representations have been received from carers and tradespeople (Annex 3), two groups of essential road users that would have benefited from the introduction of the trial traffic filters in November 2024. Officers have therefore considered a range of interim options while Network Rail completes its works.
11. The closure of Botley Road has increased congestion, slowing buses by up to 17% on Abingdon Road and lengthening journey times on Banbury and Woodstock roads. This has made conditions tougher for pedestrians and cyclists. Workers such as healthcare professionals and tradespeople are affected by longer traffic queues. There is a risk of losing more bus services, creating a negative cycle of deteriorating public transport and increasing congestion. The council has already stepped in to

financially support previously commercial bus services in the city due to increased congestion, but this is not financially sustainable in the longer term.

12. A citizens' assembly was held in early 2025 to discuss and debate the council's transport policies. There was strong support for traffic reduction measures and cheaper and more reliable public transport.

## **Options considered**

13. In March 2025, officers investigated a range of solutions to mitigate the delay in implementing the trial traffic filters. The guiding principles were to achieve benefits similar to those expected for the trial traffic filters, and to be able to implement any interventions quickly and at low cost. The following options have been considered:
  - (a) Do Nothing
  - (b) Partial implementation of the trial traffic filters (4 out of 6 filters)
  - (c) Use the trial traffic filters as temporary congestion charging locations
  - (d) Accelerating the expanded ZEZ
  - (e) Rephasing of signals at Abingdon Road/Weirs Lane
  - (f) Introducing Red Routes, suspension of parking/loading etc
  - (g) School streets around private schools
  - (h) Park & Ride stops and bus lane access for private school shuttle buses
  - (i) Direct access to hospitals bus links/Park & Ride
14. As has been outlined in the previous section, the 'do nothing' option is not considered viable for the reasons given previously.
15. A partial implementation of the trial traffic filters has been considered in the past. This would likely include operating only 4 of the 6 filter points, with the filters on Hythe Bridge Street and Thames Street not operating while the Botley Road is closed. This adjustment would be necessary to provide access to an area of the city centre that, under a 6-filter proposal, would only be accessible from the Botley Road for cars. Consequently, bus journey time benefits would not be achieved on the Abingdon, Woodstock, and Banbury roads, as car traffic attempts to access this city centre area from other routes. This situation is already occurring on these roads with the Botley Road closed. Any proposal needs to be seen as a city-wide initiative to ensure that traffic, and the congestion it creates, is not reassigned to other key bus routes. Given the maximum trial period of 18 months, the monitoring and evaluation for the trial traffic filters would be 'null and void' and could not be used for decision-making at the end of the 18-month period. For this reason, this option has been discounted.
16. The temporary congestion charge would be identical to the approved trial traffic filter scheme, except that cars without a permit have the option to pay a daily charge for

access through the congestion charge locations, rather than being prohibited. Exemptions and permits would be identical to the traffic filters (but with an additional central permit area to take account of the continued closure of the Botley Road – see Annex 4).

17. Infrastructure (much of which is already in place) would be largely the same as for the traffic filters, minimising infrastructure costs. Back-office systems for enforcement and permit management would be the same as for traffic filters, with the addition of a payment module. Traffic reduction impacts would depend on the level of the charge, but with a proposed daily charge of £5 (for access through all six charge locations) the reductions would be expected to be approaching those of the traffic filters with corresponding benefits for bus services.
18. An accelerated city centre ZEZ, whilst having some traffic reduction benefits within and around the zone itself, would not provide city-wide benefits and could make congestion worse on some important bus routes e.g. at either end of Marston Ferry Road (as people try to avoid driving through the city centre). There is no infrastructure currently in place for the city centre ZEZ, with the design and assessment work underway but not completed. The back-office systems are in place for the ZEZ pilot, but these require major modification for a wider city centre ZEZ. Therefore, it would not be possible to implement the expanded ZEZ until shortly before the reopening of the Botley Road so the benefits would be very short-lived.
19. Options (e) to (i) at paragraph 13 above, would provide benefits in terms of traffic reduction, but this would be geographically localised, not city-wide. Additionally, improvement for bus services (scheduled and private) would require lower levels of congestion to achieve the full benefits. The private schools already offer comprehensive home-to-school transport, but the coaches get caught in the same congestion as general traffic. Nevertheless, it is considered there is some benefit and these warrant investment as mitigation and officers are proposing (subject to further development and approval) implementation of options (e) to (i) in conjunction with a city-wide proposal. Indeed, new and improved bus services serving the hospitals were introduced in early 2025, and tweaks are being made to traffic signals timings.
20. For the reasons given above, officers believe that the only realistic and materially effective option, deliverable within the required timeframe, is a temporary congestion charge alongside developing options (e) to (i).
21. If the proposal proceeds to implementation, the intention is to replace the temporary congestion charge with the trial traffic filters as soon as practically possible once the Botley Road reopens. The congestion charge does not provide the full benefits in terms of traffic reduction, and like other congestion charge schemes, its effectiveness is likely to diminish over time. Therefore, it is not expected to achieve the full benefits of the trial traffic filters required to deliver the walking and cycling benefits from reduced traffic and potential road space reallocation.
22. The current proposal for a congestion charge scheme is unique as, unlike typical schemes, it is based on six individual charging locations rather than a zone, applies only to cars (including fully electric cars), and includes various exemptions and permits, unlike those seen in places like London. This design closely mirrors the trial traffic filter scheme for ease of understanding and utilises existing infrastructure to

enable quick implementation. It is a pragmatic solution to address the delay in the trial traffic filter scheme, which was expected to be implemented in November 2024. If a permanent Oxford congestion charge scheme were designed from scratch, it would likely differ significantly in terms of charge levels, operational area and time, and the number of discounts and exemptions. This proposal is very much a short-term, temporary solution, making use of existing investment.

23. If a temporary congestion charge is pursued, it is likely to generate surplus income. Subject to further work and a future Cabinet approval, this could be invested in bus service enhancements and/or reducing the cost of bus travel e.g. reducing the cost of park and ride. In line with the requirements of the Transport Act 2000, the net revenue generated by a charging scheme can only be spent on schemes that facilitate the achievement of local transport policies.

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

24. Developing a scheme, that has similar benefits to the trial traffic filters, during this extended closure to the Botley Road, will support the council's nine priorities:
- Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work
  - Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire
  - Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents
  - Support carers and the social care system
  - Invest in an inclusive, integrated and sustainable transport network
  - Preserve and improve access to nature and green spaces
  - Create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential
  - Play our part in a vibrant and participatory local democracy
  - Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit
25. 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.
26. 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

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

27. If recommendation (a) is approved, an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) will be produced for the consultation with a final assessment accompanying the consultation outcome report to Cabinet later in the year. However, the implications are expected to be broadly similar to the EqIA associated with the trial traffic filters which can be viewed [here](#).

## **Sustainability Implications**

### **Climate impact assessment**

28. If recommendation (a) is approved, a Climate Impact Assessment (CIA) will be produced for the consultation with a final assessment accompanying the report to Cabinet later in the year. However, this is expected to be broadly similar to the CIA associated with the trial traffic filters which can be viewed [here](#).

## Financial Implications

29. The proposal would largely utilise the infrastructure, including the back-office systems, approved for the trial traffic filters (through a separate Cabinet approval, in November 2022, and business case).
30. However, additional capital investment of £0.5m is required for new signs and adaptation to the back-office systems to add a charging module. It is proposed to fund this through the Congestion Relief Fund, within the council's approved capital programme, allocated to the Botley Road Mitigation package.
31. If the proposal proceeds to implementation, the operating expenditure (OpEx), including additional staff costs and maintenance, is planned to be funded by the temporary congestion charge income.
32. It is expected that a temporary congestion charge would generate surplus income above the operational costs identified. Subject to future decision-making, this surplus income could be used to reduce the cost of bus travel, including park & ride, in Oxford. Any use will need to be in line with the requirements of the Transport Act 2000 where net revenue generated by a charging scheme can only be spent on schemes that facilitate the achievement of local transport policies.

Comments checked by:

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## Legal Implications

33. The consultation will be carried out in line with the gunning consultation principles and in line with other relevant legislations.
34. The temporary congestion charge would be introduced and managed using powers available in the Transport Act 2000. The Council also has powers under the Highways Act 1980 and the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (RTRA) to implement highway improvements and to make and amend traffic regulation orders
35. Introduction of the charging scheme and the other options proposed would be subject to consultation and consideration of the matters set out in the relevant legislation.
36. All highways authorities have a duty under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991(NRSWA) and the Traffic Management Act 2004 (TMA) to manage its road network with a view to achieving, so far as may be reasonably practicable having regard to its other obligations, policies and objectives, the expeditious and safe movement of traffic, including pedestrians, on its road network. Managing congestion on its road network is an essential element and the options in this report would assist the Council in complying with this duty.

Comments checked by:

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## **Staff Implications**

37. There are no staffing implications related to this decision. However, if the proposal proceeds to implementation, additional staff (as identified in the approved trial traffic filter trial) would be required in Customer Services and Parking & Enforcement. If the proposal proceeds to implementation, this Operational Expenditure would be funded by the temporary congestion charge income.

## **Risk Management**

38. If the proposal does not proceed, there will be abortive costs related to design, assessment and consultation. The reopening of Botley Road could be different from that communicated, and the order will be drafted to accommodate this. A full risk register will be developed if approved for consultation.
39. The future implementation of the proposal, if approved, will require Department for Transport (DfT) sign authorisation. As the proposal cannot proceed without this and time is a constraint, officers are currently seeking DfT sign authorisation with a view to securing this prior to the start of public consultation, should Cabinet approve recommendation (a). Granting of a sign authorisation does not in any way commit the council to implementing the scheme.

## **Consultation and stakeholder engagement**

### **Consultation**

40. Subject to the recommendation being approved, a public consultation on introducing a temporary congestion charge would start later this month for a period of six weeks. The consultation would help the council understand the impact of the proposed scheme on residents, businesses and other users of the road network. A survey would be hosted on the county council's Let's Talk engagement platform, with paper copies available in main libraries. A series of online information and Q&A events will be open for all to join and the council would use a range of methods to reach different audiences across the county.

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Annex 1: Oxford City Council statement 3 February 2025  
Annex 2: Oxford Mail article of OBC views 20 March 2025



Annex 3: Representations from carers and tradespeople

Annex 4: Central permit area

Background papers: Nil

[Other Documents:] Nil

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