

Questions from Members of the Public

Questions are listed in the order in which they were received.

<p>1. RICHARD PARNHAM</p> <p>What is / are the specific root causes of the situation where Oxford congestion charge permits are not being deducted, days / weeks after car journeys though checkpoints have been made? Please be as specific / location-specific as possible about ALL known root causes of recent / ongoing systems failures.</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>There are no ongoing system failures. The delays impacting Oxford congestion charge day pass deductions were the result of two issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initially, cameras on Thames Street experienced poor 4G connectivity, which resulted in an error uploading images to the system. The fix led to unintended consequences, as is commonplace with IT systems, which meant we needed to suspend an element of the permit system for a short period. The permit hierarchy had to be readjusted to automatically prioritise default permits e.g., blue badge holders over resident day passes. <p>These issues have now been resolved, and permit holders should see accurate deductions and exemptions applied going forward.</p>
<p>2. RUSSELL WILLIAMSON</p> <p>If you insist Hollow Way needs a bus gate, even though it's nowhere near the city centre, why can't it be one way where those of us living inside that area can travel through the bus gate towards the ring road via Horsepath Driftway?</p> <p>Like many other residents living in that area, I need to access the bypass, and having to go the long way round</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>The Hollow Way congestion charging point operates 7am – 9am and 3pm – 6pm Monday to Saturday only.</p> <p>Residents can apply for a permit allowing free travel through the Hollow Way congestion charging point on 100 days a year.</p>

<p>instead of wasting a permit is costly as well as bad for the environment with increased pollution.</p>	<p>We are monitoring the impacts of the congestion charge in this area carefully.</p>
<p>3. PETER WHITE</p> <p>In light of the fact that the Independent Oxford Alliance has already advanced a fully developed suite of non-punitive, evidence-driven congestion-reduction measures — including optimised traffic-signal phasing, comprehensive pavement-parking enforcement, hydrogen upgrades for the bus fleet, expanded 24/7 park-and-ride capacity, and modernised freight-consolidation systems — on what intellectually defensible basis have all and every non-charging alternative been entirely ignored, particularly when your proposed congestion charge inexplicably exempts the heaviest diesel emitters, financially targets only private motorists, and is fiscally dependent on congestion continuing in order to generate revenue, thereby rendering the scheme a logically incoherent, ideologically derivative imitation of the London Mayor’s model rather than a genuinely forward-thinking or environmentally credible policy?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>The temporary congestion charge (and the traffic filters scheme it precedes) are not being pursued <i>instead of</i> other schemes, but as part of a wider strategy that includes a wide range of measures across the city and county. There are too many schemes to list here but they are outlined in full in the council’s transport capital programme and of course in policy documents such as the Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan, Bus Service Improvement Plan and others. The case for the congestion charge was set out in detail in the public consultation materials and September 2025 cabinet report, and I do not intend to repeat it here.</p> <p>The congestion problems we are grappling with in Oxford have existed for decades. The notion that cheap, quick and uncontroversial measures like adjusting signal timings and better parking enforcement could solve the problem is not credible. If that were the case, why has no Oxfordshire County Council administration, led by a range of political parties, not implemented these “simple” solutions in the last few decades?</p> <p>Oxford’s bus fleet is already 70% electrified following investment secured in part thanks to the council’s commitment to tackle congestion in the city. We’d like to go further, of course, but this will rely on future commercial investment in the bus fleet, which will only materialise if we improve bus operating conditions and boost bus use to give bus operators the confidence they need to invest in more zero-carbon vehicles. The current park and ride system is</p>

	<p>nowhere near fully utilised, even with the congestion charge and free park and ride bus offer in place. A new park and ride site at Eynsham is due to open in the next two years. Further park and ride expansion may be needed in the future and we are planning for this; there is sufficient capacity across all sites.</p> <p>The forecast revenue from the congestion charge assumed a significant reduction in traffic levels in the city. The scheme revenue self-evidently relies on <i>some</i> people paying the charge, but traffic can of course exist without congestion, so the scheme revenue certainly does not rely on congestion continuing.</p>
<p>4. BERNADETTE EVANS</p> <p>Shop front businesses in Temple Cowley (Wilkins Road, Hollow Way and Oxford Road) are reporting a drop in turnover and customers since the congestion charge went in. Please can you tell us how this shopping neighbourhood is being monitored? Please be as detailed and specific as possible including roads, postcodes and method of monitoring.</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>Footfall and spend is being monitored through the Huq Industries “Lighthouse” system. In principle any area can be selected for monitoring, although smaller areas will be less robust statistically.</p> <p>We plan to report on footfall and spend in the Hollow Way and Oxford Road area in our monthly updates.</p>
<p>5. NICHOLAS HARDYMAN</p> <p>Please can Councillor Gant specify, in detail, how many businesses and how many postcodes in Summertown are being monitored as part of the congestion charge evaluation?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>Footfall and spend is being monitored through the Huq Industries “Lighthouse” system. In principle any area can be selected for monitoring, although smaller areas will be less robust statistically.</p> <p>We plan to report on footfall and spend in Summertown in our monthly updates.</p>

6. KOSTANDINA ISIDOROS

Can Councillor Gant confirm he is aware of, and justify how he has spent millions on road 'improvements' and new pavement built-in planting beds, despite the long-time problem of rain still regularly flooding many sections of both lanes on Woodstock Road OX2?

We continue to suffer dangerous walking, cycling and car/bus driving conditions on Woodstock Road. I have sent some screenshots of relevant road flooding evidence and have videos available to watch.

The appalling irony is that the biggest risk-to-life is to cyclists.

- the rain water fills entire/both lanes, even covering the painted cycle logos, the curb edges, the potholes or sunken manhole covers on left sides of the road edges

- in some sections with flooding both sides, buses, cyclists and cars are forced to use the middle lane

- with the chop & change bus lanes, some sections are down to one lane only for cars in both directions, cyclists are at grave danger in that

- cars cannot move into bus lanes to create safe space for cyclists for fear of APNR capture

- cyclists have to cross into on-coming traffic to avoid flooded lane sections.

COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT

As part of the recent highway improvement scheme on Woodstock Road, the opportunity was taken to provide some locations for planting. These areas which are not yet with established planting, are intended to provide a number of benefits including enhancing biodiversity, traffic management, and localised benefits to drainage. The size, depth and scale of these planted areas is limited and hence the opportunity for these planted areas to significantly alter drainage / flooding is limited. However, whilst limited, our initial observations are that these features are not making previous existing drainage issues worse. We continue to monitor the scheme.

Regarding the safety concerns you raise I can report that the cycle collision history over the last 25 years shows no relevant incidents, and the scheme has been subject to safety audits at each stage as appropriate.

In terms of surface condition, Woodstock Road is inspected on a monthly basis and any defect meeting our intervention levels will be reported for repair in line with our policy. As Members will be aware, all gullies across the county will be inspected and cleaned during the financial year. The gully emptying is taking place over November and December so will hopefully improve the situation you describe at this location.

In addition to this, some drainage repairs were undertaken last year. However, further investigations are still on-going. If these investigations indicate that a scheme is needed, then the aim would be to deliver this next year.

7. EMILY SCAYSBROOK

In August, I submitted a detailed response to the Congestion Charge consultation on behalf of the Oxford Business Action Group. In that submission, we set out four minimum safeguards that we believed were essential if the Council intended to proceed with the scheme in spite of overwhelming opposition from the independent business sector. None of these safeguards were implemented.

We asked for implementation to be postponed until after the Christmas trading period. This did not happen.

We asked for clear, measurable thresholds for economic harm to be published, so that the scheme could be paused, reviewed or withdrawn, depending on the level of economic damage it duly caused. This did not happen. We asked for transparent, accountable mechanisms for collecting and responding to business feedback. This did not happen.

Finally, we asked for a funded mitigation plan to support businesses through the Council's own projected three-to-six-month "adjustment period". This has not happened either.

As I hope you were made aware during your recent visit to the Covered Market, a number of longstanding independent businesses are now experiencing severe and immediate declines in trade, exactly as I laid out in OBAG's consultation response and as many other business owners similarly predicted.

COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT

Footfall and spend is being monitored through the Huq Industries "Lighthouse" system and will be reported monthly, with the first footfall update for November 2025 due soon. Spend data will not be available until early 2026 as there is a two-month lag before data becomes available.

A feedback survey will be launched in early 2026 for residents, businesses and visitors to provide feedback on the scheme.

Under the Transport Act 2000, net proceeds from a road user charging scheme can only be used "for the purpose of directly or indirectly facilitating the achievement of local transport policies of the authority". Financial support to businesses would not fall within this and would be unlawful under the act.

<p>Given that the Council proceeded without implementing any of the requested safeguards, and that early evidence indicates serious and potentially irreversible harm to independent businesses, will you now reconsider your position and commit to ring-fencing a proportion of revenue from the scheme to support those businesses through the transition period that the Council anticipated but failed to mitigate?</p>	
<p>8. ANNE GWINNETT</p> <p>The County Council has often referenced a statistic that says that 90% of people travelling into Oxford City Centre travel in by non-car modes.</p> <p>That statistic comes from the “Summary of City Centre and Jericho pedestrian interview surveys” report produced by Steer, although the first paragraph states that it was Oxfordshire County Council that completed (I think they mean ‘conducted’) the interview survey.</p> <p>Can Councillor Gant please confirm who conducted the survey, and explain why it was undertaken in the week commencing 23 May 2022, and on what basis the locations used for the survey (Cornmarket, Queen Street and Broad Street) were chosen?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>The survey was commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council, conducted by Indiefield (a market research fieldwork company) and analysed by Steer.</p> <p>The survey locations were chosen to capture a broad cross-section of city centre footfall in busy locations some distance from bus stops and car parks and not unduly influenced by any single destination. High Street was not included due to the high concentration of bus stops in High Street, which would have exaggerated the number of bus passengers.</p>
<p>9. PAUL MAJOR</p> <p>In the consultation pack for the congestion charge there was a section that suggested the result of the charge</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p>

<p>would be a minor positive for businesses. There was no evidence or credibility given to that statement. Since then during the consultation, in the build up to the decision and since the charge went live Councillor Gant has continued to state in the media and in public that the charge is good for business; again, without any qualification as to how or why that would be.</p> <p>I would like to ask Councillor Gant what he now thinks as retail businesses have shown in real evidence that the charge has been severely detrimental to their income and livelihoods and other businesses anecdotally talk of issues with recruitment and staff leaving. As an example my business was trending 10% ahead of last year before the charge, last week continued a trend of 14% down, a 24% negative shift. Covered market traders talk of 40% and 50% down on last year. Does Councillor Gant still consider this scheme a 'positive' for business?</p>	<p>Footfall and spend data will be published as soon as it becomes available.</p> <p>The scheme aims to boost access to the city by non-car modes of transport, which the vast majority of city centre visitors use, whilst maintaining access for car-borne visitors.</p>
<p>10. GEOFFREY SUTTON</p> <p>Observation of the ongoing evening peak congestion on West Bound St Clements after the congestion charge has been introduced, reveals that the cause of congestion is not the number of cars using St Clements, but the unrelenting and unregulated flow of buses, taxis, cars and cyclists, lit and unlit, coming from the city centre onto the Plain Roundabout from Magdalen Bridge to access Cowley and Iffley Roads, which, when combined with LTN Boundary traffic proceeding from Iffley Road to Cowley Road, takes priority over traffic trying to emerge from St Clements, so effectively cutting the St Clements exit off at</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>It is uncontested that traffic circulating on The Plain roundabout reduces the westbound capacity of St Clements in the evening peak. The county council trialled traffic signal control of the Iffley Road and Magdalen Bridge approaches to the roundabout in February 2024 for precisely this reason, but this produced little benefit for St Clements whilst increasing delays approaching from Magdalen Bridge, which has a much higher bus and cycle flow than St Clements.</p>

<p>busy periods. What plans does the Council have to regulate the flow of traffic around the Plain to give greater priority to the West Bound St Clements traffic?</p>	<p>The only way to reduce congestion in this area is to reduce traffic volumes, which is what the congestion charge aims to do.</p> <p>Monitoring data for the first month of the congestion charge will be published soon.</p>
<p>11. ERIC JANSSON</p> <p>The 'My Permits' webpage where holders of congestion-scheme permits access their account and related records (here) has for some time now displayed this advisory note: "Day pass deductions: We've experienced delays in processing deductions, but these should start appearing correctly soon. You may also notice the date in your permit history differs from your travel date - this shows when the deduction was processed, not when you travelled. We're working to bring all accounts up to date as quickly as possible. Thank you for your patience." I note that such advisory statement is indeed warranted, as my family's account shows two permits deducted on 24th November for travel that had occurred on 1st and 2nd November, and a further two permits deducted on 25th November for travel that had occurred on 7th and 8th November -- from which we observe that the processing delay can last anywhere from 17 to 23 days, a substantial time. What happens in a situation where a person has used his allotted number of permits yet passes through a congestion-charge point without paying, believing he need not pay, in reliance on information from the 'My Permits' webpage, which tells him inaccurately that he does have permits remaining? Specifically, will the Council fine the person for passing through the charge point without a permit and without</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>The exercise to bring all accounts up to date has now been completed, and day pass deductions will continue to be processed much more quickly going forward, typically in the early morning following the day of entry.</p> <p>At this point, we do not have any record of a permit holder depleting their allocation and then travelling without payment in reliance on outdated information. Should such a situation arise, it would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, but the improved processing times should prevent this from occurring.</p>

paying, or will the Council agree to waive the fine in that situation?	
--	--