

**Richard Parnham**  
**Presentation to Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee**  
**27 August 2025 10.00 am**

Today I will focus on just one of the six key justifications for the congestion change: the suggestion that it will “make bus journeys faster and more reliable”.

In annex 9 of the document pack for this meeting, you are presented with information that shows that average bus speeds in Oxford were between 11- 11.6 mph in March – June 2025. Implicit in this is that bus times have got worse recently. Well, newsflash: they haven't. The council has data, which it didn't share with you, but I will, which indicates that bus speeds in 2019 at the same time of year were – between 11.2 – 11.4mph. This means average bus speeds within Oxford's ring road have barely change over six years, and that's despite the closure of Botley Road, the LTNs (which shredded services locally) and the new 20mph limits. So when the bus companies demand a 10% improvement in bus speeds, they are not asking the council to fix a problem that (overall) has got worse recently: instead, they were asking for lockdown-style levels of traffic, mainly for their commercial benefit. When they asked to make this 10% improvement a condition of their electric bus investment, Oxfordshire County Council should have told them to get stuffed, and invest in electric buses anyway.

So will the congestion change make a difference to bus speeds? Almost certainly not. According to data in the council's possession, there's no improvement in road speeds predicted, for example, on Abingdon Road (it may get fractionally worse), the road nearest to Botley Road. But nor are road speed improvements predicted for London Road, Iffley Road and Banbury Road, to name but a few major bus routes. The best outcome, but for only around its 500m length only (two locations are modelled), a 1-3kpm improvement on St Clement's, during peak hours only. That's deeply troubling benefit/harm ratio, on a city-wide, Oxford economy-wide basis.

And there's probably an apparent reason for this lack of road speed benefits: the congestion charge sites were never selected because they were congestion hotspots, or major bus routes: they were selected because they severe connections between neighbourhoods – a legacy of the original purpose of the “Connecting Oxford” scheme, on which the congestion charge scheme is largely derived. So now you have the farcical situation where two of the congestion charge sites carry no buses at all, while two more that do don't typically suffer from any congestion. Of the two congestion charge sites that a) are bus routes and b) can be congested, Hollow Way is predicted to get slightly slower if the congestion charge is brought in, both morning and interpeak. You heard that right: slower, not quicker. We've already discussed St Clement's.

City-wide, the big “unknown” is the impact on bus services caused by displacement. We've worked out that around 70% of buses go nowhere near a congestion charge filter, but may get caught up in displacement from it. That's certainly likely to occur on Marsh Lane, but will bus routes on Garsington Road get hit as a result of the modelled increase in traffic on that road? What about Cowley Road? What does the council know, but is not telling us?

And by that I mean: the council has data in its possession data which shows a clear absence of improvements in road speeds if the congestion charge is bought it, at numerous roads across the city. So why wasn't this finding published, leaving it up to us to do the maths independently? Was this discovery missed in the mad rush to get the proposal ready for publication – or did someone actively decide not to publish this finding? If someone made an

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active choice not to publish this finding, I'd like to know who that was, and why. I want an explanation - and a name.