



# Oxfordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan

**Updated October 2022**



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# 1. OVERVIEW

This Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) has been prepared by Oxfordshire County Council in part-fulfilment of the requirements of the National Bus Strategy.

The BSIP has been prepared to cover the county of Oxfordshire and all bus services operating within it, including cross-boundary services. Oxfordshire is a discrete area with a relatively self-contained network, and as such the Council did not consider it necessary to enter joint BSIP arrangements with any neighbouring authorities.

The purpose of the BSIP is to describe in outline how the Council and local bus operators will achieve the overarching outcomes of the National Bus Strategy, which are to build back bus use to pre-pandemic levels and to increase mode share still further in the future.

Oxfordshire covers just over 1,000 square miles and has an estimated current population of 696,000. It consists of five districts (Oxford City, Cherwell District, West Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire) and 318 town and parish councils covering much of the rural area.

Oxford is the main hub for economic and social activity in the county and is very much the focus of the bus network, which includes many frequent local services within the city.

The other key 'county towns' include Banbury, Bicester, Didcot, Witney, Carterton, Wallingford, Abingdon, Wantage, Thame and Henley-on-Thames. Most of these towns have some form of local bus service in addition to inter-urban links between these centres and with Oxford itself.

The main bus operators are Go-Ahead (Oxford Bus Company and Thames Travel) and Stagecoach – these companies provide over 80% of bus mileage and patronage, from main depots in Oxford (both), Didcot (Go-Ahead), Witney and Banbury (Stagecoach). Other significant inter-urban routes are provided by Arriva, Reading Buses, Pulham's Coaches, Diamond Bus and Redline/Red Rose. There are also several smaller operators and community transport providers in some of the local areas. Further details of routes and types of service are provided in Section 2.

The County Council's Cabinet, at their meeting in March 2021, determined that an Enhanced Partnership (EP) was the preferred mechanism for securing improvements to local bus services in the county. The Oxfordshire BSIP area will therefore be covered by a single Enhanced Partnership scheme.

The Oxfordshire BSIP was approved by the Cabinet on 19 October 2021 and will be valid until 2025 but will be reviewed annually. This is the first such review and reflects the changes in circumstances following Oxfordshire County Council succeeding in securing BSIP funding from the Department for Transport in January 2022.

The BSIP is closely linked to the new Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP), as adopted by the Council in July 2022. The summary of the LTCP articulates how the

BSIP and buses more generally has priority in the delivery of transport improvements in Oxfordshire.

*“The LTCP outlines a clear vision to deliver a net-zero Oxfordshire transport and travel system that enables the county to thrive whilst protecting the environment and making Oxfordshire a better place to live for all residents. We plan to achieve this by reducing the need to travel, discouraging individual private vehicle journeys and making walking, cycling, public and shared transport the natural first choice. The policies included in the LTCP are the tools that we believe are necessary to achieve this.”*

The current Oxfordshire bus map (correct in October 2022) is shown below. All services indicated on this map are included in the scope of this BSIP and subsequent EP.

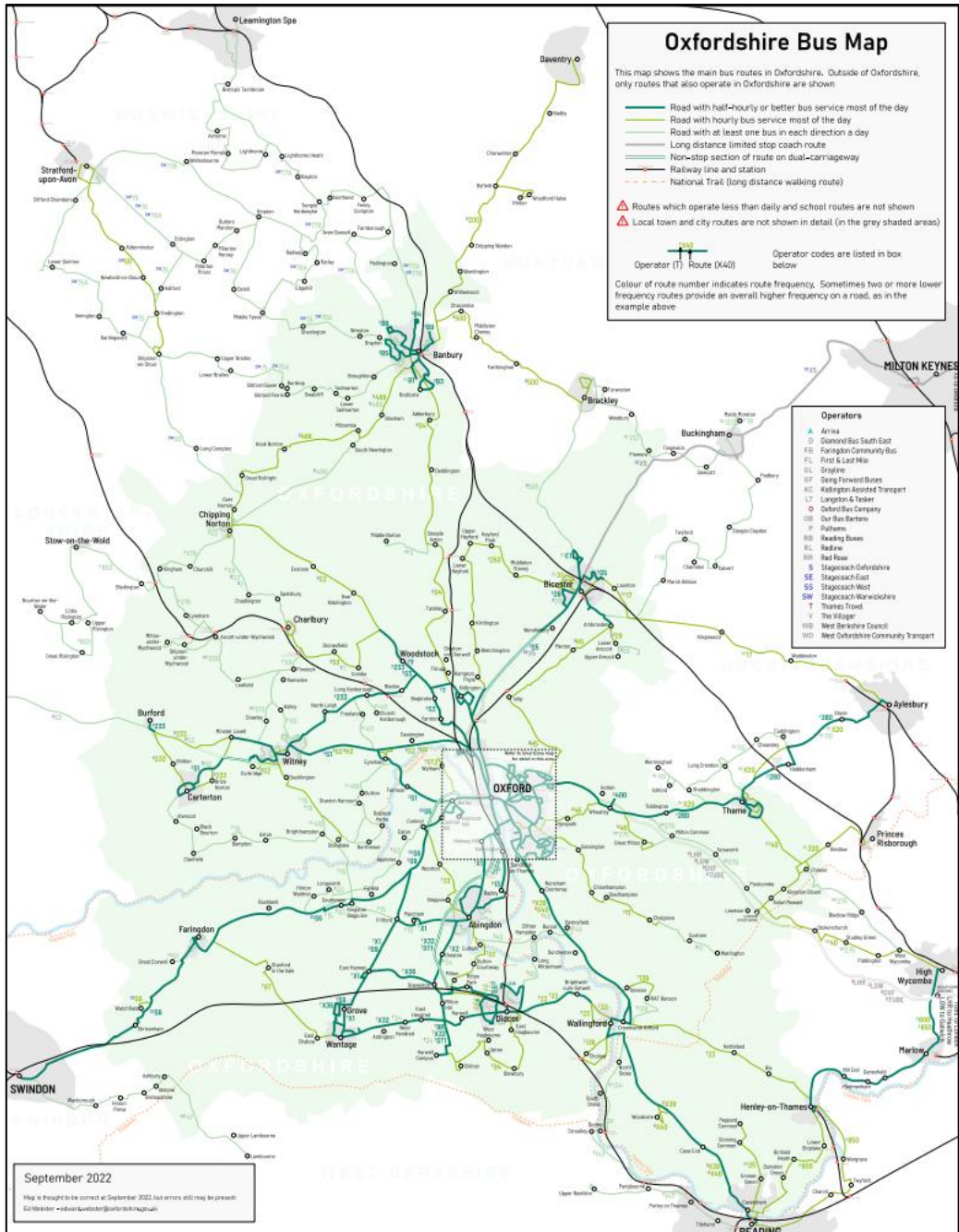


Figure 1 - Oxfordshire bus map

## 2. CURRENT BUS OFFER

This section of the BSIP outlines and examines whether this meets the aspirations of the National Bus Strategy:

- the characteristics of the Oxfordshire bus network;
- recent trends in the network and patronage;
- financial support provided to the bus network by the LTA;
- other factors affecting the use of bus services in Oxfordshire.

### Current Network characteristics

Historically, Oxfordshire has had a successful commercial bus network with the highest per-capita usage of local services of any shire county in England. This is largely due to very significant use of the bus for journeys to, from and within Oxford, the county's main centre.

Oxfordshire's bus use (per capita) is higher than in some metropolitan areas, but not as high as in denser urban areas without a constituent rural territory (for example, Reading). This is a significant achievement given that Oxfordshire is the most rural county in the South East, and is due to historical partnership working between the LTA and local bus operators.

### Frequent urban routes in Oxford City,

These routes have an exceptionally high level of demand and frequency as a consequence of the city's high-density urban form and demographics, with a high proportion of young people using the bus to access employment, education and entertainment. There are current frequencies of more than 20 buses per hour on some radial routes in Oxford– these bus services have historically operated on a fully commercial basis from 0500 to 2400 daily with night bus services until 0300 on many of the main corridors.

Before 2011, the local Oxford urban bus network was highly competitive between two main operators (Oxford Bus and Stagecoach) following the launch of a competing minibus network in the 1990s. The consequent high level of service provision led to significant passenger growth on city routes at that time. Since 2011, this competition has become a more 'mature' contest between different brands and different zonal ticketing offers, with services on many key corridors co-ordinated using Qualifying Agreements, but with coordinated services and inter-available ticketing (SmartZone).

At the time of writing, the Qualifying Agreement corridors within Oxford City are Cowley Road and London Road.

There are eight other Oxford City corridors which also which have frequent daytime services (six buses per hour or better), but without a Qualifying Agreement. (please see Figure 2 below).

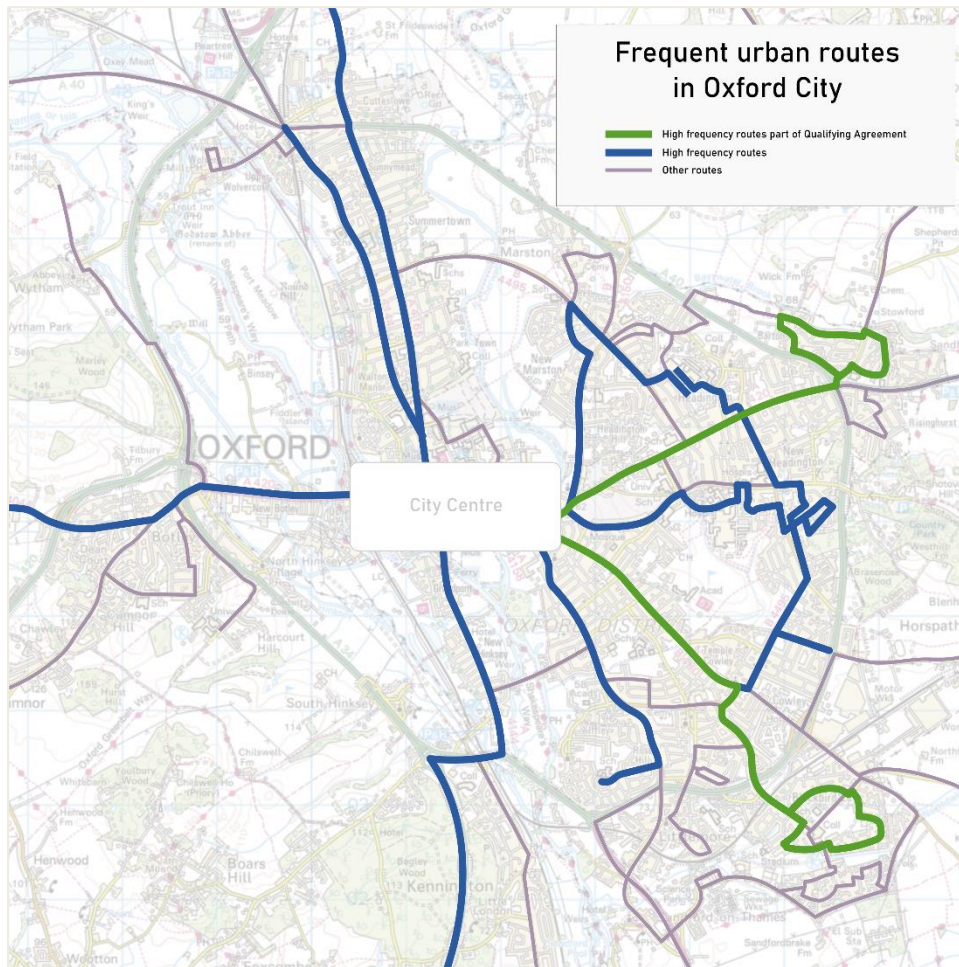


Figure 2 - Frequent urban routes in Oxford

Bus patronage has been falling in Oxford in recent years due to increasing levels of traffic congestion, delays to services and perceived unreliability.

### Premium Inter-urban routes

These are frequent bus services linking Oxford, the central hub of the County's public transport network with the County's main towns, along fast main 'A' roads. These frequent inter-urban routes are designated as 'Premium Routes' and there has been some investment in improved infrastructure over the last two decades. The stated aim for the Premium Routes concept, adopted by the County Council in 2002, is a turn-up-and-go frequency of 4 buses per hour during weekday daytimes, with at least an hourly evening and Sunday service. Much of this growth in passenger numbers and bus frequencies has been driven by residential and commercial development, initially from the growth of County Towns, but more recently using planning policies to allocate new Growth Areas to sites adjacent to these inter-urban Premium Bus Routes.

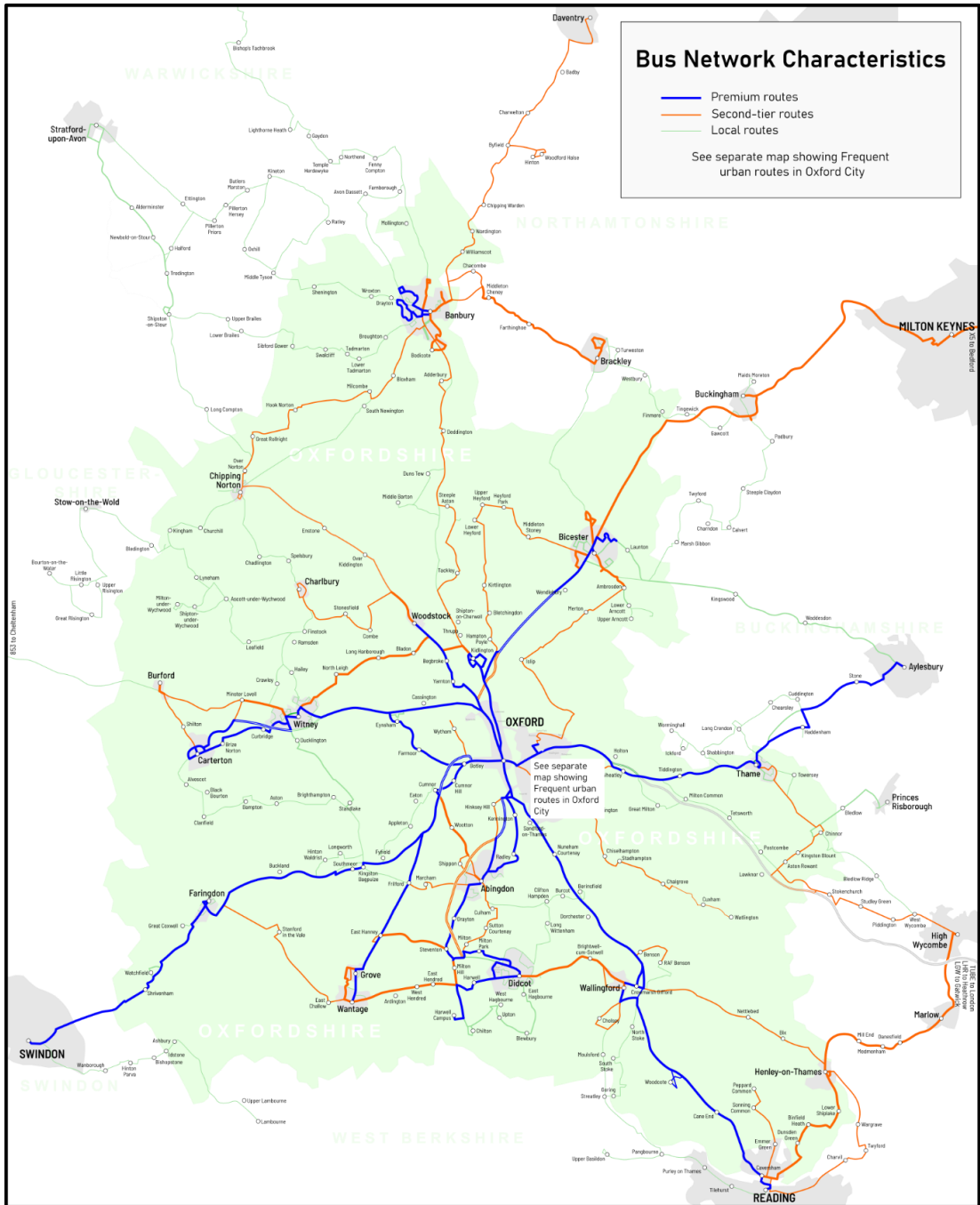


Figure 3 - Characteristics of the Oxfordshire Bus Network - Premium, Second-Tier, Local

These frequent inter-urban Premium Routes are a very distinctive feature of Oxfordshire’s bus network. The levels of service provided seven days a week from early to late (with some night journeys) with high-quality vehicles is probably not matched elsewhere in the UK. The ratcheting-up of frequencies, often pump-primed by section 106 contributions from new developments, has been rewarded by higher patronage levels on these corridors. Routes which either already meet or aspire to meet the Premium Routes standard, include:

- Thame – Oxford (Arriva)
- Wallingford – Oxford (Oxford Bus)
- Didcot – Abingdon – Oxford (Thames Travel, Oxford Bus)



- Wantage – Grove – Oxford (Stagecoach)
- Swindon – Faringdon – Oxford (Stagecoach)
- Carterton – Witney – Oxford (Stagecoach)
- Woodstock – Oxford (Stagecoach)
- Kidlington – Oxford (Stagecoach)
- Bicester – Oxford (Stagecoach)

### Second-tier inter-urban routes

These routes generally provide links between Oxfordshire's towns, and there are some less-frequent routes connecting with Oxford City. Typically, these services operate at least hourly during weekday daytimes. There is a mixture of fully commercial but also some financially supported services. In theory, these services should be fully commercially viable, but some are currently partly funded by section 106 contributions. Most routes have evening and Sunday services, although last journeys of the day are generally earlier than for the 'Premium' inter-urban routes. Please see map above.

### Local routes with Oxfordshire's towns.

Banbury, as the largest town (around 50,000 residents) outside Oxford has a well-developed urban local network, operating up to 4 buses per hour:

- Bodicote – Longford Park – Banbury and Banbury – Southam Road (south to north)
- Hardwick – Banbury – Banbury Gateway (north-west to east)
- Bretch Hill – Banbury (west to centre)

These local routes are nominally commercially viable, but section 106 contributions have been secured from a series of new residential developments around the town (Southam Road, Warwick Road area, Bretch Hill and Longford Park) which have funded increased frequencies on this local bus network. Town routes all operate on a 15- or 30-minute headway, to ensure that suburb-to-suburb journeys can be made on a regular basis by changing buses in the main Bridge Street terminal area. A low-cost Banbury Town day-ticket supports this interchange. A second-tier network of town services operates in Banbury provided by a community transport operator. There is currently no inter-availability of ticketing between the two providers.

Didcot (around 27,500 residents) has up to 4 buses per hour operating through the newly built Great Western Park development. Significant section 106 contributions were secured to ensure residents of this large (3500 dwellings) residential area were provided with a frequent and comprehensive direct bus service to Didcot Town Centre and Rail Station and to the major workplaces of Milton Park and to Harwell Campus. This funding will decrease as this development of is fully built out, leaving a legacy of a commercially viable, attractive and comprehensive local network. A new service to the southern area of development at Great Western Park commenced in August 2022.

In smaller towns, local services typically operate hourly, and are mostly financially supported, with some routes (as in Witney) being provided by community transport operators. Inter-urban services are widely used for local journeys in smaller towns. Two of the three Banbury local routes have evening and Sunday services. Great

Western Park in Didcot also has evening and Sunday bus services, thus linking residents to retail and other opportunities on this increasingly busy day.

### Routes linking rural villages with County towns

These are some lower frequency inter-urban routes, passing through various intermediate settlements, including Culham, Berinsfield, Bampton and Standlake. This category of low-frequency bus service does not have evening and Sunday services. Away from the main inter-urban bus routes along main roads, there are many Oxfordshire villages which have no local bus service. There are some infrequent services provided to some communities by community transport providers, however. Generally, these services provide access to retail and some other opportunities.

The lack of access to the public transport network for people living in these settlements is a significant problem, which Oxfordshire aims to address by investing in two types of new facility:

- Several pre-bookable routes in areas of the County where there is currently no bus provision. These routes will operate on a flexible basis, but to a fixed timetable between termini. Typically, one end of each route will terminate in a market town, offering interchange with the inter-urban bus network, with through network tickets available. It is expected these routes would operate between 0700 and 1900 six days per week
- A number of Transport Hubs to be developed along the Inter-urban Premium Route network, providing access to the bus network for nearby settlements

### **Cross-boundary routes**

Whilst the Oxfordshire bus network is largely self-contained, there are several important bus routes operating into neighbouring authority areas daily. These include the services listed in Table 1.

This BSIP proposes frequency increases on some of the Premium Route inter-urban cross-boundary links, especially where these are linked to housing growth. This BSIP also proposes the re-instatement of three cross-boundary routes which were discontinued in the last decade, as a consequence of funding reductions. These routes would provide access to employment, education and other opportunities. Further details are given later in this BSIP.

### **Recent trends in Oxfordshire's bus network**

Due to its considerable success, the current Oxfordshire bus network is provided on a largely commercial basis. The network has remained relatively stable since 2016 when supported bus services were removed due to financial constraints.

Table 1 - Cross boundary routes into neighbouring local authorities

Neighbouring local authority	Route	frequency
Buckinghamshire	Oxford – Thame – Aylesbury	2 per hour
	Oxford – Bicester – Milton Keynes	1-2 per hour
	Henley – Marlow – High Wycombe	2 per hour
	High Wycombe – Chinnor – Thame	1 per hour
	Chinnor – Princes Risborough	1 per hour
West Northamptonshire	Bicester – Brackley	<1 per hour
	Banbury – Brackley	1 per hour
	Banbury – Daventry	1 per hour
Warwickshire	Banbury – Leamington Spa	6 per day
	Banbury – Stratford	1 per hour
	Chipping Norton – Stratford	4 per day
Gloucestershire	Oxford – Witney – Cheltenham	6 per day
Swindon	Oxford – Faringdon – Swindon	4 per hour
West Berkshire	Lambourn – Ashbury – Swindon	4 per day
Reading	Oxford – Wallingford – Reading	2 per hour
	Peppard Common – Reading	1-2 per hour
	Henley – Shiplake – Reading	1 per hour
Wokingham, Reading	Henley – Twyford – Reading	1 per hour

There was strong growth in bus patronage between 2010 and 2014, as described in Figure 4. This was followed by a period of relative decline through to 2019/20. The COVID-19 pandemic saw a significant drop in bus use in Oxfordshire, something that was similarly seen across the UK.

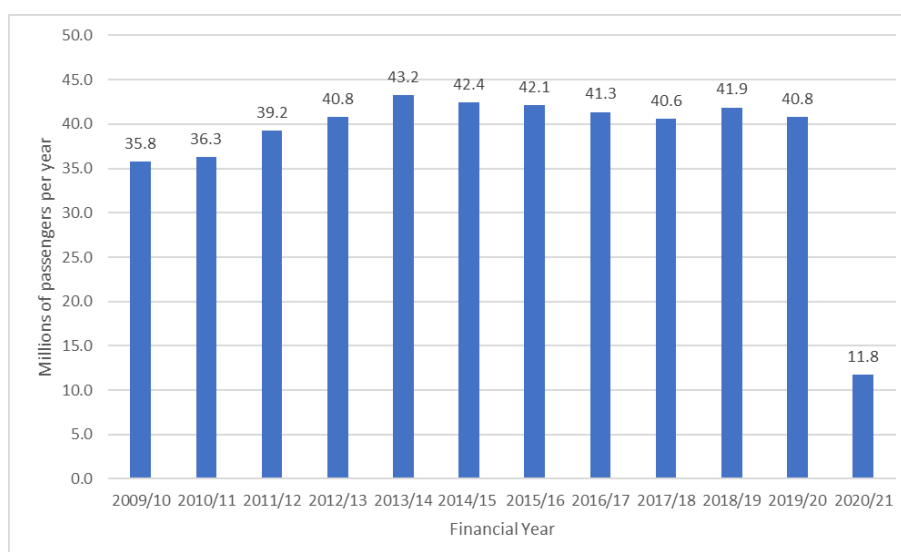


Figure 4 - Number of bus journeys per year in Oxfordshire<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department for Transport (2022) Local bus passenger journeys (BUS01). [Local bus passenger journeys \(BUS01\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-bus-passenger-journeys-bus01)

During this period, increasing levels of general traffic have caused greater delays to buses, increased journey times and declining reliability. Much of this is due to population growth and associated roadworks. As a result, increased operating costs and declining patronage caused a deterioration in commercial viability to bus operators. Commercial rates of return have declined below the level required to replace the fleet on a systematic basis, resulting in an increase in the average age of the Oxfordshire fleet and the withdrawal of some of the weaker commercial routes.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, bus patronage has fallen significantly, and the Government have provided welcome financial support for the continued operation of an almost complete bus service around the county. Passenger numbers are improving but are still below the national average and the levels necessary to sustain full commercial operation of the pre-pandemic bus network.

Currently, overall bus patronage is running at around 70% to 80% of pre-Covid levels, which would translate into a baseline patronage level equivalent to around 28 million passengers per annum in October 2021. Patronage is currently most depressed on the Oxford urban bus network during morning peak periods, especially on Park & Ride services. Conversely in Banbury, local services have had the greatest increase in patronage to around 85% of pre-Covid levels. Both the Banbury and Oxford patronage figures are consequences of demography – employment patterns in Banbury being predominantly ‘blue-collar’ whereas Oxford has a high proportion of ‘white-collar’ employment, where there is now currently a very high proportion of ‘home-working’.

Current pressures relating to the reduction in Government financial support and ongoing problems with staff retention and recruitment means that it is likely some changes to the network will be necessary in the future. This may reset the pre-BSIP baseline to a lower level than at present and represents a risk to the network. The County Council is currently providing short-term financial support for some routes where it is anticipated that commercial viability can be restored.

### **Population growth and new developments in Oxfordshire**

Oxfordshire is an attractive location to live and work, and as such very significant growth of the population and housing stock over the next 12 years is expected. The most recent wave of Local Plans in the county (covering the period up to 2031/2034) allocated sites for 100,000 new dwellings for this period. Some have already been delivered and some may be delivered late, but at a conservative estimate some 50,000 new dwellings will be built in the decade from 2022 onwards. Oxfordshire’s internal estimate of population growth is for an increase of 13,600 new residents per annum over this period, or an almost 20% increase in population from the 2019 estimate of 696,000 people over the decade.

The LTA is already planning for new bus services for most of these new residents, which will be funded by section 106 payments negotiated from developers to establish the services as viable commercial operations. The effect of organic population growth is predicted to increase the number of County bus passengers by 10%, or by 4 million passengers per annum, by the tenth year (2031).

Financial contributions from developers are a key part of Oxfordshire's strategy for enhancement of bus services. Contributions have always been considered as an investment in the future Oxfordshire bus network, and as such are intended to cover the cost of an agreed level of bus service serving a new development for an initial period. This could be a new service or the pump-priming of an existing service to a higher frequency level. Operators are requested to bid for these contracts on a declining support basis year on year, until the service becomes fully commercially viable. In turn, this is the rationale for obtaining further funds, so the new residents have access to a credible level of bus service from early in the development phasing.

A summary of the current and forthcoming major development proposals expected through the Local Plans is included below.

### Oxford City

The first phase of the Barton Park development opened two years ago and consequently the Abingdon-John Radcliffe Hospital route was extended into the new housing area, funded by section 106 payments. Development at Wolvercote resulted in a funded increase in local bus service to four buses per hour in January 2022.

### West Oxfordshire

The Windrush Place development in Witney opened to buses in August 2022, leading to a reorganisation of the West Oxfordshire bus network, including four buses per hour through the development on the Carterton to Oxford route. The completion of smaller developments at North-East Carterton and along the A4095 between Witney and Woodstock has resulted in a doubling of the frequency of the Burford – Witney – Woodstock route, using section 106 funding.

Other new residential developments in Witney and Eynsham later in the 2020s will contribute s106 funds to a significant increase in the frequency of buses between Witney and Eynsham, which will then feed through to the increased frequency of service between Eynsham and Oxford along the A40 bus lanes.

### Cherwell

There are several smaller residential development sites around Banbury (at Southam Road, Hardwick, Bretch Hill and Longford Park) which have contributed significant sums to establishing the current local bus network, which operates at 15- and 30-minute frequencies. Subsequent sites at Bodicote and Bloxham Road will fund additional journeys and routes.

Bicester has grown significantly in the last decade and agreements with developers have delivered new routes from Kingsmere and Elmsbrook, During the next decade there will be significant growth at North East Bicester, and at Wretchwick Green, which will deliver additional bus journeys and routes. The Graven Hill development area in the south-east is now served by a half-hourly service to Bicester town centre.

More recently new development areas were agreed adjacent to the A44 between Yarnton and Begbroke and along the A4260 between Water Eaton and Cutteslowe.

New bus lanes will be constructed adjacent to both roads. Bus frequency on the A44 should increase from 2 to 6 buses per hour, whilst there are already over 10 buses per hour along the A4260.

### Vale of White Horse

In the past decade, OCC has used Section 106 contributions from new developments along the A420 to transform the Swindon to Oxford route from a one bus per hour second-tier service into a four bus per hour Premium Route. This transformation is an exemplar of what can be achieved for bus transport along an inter-urban service.

The Great Western Park development near Didcot is another exemplar of what can be achieved using the planning system to deliver a frequent local bus service which runs through the heart of the development, linking the residents to the centre of Didcot, to the rail station and to local employment centres at Harwell and Milton Park.

There are two new development sites in the Wantage area (Crab Hill and Grove Airfield) with some 4,000 dwellings being delivered currently. These have already generated a developer funded frequent bus service to Didcot, with further service improvements to follow.

There is also a ring of progressing developments around the north side of Abingdon, with new Section 106-funded services to Oxford and Wantage commencing in September 2022 and operating up to every 30 minutes.

### South Oxfordshire

Developments around Wallingford have already funded frequency increases to bus services to Didcot and Oxford, with more to follow. The North East Didcot site is now being constructed with the extensive Valley Park development area to follow. These sites will generate more bus routes linking to Didcot centre, station, Milton Park and Valley Park.

Sites for new housing have now been allocated for a ring of new developments around Oxford's perimeter, at Northfield, South of Grenoble Road and Bayswater Brook. These sites are all at an early stage in the development process, but these are expected to deliver funding and new services after 2025.

## **Oxfordshire County Council Support for Local Bus Services**

### Financial support

In the 2021/22 financial year the Council provided £4.08 million of financial support to the bus network (expected to be higher in 2022/23). This can be broken down broadly as shown in Figure 5 below. As indicated, the LTA has been extremely successful at leveraging Section 106 contributions from the promoters of development schemes, and it is expected that this will be an increasing source of income in the future as further growth takes place.

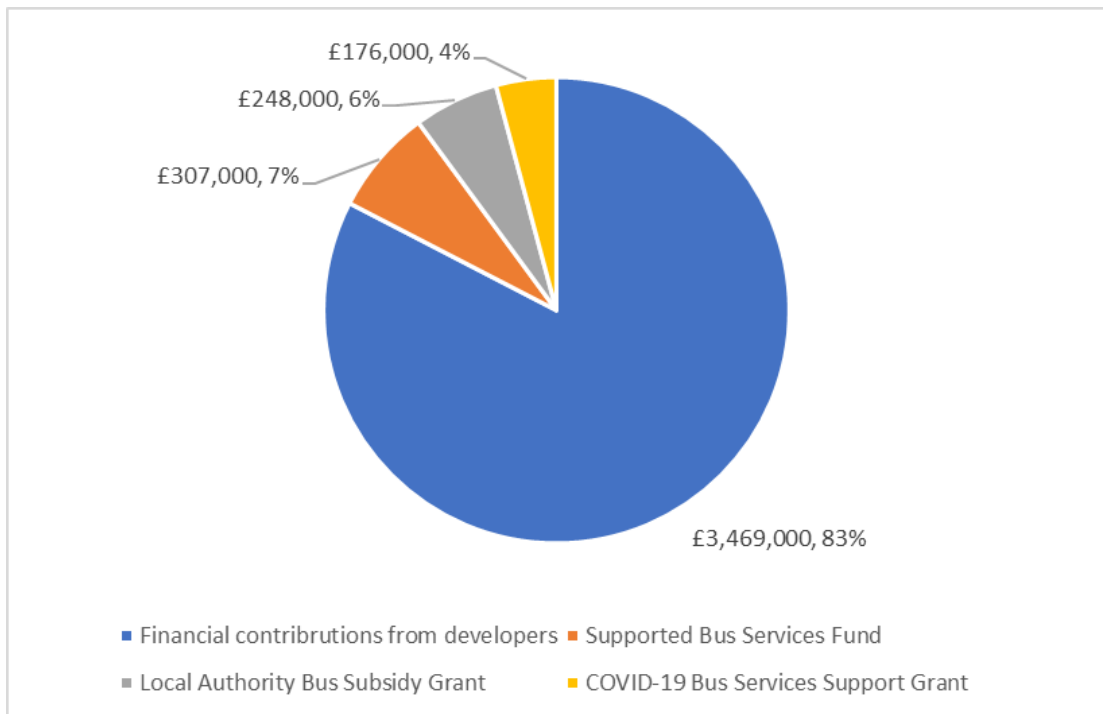


Figure 5 - Sources of financial support for bus services in Oxfordshire spent by Oxfordshire County Council in 2021/22<sup>2</sup>

### Staff and Information

Apart from the dedicated resource employed to produce the BSIP and provide support for EP development over the next six months, the LTA's public transport resources consist of:

- 1.6 full time equivalent (FTE) officers covering bus services, including tender processes, service design, liaison with operators, stakeholders and the public;
- an 0.6 FTE officer dealing with bus infrastructure;
- a 1 FTE officer covering bus data and registrations, and
- a 1 FTE officer covering community transport and ENCTS data reporting;
- a 1 FTE officer in the Urban Traffic Management Control (UTMC) area whose role includes development of the real time passenger information system.

These staff are located in several different service areas across the LTA, although it the capacity funds recently allocated by Government will assist in developing this further and providing a more central hub for a dedicated public transport team.

The LTA does not currently provide any public transport information. All roadside publicity is provided and installed by operators; in Oxford City a formal agreement is also in place for the updating of bus stop flags with route numbers. Whilst operators maintain this information to a generally high standard and also provide websites, maps and timetables, there is no input from the LTA on this at the present time.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Oxfordshire County Council own data

This is an area where the objectives of the National Bus Strategy are not currently being met and where the BSIP will make for significant improvement.

## **Other factors**

### Planning policies

Planning policies in recent decades in Oxfordshire have made the bus a credible choice of travel for a significant proportion of its residents, who live within walking distance of stops on frequent bus routes, whether these are urban, inter-urban or from new developments. These routes mostly have comprehensive service levels, operating from early to late, seven days per week. On the other hand, some non-residential uses have been permitted that are difficult to reach by bus. Ideally, sites attracting large numbers of daily users should be located adjacent to one of the frequent bus corridors.

### Rural and Urban areas

Rural areas typically have lower levels of bus service provision compared to urban areas. This BSIP proposes to create six new flexible bus services which will link rural communities to larger town centres, where links can be made into the inter-urban bus network and to trains. There is also an aspiration proposal to create Transport Hubs where rural residents can make a journey by other means (lift, cycle, scooter etc) to a bus stop on an inter-urban bus route

### Comprehensive high quality bus services

Oxfordshire's core bus network operates from early to late, seven days a week, using modern comfortable buses. Generally, there is a good frequency of buses on all core routes during evenings and on Sundays (at least 2 per hour on inter-urban routes and 4 per hour on Oxford's urban radial routes, with night buses in some cases). These extensive hours of frequent operation provide a credible choice of using the bus for people residing within walking or cycling distance of these routes, linking Oxfordshire's residents with a wide range of opportunities.

Main operators generally use very modern and comfortable double-deck buses, many with Wi-Fi, phone charging sockets and next-bus announcements. They are equipped with CCTV and drivers are in contact with controllers, should there be any incident.

### Interchange between routes

Journeys involving a change of bus tend to be more difficult and more expensive for users, especially if a different bus operator is involved. Whilst journeys using the two main operators within the Oxford Smartzone area can currently be made using an integrated ticket, this facility is not currently available for users of other operators. There are proposals in this BSIP to move towards a fully integrated ticketing system between all Oxfordshire bus operators.

Physical interchange between buses is generally easier in County Towns than in Oxford City Centre, where very high land prices limit the provision of more convenient



facilities. Interchanges in Oxfordshire's towns and District Centres will be improved through investment in higher quality infrastructure, including new 'Totem' Real-Time information signs. Within Oxford City Centre there will be much better information about walking routes between stops on different routes.

### Park and Ride

Residents living beyond walking distance of bus routes currently have the choice of driving a car to a Park and Ride site, then travelling by bus. There are five sites on the edge of Oxford with a total of over 5,300 spaces (Thornhill, Water Eaton/Oxford Parkway, Pear Tree, Seacourt, Redbridge), whilst there are about 300 spaces at a Park & Ride site adjacent to the A41 at Bicester (which does not charge for parking).

At the Park and Ride, passengers can now buy a combined ticket at a reduced price which covers both parking and return bus travel at a rate of £4 for a car with only 1 adult and £5 for a car and 2 adults. With both options, up to three children under 16 can travel for free. The combined ticket at a reduced price offer is part of a six-month trial, which is taking place until 31 March 2023 and is subject to review by both councils and the bus operators. The new combined ticket also provides a lower cost alternative to the previous (£6.80) family ticket as it offers a saving of £1 per person (20%) for an individual ticket, and £1.80 per two people travelling together (26%). Previously, other than a combined family ticket, drivers had to pay separately for both parking and bus travel and – irrespective of the charging level – the combined parking and bus ticket is a permanent change.

An additional Park and Ride site with around 1,000 spaces is under construction on the A40 main road north of Eynsham, whilst there is also an ambition to provide Park and Ride sites at Sandford on the A4074, and near to Bladon roundabout on the A44.

### Car parking in town and district centres

Within Oxfordshire, parking charges and availability vary considerably between Oxford City Centre, its suburban district centres and county town centres.

Parking is generally administered by Oxford City Council and the four rural District Councils which make up Oxfordshire. These second-tier Councils have their own policies and practices regarding provision and charging in their off-road car parks, and the Local Transport Authority has only limited influence.

Oxford City Centre is considerably more expensive for parking than other locations. There are also 530 spaces at the rail station at a daily cost of £9, but these are intended for rail users. The cost of parking is much less in the private car parks in suburban Cowley than in the district centres in Headington and Summertown.

The extent and cost (£4.20 for 3 hours) of Public Car Parking at the regionally significant John Radcliffe Hospital near Headington is a difficult and emotive area, which the Council does try to influence, given the amount of traffic congestion around this site and the number of bus routes. There may be some progress to report in the annual update to this BSIP.

The cost of parking in the car parks administered by Oxford City, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and Cherwell District Councils is shown below in Table 2. However, West Oxfordshire District Council has a policy of not charging for car parking. Parking is also free of charge in the privately-operated Bicester Village and the Banbury Gateway Shopping Park, which reduces the scope for more realistic parking charges elsewhere in Oxfordshire.

*Table 2 - Typical car parking charges in Oxfordshire<sup>3</sup>*

	<b>Public spaces</b>	<b>3 hours</b>	<b>8 hours</b>
Oxford city centre - public	480	£9.50	£28.50
Oxford city centre - Westgate	1000	£5.50	£20.00
Headington/Summertown	364	£3.50	£15.00
Cowley	310	£1.10	£2.60
Didcot	979	£1.80	£3.40
Henley	241	£1.80	£3.40
Thame	184	1.80	2.60
Abingdon	612	1.90	5.70
Wantage	189	1.90	5.70
Faringdon	108	1.40	3.20
Banbury	876	2.80	4.50
Bicester	525	2.80	4.50
Witney	933	free	free
Chipping Norton	195	free	free
Carterton	135	free	free
Woodstock	116	free	free

Thus, the availability and cost of car parking across Oxfordshire is a mixed picture, as there are several different administrations (City and District Councils), some private car park operators, the rail industry and the NHS Hospital Trust, all with different objectives and operational practices. The planning system can influence this over time, as these organisations propose other uses for scarce land in pressured locations such as Town Centres.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Parkopedia (2021). Parkopedia. <https://en.parkopedia.co.uk/>

## Engagement

The Local Transport Authority has engaged with a number of organisations and entities during compilation of this Bus Service Improvement Plan:

1. Neighbouring Local Transport Authorities (8)
2. Oxford City Council and the four other Oxfordshire District Authorities (5)
3. Mainstream bus companies operating in Oxfordshire (9)
4. Oxfordshire County Councillors (20 responded)
5. Oxfordshire Town and Parish Councils (247 out of 318, 39 responded)
6. Oxfordshire Stakeholders and Organisations (14 responded)
7. Oxfordshire General Public (261 responses received)
8. Oxfordshire MPs (6)

The Local Transport Authority held seven seminars (Oxfordshire Strategy Working Group) with the Major Bus Operators, covering a series of themes, for example Fares, Ticketing, Information provision.

On-line Surveys were conducted of the people/organisations belonging to Engagement Groups 4 to 7, which included a question where respondents were requested to rank different aspects of the National Bus Strategy, in order of preference for implementation.

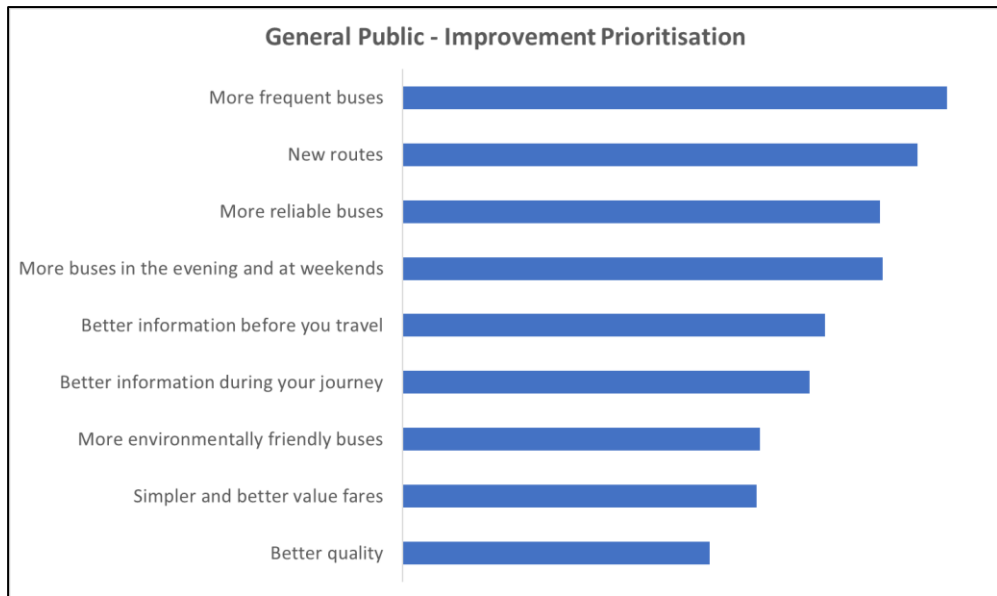
All four surveys gave a clear preference for:

1. More frequent buses
2. New bus routes
3. More reliable buses

These results underpin the proposals set out in this Bus Service Improvement Plan, to:

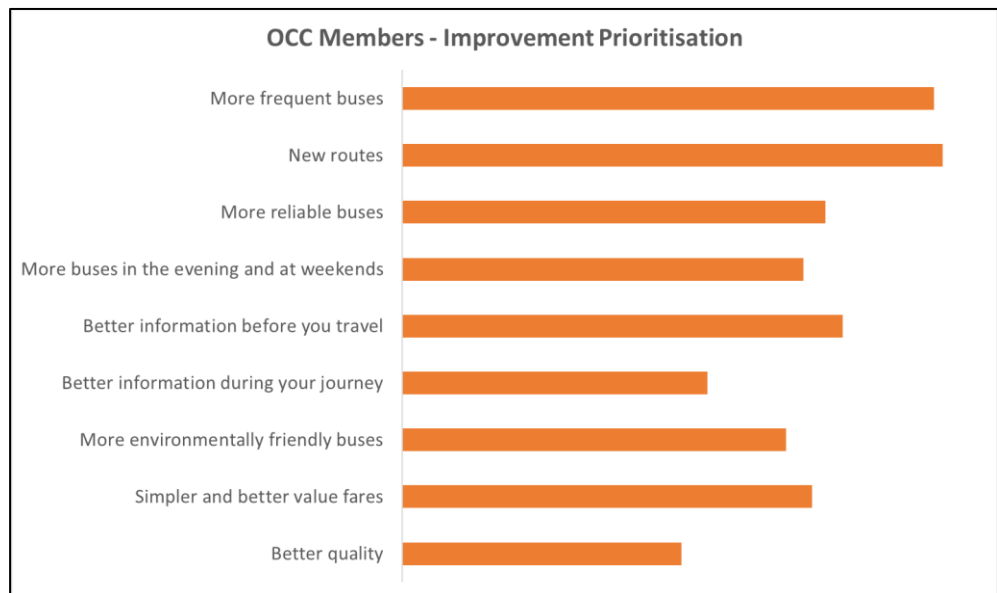
1. Endorse and strengthen the Premium Route policy of frequent services
2. Endorse the Rural Flexible Bus strategy and the Eastern Arc rapid transit proposal
3. Endorse the emphasis on Bus Priority measures to secure reliable and faster journeys

There has also been significant engagement with many parts of the Local Transport Authority, especially with Network Management and Localities teams.



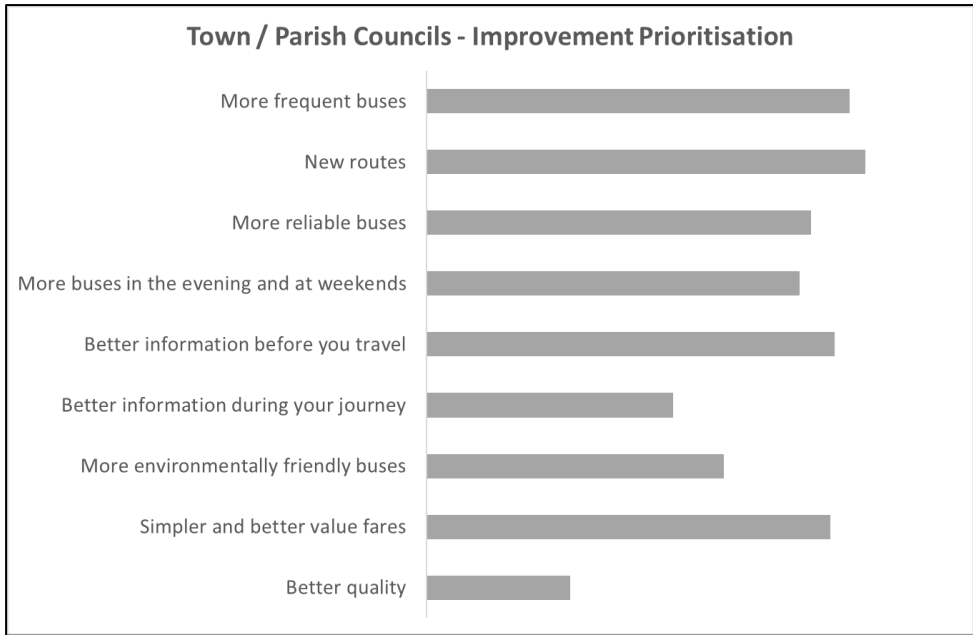
*Figure 6 - Preferences of the general public*

*Responses: 261 (207 bus users)*



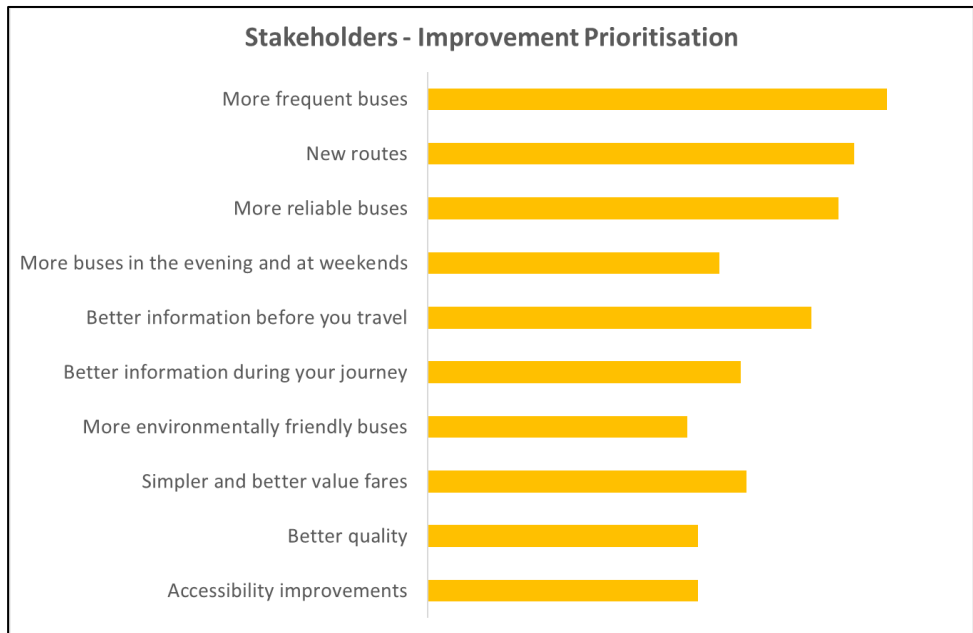
*Figure 7 - Preferences of OCC members*

*Responses: 20*



*Figure 8 - Town and Parish Council Priorities for Improvements*

Responses: 39



*Figure 9 - Stakeholder Priorities for Improvement*

Responses: 14

## Meeting the aspirations of the National Bus Strategy

The Oxfordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan as adopted in October 2021 set out how this Local Transport Authority will 'build back better' by 2025. It proposes to do this by:

1. Providing more frequent bus services on inter-urban Premium Routes, by:
  - Delivering up to 6 buses per hour between West Oxfordshire and Oxford City Centre along the planned new A40 bus lane.
  - Delivering 4 buses per hour between Woodstock and Oxford along the planned A44 bus lane
  - Delivering 4 buses per hour between Wallingford and Oxford
  - Delivering 4 buses per hour between Swindon, Faringdon and Oxford
  - Delivering 8 buses per hour between Abingdon and Oxford (4 of which would operate from Didcot via Steventon)
2. Maintaining a minimum frequency of four buses per hour on these inter-urban routes, including two buses per hour during evenings/Sundays:
  - between Eynsham, Botley and Oxford
  - between Bicester and Oxford
  - between Thame and Oxford
  - between Wantage and Oxford
3. Creating new direct bus links between County Towns (for example Witney, Kidlington and Abingdon) and Oxford's Eastern Arc area.
4. Restoring the pre-pandemic frequencies on the frequent Oxford urban bus corridors by 2025. The Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan proposals will reduce delays, increase bus speeds and will increase passenger numbers, restoring commercial vitality. Faster journey times will allow the operators to make more journeys with current resources.
5. Maintaining pre-pandemic frequencies on the Banbury urban bus network and extending these routes as opportunities arise.
6. Preparing a bid for newer, more environmentally friendly vehicles through the ZEBRA scheme and other opportunities as they arise
7. Introduction of an integrated county-wide ticketing product, valid across all Oxfordshire operators and providing a seamless means of travel between different operators.
8. Improving the quality of bus stops and interchanges to a common County standard for premium, second tier and other routes.
9. Investment in much-improved information provision at stops, interchanges, on buses and through electronic means, with the Local Transport Authority working in partnership to provide excellent maps and other publicity.

10. Providing discounted fares to two targeted groups – 16/17-year-olds across Oxfordshire and low-paid NHS employees working in Oxford but living in the County towns and residential areas.

In January 2022, the Department for Transport confirmed that the County Council had been successful in securing £12,704,921 in BSIP funding. This funding is split as follows:

- £3,961,893 is for revenue schemes, such as supporting bus services and discounted fares;
- £8,742,028 is for capital infrastructure schemes, such as traffic filters.

This is subject to the Council and the bus operators entering into an Enhanced Partnership – a legal agreement between the Council and bus operators to make certain improvements to buses – by the end of January 2023. The County Council has worked with bus operators to prioritise the BSIP funding, and agree an Enhanced Partnership, which will be made by the end of January 2023.

Regardless, it is the intention of the County Council to deliver all aspects of the BSIP, seeking other funding for projects where possible.

### 3. HEADLINE TARGETS

This section of the BSIP outlines the future prospects for the Oxfordshire bus network and sets headline targets. The Council and bus operators must agree to a set of performance targets, to be achieved through joint working and agreed programmes. Following the indicative allocation of BSIP funding announced by the Department for Transport in January 2022, in which some funding was allocated to BSIP schemes, these targets are currently under review, but have been included here as the current baseline target.

#### **Patronage forecasts – prospects for the future Oxfordshire bus network**

The overall County annual bus patronage level was 40.8 million in 2019/20, however overall patronage had declined from a higher level of 43.2 million reached in 2013/14 and patronage levels for 2020 and 2021 will be much lower than this. The immediate challenge is to regain lost ground as quickly as possible and restore a comparable patronage level, which will support a comprehensive commercial bus network with services from early to late, seven days per week. Otherwise, there will be reductions in bus service levels, in some cases lower frequency of bus services, in other cases removal of evening/weekend buses, or possibly the loss of entire routes. Whilst bus services in the last two years have been sustained through a Government COVID support scheme, it is assumed this funding will cease by April 2022 and current patronage levels are at a level insufficient to sustain the current network.

Patronage increased to around 75% of pre-COVID levels by October 2022. This is the equivalent of 30 million passengers per annum.

Steady progress towards previous levels of bus use is expected in following years. Targets of 80% for 2023, 85% for 2024 and 90% for 2025 are based on a similar gradual return to previous levels of patronage, as a consequence of a return of international tourism, especially for pupils at Oxford's many Language Schools. There is also expected to be a gradual return to a greater proportion of in-person attendance in workplaces.

Footfall in Oxford City Centre has exceeded pre-pandemic figures, exceeding the degree of 'bounce-back' experienced in other cities<sup>4</sup>. Consequently, Oxford offers a greater potential for bus passengers to return more quickly as the economy recovers. It is accepted, however, that a small proportion of previous users will not return to the bus, due to personal lifestyle changes. A very gradual return of previous bus users is predicted from 2025 to 2029, with a plateau at 95% of previous users.

Other positive trends are expected, however, including the impact of the measures listed in this Bus Service Improvement Plan being delivered, along with strong Organic Growth expected from population growth planned in the County.

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<sup>4</sup> Centre for Cities (2022) High Streets Recovery Tracker. <https://www.centreforcities.org/data/high-streets-recovery-tracker/>



Despite recent setbacks, Oxfordshire’s bus network is expected to enter a period of sustained growth from 2022 onwards. This growth is expected to result from:

- Sustained recovery from COVID – effect as people return to work and participate more fully in social and economic opportunities. This effect alone would increase patronage levels from 75% to 90% from 2022 to 2025, or an additional 6 million passengers per annum
- Effect of bus priority measures, including the Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan core schemes, resulting in increased bus speeds, fewer delays and higher bus speeds. Shorter journey times would result in bus operators re-investing vehicles saved from time savings into more frequent services, which would be more attractive to passengers. By 2025, it is considered that a 10% reduction in journey time would deliver a 10% increase in passengers, or an additional 4 million passengers per annum.
- Better information at stops, on-line and via apps, better quality of bus stops and improved interchanges are expected to deliver a 2.5 % increase in passenger numbers, or an additional 1 million passengers per annum
- Oxfordshire is already planning for new bus services for most of the expected 136,000 new residents in the next decade, which will be funded by section 106 payments from developers This effect is predicted to increase the number of bus passengers by 20%, or by 8 million passengers per annum, by the tenth year.
- The additional effect of two major public transport schemes, where these deliver bus passenger growth far in excess of the effects of population growth and the effect of bus priority schemes/journey time reduction that are already accounted for in the table below.

*Table 3 - Major public transport schemes that will impact on demand for buses*

<b>A40 project Eynsham to Wolvercote</b>	<b>Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan and new routes to Oxford’s Eastern Arc</b>
<p>Construction is proposed soon on the A40 bus lane project, a transformational scheme which will provide much faster and much more frequent journeys along this major road from West Oxfordshire towards Oxford. Currently there are only 2 buses per hour along this road, but by 2031, it is predicted that there will be 14 buses per hour, consisting of 10 buses per hour into central Oxford and 4 per hour continuing from a new Park &amp; Ride site at Eynsham towards East Oxford. These additional buses will be part-funded from section 106 contributions from seven developments in West Oxfordshire, totalling 6,700 new dwellings. The 2025 forecast assumes an initial service of six buses per hour.</p> <p>It is expected that this project will deliver 2 million additional bus passengers between West Oxfordshire and Oxford per annum by 2031. However, 500,000 of these would have been accounted for by the average ‘bus priority’ factor and the population growth factor, resulting in a surplus of 1,500,000 additional annual passengers by 2031 as a consequence of the transformative nature of the scheme.</p>	<p>The overall impact of the Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan measures (traffic filters and Workplace Parking Levy) has been calculated (Stantec, Electric Bus City) as delivering a 10% reduction in journey times for buses, which it is expected would deliver at least a 10% increase in bus patronage for all journeys within, to and from the Oxford City area within the Ring Road.</p> <p>However, more frequent and more direct links by bus from West Oxfordshire (Witney), from Cherwell (Kidlington) and from the Vale of White Horse (Abingdon) are proposed to the Headington and Cowley areas, where there are many workplaces. This service will ultimately be funded out of the Workplace Parking Levy scheme, but prior to 2025 these links will require one year of funding from the BSIP along with a significant amount of s106 funding from the Oxford North strategic employment site. This project of direct fast links from surrounding districts is predicted to deliver 0.5 million additional annual passengers</p>

Table 4 illustrates the forecast of bus patronage over the 2022-2031 period, with the negative COVID effect reducing year on year, but with the effects of population growth, investment in bus priority, effect of two major public transport schemes and the effect of providing improved information. These impacts will be incremental, as new developments deliver new bus services and as bus priority schemes are delivered. Thus, Oxfordshire bus patronage is expected to grow to 52.8 million by 2030, compared to 40.8 million in 2019.

*Table 4 - Bus passenger forecasts by contributory factors*

	BASE / Covid	Bus Priority	Information/ Infrastructure	Population/ Organic Growth	Major Bus Schemes	Total
2019	40.8 (100%)					40.8
2021	28.6 (70%)					28.6
2022	30,6 (75%)			0.8		31.4
2023	32.6 (80%)		0.5	1.6		34.7
2024	34.7 (85%)	1	1	2.4		39.1
2025	36.7 (90%)	2	1	3.2	0.3	43.2
2026	37.1 (91%)	3	1	4.0	0.6	45.7
2027	37.5 (92%)	4	1	4.8	0.9	48.2
2028	37.9 (93%)	4	1	5.6	1.2	49.7
2029	38.4 (94%)	4	1	6.4	1.5	51.3
2030	38.8 (95%)	4	1	7.2	1,8	52.8
2031	38.8 (95%)	4	1	8.0	2.0	53.8

## **Journey time**

The average operating speeds of buses in urban areas is an essential statistic for inclusion in the BSIP, so progress can be measured year on year. In Oxford, measurement will be made at the corridor level as well as providing an average bus speed for the wider city network.

The Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan scheme is expected to reduce bus journey times by 10% on average, and this will affect all bus routes in the Oxford area. There will be additional benefits from the various bus priority elements proposed in this BSIP, not only in and around Oxford but also in Banbury, and on the approaches to Wallingford. Thus, the overall target for Bus Journey Time reduction around Oxfordshire is also 10% by 2030, compared to a baseline of 2019. The target average journey reduction by 2025 is expected to be 5%.

## **Punctuality**

The Council and bus operators entered a Punctuality Improvement Partnership in 2020. The current target for services measured at origin points is 90% of all journeys operating within a window of no more than one minute early or five minutes late. Current performance is 87%; however, this metric would appear to be less important than average bus speed in the Oxfordshire frequent bus context because of the operating environment where performance varies significantly from day to day

because of random incidents on the congested highway. Over time, more of the network will operate to the 'frequent services' standard, where the aim of the operator is to maintain intervals between subsequent buses on a route or corridor.

Table 5 - Current scheduled bus journey times

	Routes	Am peak	Interpeak	Evening
<b>Oxford City Radial Routes</b>				
Elms Parade-Westgate	4A	14 mins	11 mins	10 mins
Wolvercote – St Aldates	6	32 mins	32 mins	34 mins
Garden City – Magdalen St	2	28 mins	22 mins	15 mins
Jack Straws Lane -St Aldates	X3	16 mins	22 mins	18 mins
Barton Edgecombe Road – Westgate	8	36 mins	44 mins	19 mins
Wood Farm – Police Station	15	29 mins	24 mins	23 mins
Templars Square – Westgate	1, 5	25 mins	22 mins	19 mins
Rose Hill – Westgate	3	29 mins	23 mins	20 mins
<b>Orbital</b>				
Cowley – John Radcliffe Hospital	10	28 mins	28 mins	22 mins
Summertown – John Radcliffe Hospital	H2, 700	40 mins	30 mins	25 mins
<b>Inter-urban</b>				
Wantage – Frideswide Square	S9	55 mins	45 mins	
Witney – George Street	S1	64 mins	45 mins	36 mins
Woodstock – George Street	S3	43 mins	33 mins	24 mins
Deddington – Magdalen Street	S4	68 mins	52 mins	46 mins
Thame – Oxford High Street	280	44 mins	37 mins	32 mins
Chalgrove – Speedwell Street	11	56 mins	49 mins	
Wallingford – Westgate	X39/40	51 mins	36 mins	34 mins
Radley – Westgate	13	23 mins	20 mins	18 mins
Abingdon – Police Station	X2	36 mins	22 mins	18 mins
Milton Park – Oxford High Street	X32	41 mins	27 mins	26 mins

## Passenger Satisfaction

Passenger satisfaction is the final indicator to be included in the BSIP document, Passenger Focus has carried out comprehensive surveys in recent years, with Oxfordshire scoring a respectable percentage of bus users satisfied with their journey. In 2019, 93% of 1,057 Oxfordshire bus users were either satisfied or very satisfied with their journey. Efforts will be made to capture the views of non-bus users, which are not included in the Passenger Focus methodology.

## 4. OUTCOMES

The Oxfordshire Bus Service Improvement Plan seeks to achieve a number of key outcomes:

- an enhanced bus network;
- more attractive fares and ticketing;
- better vehicles;
- improved information;
- a more reliable main road network; and
- improved bus stop infrastructure.

Each of these are set out in more detail below.

### **Enhanced Bus Network**

Oxfordshire has developed a comprehensive commercial bus network, which operates from early morning to late evening on radial 'Premium' routes from Oxford City Centre to residential suburbs and to County towns. There is also a secondary network, at lower frequency, within some of the County towns, also with some links between these hubs. There are also some Community Transport services, where individuals and groups have created new services and filled gaps where previous services had ceased to operate.

There has been considerable population growth in recent years, and the County has been proactive in requiring that new developments are designed around the bus with section 106 funding requested to fund the initial years of new service provision. There are several new developments, which will generate new bus services in the next few years.

The COVID pandemic has reduced the level of bus use in Oxfordshire, which will take some time to return to previous levels. Some rationalisation of routes and frequencies has taken place to reflect the new 'normal', but it is considered the main commercial network should remain intact or be improved where possible. However, there is less certainty about some of the secondary commercial routes and some short-term financial support has already been made available to retain such services, especially where they link to other Council priorities.

Away from the main routes, there are significant parts of the County without any form of bus service. Getting the provision of rural services right – in terms of providing a balance between being able to provide connectivity and serve populations and getting value for money from services which, in most cases, are not going to be commercially viable – is one of the biggest issues for Oxfordshire. Connections to commercial services, rail stations, new forms of flexible service and the provision of transport hubs are just some of the ways this can be approached. There are wider strategic decisions needed, for example in terms of threshold for service provision, whether based on population size or other factors.

At this stage, a limited number of new services are proposed to provide accessibility to people living in these areas and to look to establish a model from which to build further in future years. These would probably operate in a flexible manner, focusing on journeys to work and education as well as for retail/medical/social purposes, linking in with main 'Premium' bus routes at hubs or interchanges. An estimated capital cost of £800,000 for around 8 new vehicles would reduce the ongoing revenue support costs required to sustain six new services, which is assumed to be £100,000 per additional route per annum.

Several new or improved conventional services linking rural communities were commenced in September 2020, following receipt of a one-year DfT Supported Bus Services Fund grant. Arrangements have been made to continue operation of these routes until March 2022, and following the DfT's funding decision these will now continue until March 2025.

Rural mobility across Oxfordshire would also be enhanced by the provision of some transport hubs along the inter-urban network. These hubs would be located where modest investment could provide a high-quality interchange facility for journeys made by different modes from adjacent rural areas.

Park and Ride services have operated to and from Oxford City Centre for some decades, as the very first of such a scheme in the UK. Building on one of few wholly commercial networks in the UK, the strategy has evolved in recent years to include rail-based Park and Ride and the provision of sites further from Oxford, and to serve different travel markets such as the Hospitals.

There are considerable current challenges with Park & Ride in Oxfordshire, including significantly depressed demand. Short term measures on pricing and ticketing have been taken to address this, which will inform a wider review of the role and purpose of sites, parking charges and ticketing arrangements.

### **More attractive Fares and Ticketing**

The provision of a simple, attractive fare and ticketing structure is of fundamental importance in achieving Oxfordshire's vision of an attractive and efficient public transport system carrying more public transport users.

Oxfordshire has already made significant progress, adopting a 'Smartzone' in the Oxford area in 2011, which required the close collaboration between operators to provide an inter-available ticket range, covering different time periods. There are also other zonal fares in existence, for example, in the Didcot and Banbury areas.

There is a joint commitment for a gradual move towards a more integrated Countywide ticketing system. To achieve this will require negotiations with a wide range of operators, and some investment will be required in devices to issue and process tickets, as well as the development of back-office systems to reallocate revenue to operators. This may include more integration with rail ticket products, although this is likely to take some time and integration of timetable data to bring this into operation.

Ahead of this, specific, targeted measures could be introduced to boost the market. This BSIP contains proposals for:

- cheaper tickets for under 19s
- discounted tickets for low-wage NHS employees at Hospital sites

For now, it is assumed that £1 million per annum revenue support would be required to support new bus fare initiatives on an ongoing basis after 2025, but discussions are continuing with operators regarding this level of cost. The fares for young people are being funded through the Department for Transport's BSIP allocation.

It is also assumed that the provision of some new ticket machines for smaller operators (so they can issue and accept multi-operator tickets), the provision of tap-off readers for some buses (to facilitate revenue reassignment on ticket types that would be faster to issue) and the cost of developing software to enable this reallocation of revenue would cost a total of around £600,000.

### **Better Vehicles**

Buses used on Oxfordshire's Premium Routes are modern, with comfortable double-deck seating and with many customer-focused attributes, such as wi-fi and charging facilities for mobile phones. These buses also mainly have Euro 5 or better low-emission engines, as required in Oxford's Low Emission Zone. Further changes are expected in Oxford, including an ambition for an Ultra-Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ), followed by a Zero Emissions Zone (ZEZ) by 2035.

Some discussion will be required about the design of the future fleet, considering the availability of seating for elderly people and the need to reduce dwell time at stops as part of an overall approach to reduce journey times.

The next step in the evolution of Oxfordshire's buses will be the introduction of a fleet of around 159 battery electric buses on routes wholly within the Oxford Smartzone area. This new fleet will be part-funded through the Government's ZEBRA initiative, which would make a significant change to air quality within the Oxford City area.

As technology evolves, there will be proposals for investment in vehicles suitable for Oxfordshire's extensive inter-urban network. These are all day, high-mileage, higher speed routes with little opportunity for charging at termini so are not currently suitable for all-electric operation. Considerable thought will be given to the appropriate future technology for the 100 or more vehicles currently employed on high-speed high-mileage buses currently operating on the County's interurban network, for example hydrogen fuelled or improved 'range-extender' vehicles.

### **Improved Information**

The provision of clear, unbiased, and attractive information about public transport is extremely important in attracting new users. Currently information is available on different bus operator websites, and related applications, but there is also significant unmet demand for more traditional approaches such as maps, paper timetables and roadside publicity.

'Next bus' information is also currently available on the County's 'Oxontime' website, through electronic displays at 261 bus stops and through a text messaging facility. This system has been in operation for around 15 years and is now increasingly outdated and unreliable. A targeted programme of new 'totem' signs for comprehensive displays at key public transport hubs and interchanges is proposed. There would also expedite a programme of replacing older signs and providing new sign infrastructure where required. This programme would help to restore Oxfordshire's previous reputation as a nationally recognised leading public transport authority.

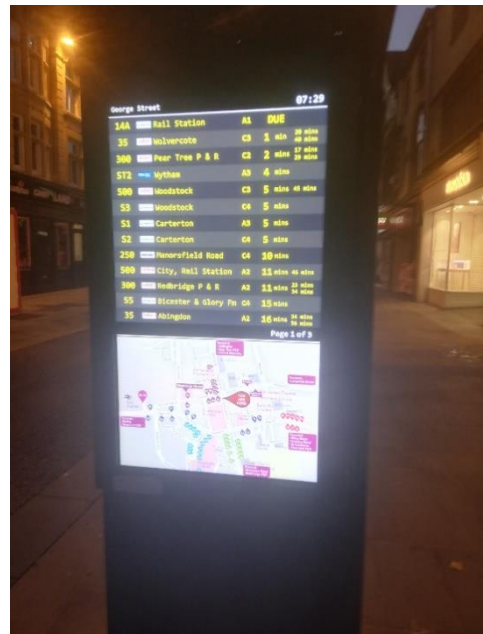


Figure 10 - Bus information display in Oxford

Unlike some Local Transport Authority areas, there is currently no central portal for bus service information in Oxfordshire. No maps or diagrams are produced to show the bus service network of all operators, or connection points with the rail network. This BSIP proposes to change this situation by making a significant step-change in provision. Further development of a centrally provided information hub could be an Oxfordshire public transport website, which could then lead to a portal for multi-operator ticket sales.

The provision of good quality public transport information requires investment in staff resources, both by the Council and by operators. Whilst certain types of information can be imported automatically, it is necessary to maintain the central electronic timetable database from which information can be exported in various formats to on-street signs, to websites and apps, to the national Traveline service and to operators for production of information at bus stops.

It is proposed to create a comprehensive County website for public transport information and to produce a suite of maps and diagrams showing the overall Public Transport network across the County and in the different towns. These maps would be used in Interchanges, in Bus Shelters and in other places and formats. An estimated additional staffing cost of £150,000 per annum (including on-costs) is included in the Financial Implications. An ongoing Revenue Support budget of £300,000 is required to pay for support costs (fees to the RTI system support contractor, the cost of producing maps, and designing a new website.)

### **A more reliable main road network**

The free-flow traffic conditions experienced during the lockdown periods in 2020 provided an indication of what unrestricted conditions for bus services could be like. In normal circumstances, Oxfordshire is currently an extremely challenging environment for bus operation, with a very constrained road network around Central Oxford, much competition for road space with other modes, an extremely high incidence of roadworks caused mainly by utilities and a very significant pressure from new developments.

According to bus operator analysis, between 2015 and 2018 bus operating speeds declined by 30% along Abingdon Road and by 19% along the Cowley Road. Bus schedules are already very slow – with an average of only 8 mph being achieved during the weekday peaks from the JR Hospital to the City Centre via Cowley Centre on route 10.

There will be strong focus on driving up operating performance on Oxfordshire's bus network, particularly operating speeds. There is a requirement for concerted action to improve punctuality and bus speeds both inside and around the central zone. There is likely to be a requirement for the installation of new bus lanes and other bus priority measures, particularly on stretches of the main road network approaching the very busy Oxford Ring Road. There is also a requirement for investment in smart traffic signals, which detect the approach of buses to key junctions and change the signalling sequence to provide approaching buses with priority.

Achieving the necessary change will require much investment in operational personnel, supporting technology and targeted investment in infrastructure improvements. Both the Council and the bus operators will commit to a process of delivering improved quality through deepened partnership working, delivering more consistent bus punctuality and operating speeds.

The Council's Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan project is key to achieving this success. This scheme will facilitate significant reductions in car traffic levels in the Oxford city area by creating a series of 'traffic filters', coupled with the introduction of a workplace parking levy, amongst other measures. The consequent reduction in general traffic will reduce delays to buses and will increase journey speeds, while also helping to increase patronage. Some of these measures which have the potential to be delivered earliest, will now need to be accelerated to contribute to the bus journey-time reductions proposed in this BSIP. This in turn will give operators confidence to provide the local match funding required to complete the bid for ZEBRA funding, to ensure the fleet of new battery-electric vehicles is delivered.

The Council is changing its approach to on-street parking enforcement, following the agreement to de-criminalise parking offences in three of the District areas (Cherwell, South and Vale). This includes mobile patrols, which can initiate civil action against offenders and a process for operators to provide details of problem locations.

There will also be an ongoing corridor-by-corridor approach to measuring bus performance, of analysing points of delay and working up schemes which increase average bus speeds. Operating statistics will be produced on a regular basis, and teams of operational Council and bus company staff will be empowered to work up schemes for investment.

For this approach to work, it is proposed that additional staffing resource will be required in the following council functional areas: roadworks, traffic signals, capital scheme design. Investment will also be required in new technology for installation in traffic signals. A proposed base capital budget of £10 million or more per annum for additional capital works related to bus movement is needed. This will be additional to the current annual £1 million budget for 'Journey Time Reliability' works. The cost of



additional staffing in the Network management area required to facilitate closer working with the bus operators and to enable planned improvements to be delivered is estimated to cost £200,000 per annum (including on-costs).

Work is still ongoing to define and refine a list of further bus priority schemes, including quantifying the benefits. These projects have been identified by operators as causing significant delays to buses and their users, causing additional vehicles to be deployed on services to maintain frequencies, at additional cost.

Inclusion of a scheme on this indicative list does not imply that these proposals will necessarily proceed as illustrated, individual projects would be subject to the County Council's process of approval by Cabinet Member or the full Cabinet. This list is intended to illustrate the level of commitment required to enable the outcomes we are looking for through BSIP to be delivered.

### **Improved Bus Stop Infrastructure**

The quality of each bus stop across Oxfordshire is of fundamental importance to the attractiveness of the public transport network to residents and visitors travel mode. Due to restricted budgets and staffing levels, maintenance standards have declined in recent years with a drift away from the high standards achieved during the Premium Bus Routes programme.

It is considered essential that common high-quality standards for the County's bus stops are re-established as soon as possible. This requires greater emphasis on bus stop infrastructure delivery as part of an integrated public transport function in the County Council. This increased resource would also focus on delivery of common standards for bus shelters across the network, for example through tendering an Oxfordshire-wide advertising contract. In addition, an enhanced maintenance budget would be required for the upkeep of bus stop infrastructure across the County and replacement of damaged assets.

An annual capital budget of £500,000 for each of the next three years is needed for a programme to catch up with arrears of maintenance, to upgrade infrastructure as required. This amount will also cover the procurement of new shelters, where these cannot be included in the proposed new advertising shelter contract. An annual revenue budget of £150,000 (including on-costs) is also required to provide adequate staffing for this function.

## **5. DELIVERY PLAN**

In January 2022, Oxfordshire County Council was confirmed to have succeeded in securing funding through the National Bus Strategy. The schemes that we will be delivering from this funding are summarised in this section, as well as the mechanism through which they will be delivered.

### **Oxfordshire Enhanced Partnership for Buses**

The Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme is a legal document between the County Council and qualifying bus operators (in practice the vast majority of bus services in the County), which commits both parties to making improvements to bus services across the County. It sets out the relevant context under which the Council and local bus operators will seek to achieve the overarching outcomes of the National Bus Strategy, which are to build back bus use to pre-pandemic levels and to increase mode share still further in the future.

It also contains detailed commitments on behalf of the Council and operators to specific improvements to be made, by a specific timescale. This includes all projects to be funded through BSIP. These commitments can be added to over time through a process called variation.

This Partnership represents the commitment that both the Council and operators have in delivering this delivery plan and will be the primary mechanism through which many of these improvements will be delivered. The Council is currently going through the statutory procedures to 'make' the Enhanced Partnership by the end of January 2023. These are:

- The Operator Objection Period from 14<sup>th</sup> October 2022 until 11<sup>th</sup> November 2022;
- The Statutory Stakeholder Consultation Period during November and December 2022;
- 'Making' the Enhanced Partnership during January 2023.

### **Schemes to be delivered**

The Action Plan for the schemes to be delivered through this BSIP is given below. Full scheme descriptions are given in Appendix A, but are also summarised below.

Table 6 - BSIP Delivery Plan

Type of scheme	Scheme title or intervention	2022/23		2023/24		2024/25		Total estimated cost	
		Resource	Capital	Resource	Capital	Resource	Capital	Resource	Capital
Bus Priority Infrastructure	Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan – Traffic Filters				£3,400,000				£3,400,000
	Countywide Traffic Signals Upgrade		£93,028		£575,000		£575,000		£1,243,028
	Banbury – Cherwell Street Bus Lane				£1,300,000		£1,000,000		£2,300,000
Other Infrastructure	Real time information		£50,000		£800,000		£750,000		£1,600,000
Fares Support	Youth Fares	£305,250		£610,500		£610,500		£1,526,250	
Ticketing Reform	Multi-operator ticket app	(Being funded by operators)							

Type of scheme	Scheme title or intervention	2022/23		2023/24		2024/25		Total estimated cost	
		Resource	Capital	Resource	Capital	Resource	Capital	Resource	Capital
Bus service support	New rural bus services		£200,000	£261,000		£275,000		£535,000	£200,000
	Newbury – Harwell – Didcot / Oxford <sup>5</sup>	£41,000		£82,000		£82,000		£205,000	
	Bicester - Brackley			£163,000		£163,000		£326,000	
	SBSF Projects	£228,145		£261,000		£265,500		£754,645	
Marketing	Journey Planning	£25,000		£75,000				£100,000	
EP Delivery	Lead Officer (Infrastructure Delivery)	£57,222		£57,222		£57,222		£171,666	
	Lead Officer (Network Management)	£57,222		£57,222		£57,222		£171,666	
	Lead Officer (Service Improvement)	£57,222		£57,222		£57,222		£171,666	
<b>Total</b>		<b>£771,061</b>	<b>£343,028</b>	<b>£1,623,166</b>	<b>£6,075,000</b>	<b>£1,567,666</b>	<b>£2,325,000</b>	<b>£3,961,893</b>	<b>£8,743,028</b>

<sup>5</sup> Additional financial contribution also to be provided by the West Berkshire Enhanced Partnership, which is not included in this total

Each of the schemes is summarised below, with further details in Appendix A.

### **Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan Traffic Filters**

The Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan proposals constitute a radical proposal to make a significant reduction in general traffic levels in the Oxford City area, within the Outer Ring Road. A series of 'Traffic Filters' are proposed at strategic points within this area, which would restrict movement by general traffic, except by buses and other permitted vehicles. It is anticipated that the traffic reductions from these filters will significantly speed up bus journeys across Oxford and will be critical to achieving targets to improve reliability, as well as unlocking significant investment in electric vehicles.

A Cabinet decision on implementing the traffic filters is expected to be made on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2022. Should the decision be to proceed, then more detailed work will follow.

### **Countywide Traffic Signals Upgrade**

This will be a rolling programme of upgrades to the existing capability of traffic signals across Oxfordshire, which already have Urban Traffic Management Control (UTMC) capability. These upgrades will initially focus on upgrading signals on the premium bus routes in Oxford and the major towns in Oxfordshire. As the programme progresses, this will then be rolled to signal locations along the interurban premium bus route corridors.

The intention is, as a minimum, to insert modules can be inserted into each signal installation (junctions and the various types of pedestrian/cycle crossing), and these can then be configured to detect approaching buses through an interface with the AVL (Automatic Vehicle Location) component of Oxfordshire's Real Time Information system. The traffic light sequence at each signal installation can then be progressed more quickly to offer the oncoming bus a green light, or a green signal can be extended to allow an approaching bus to pass. Opportunities to develop a more enhance smart signal capability will also be investigated as part of this work.

### **Cherwell Street Bus Lane, Banbury**

The signalised Bridge Street intersection with Cherwell Street is of particular importance for Banbury's local and inter-urban bus network, as it is the gateway to the terminal area within the Town Centre. This junction operates over-capacity for motorised vehicles. resulting in significant delays to buses, both into and out of the town centre. The provision of a section of bus lane and reconfigured traffic islands between the George Street and Bridge Street junctions, would save around 2 minutes (one sequence of the signals) for buses approaching the Town Centre, and compliment delivered improvements to buses across Banbury.

### **Real time information**

The proposal is to deliver a rolling programme of enhancements to the at-stop real time information and supporting software capability. This will consist of a mixture of signs and totem poles at 230 bus stops, with stops along the premium bus routes in

Oxford and the major towns being prioritised, along with real time infrastructure at key hubs to be served by the new rural bus projects in the North Downs and Cherwell Valley.

Additionally, an upgrade to the 'Oxontime' system is proposed. This will provide a functionality that will tell users at the roadside when a bus is cancelled. Furthermore, any other network updates to be displayed, which would improve the customer experience. This data is already supplied by operators to the County server, but the system is not currently configured to display such essential information.

### **Youth Fares**

This will offer a discounted fare to everyone aged under 19 years old in Oxfordshire. This will build on the existing youth fare discount offer from Oxford Bus Company and expand it to all operators. Anyone aged under 19 years old will be entitled to a £1 flat fare in the city, and discounted travel (existing child fare) to other areas outside of the city.

### **Multi-operator App**

Stagecoach and Oxford Bus Company are developing multi-operator app ticketing for Oxford Smartzone. This will provide multi-operator ticketing through a single user interface, using QR codes. This has completed testing, and the operators are seeking to roll out this app across all services.

### **New rural bus projects**

Two semi-flexible new bus routes would be created in the more rural parts of Oxfordshire, serving the following areas:

- C. North Downs – linking to Didcot
- D. Cherwell Valley – linking to Oxford Parkway.

Work is currently underway on specifying these services and liaising with local communities to ensure the new routes meet their needs as much as possible. The Council is also exploring vehicle and technology solutions to support these schemes.

### **Bus Service Support: Newbury – Harwell – Didcot/Oxford**

This service would link West Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Historically there was an hourly Newbury to Oxford bus service along then A34, but in more recent times, this service was split into several sections and the Harwell Campus to Newbury section of route was eventually lost. This scheme would provide access to employment in both directions, as well as providing an hourly all-purpose daytime bus service between the peaks.

Costs of the service between Newbury and Harwell Campus would be shared with West Berkshire Council, and some Section 106 funds would be allocated from the Harwell Campus site. Costs of this service enhancement would also be contained by

linking the Newbury-Harwell Campus section (with one of the existing bus services operating from Harwell to Oxford (or to Didcot).

Subject to confirmation of West Berkshire's BSIP funding allocation, it is expected that this service will commence in April 2023.

### **Bus Service Support: Bicester – Brackley**

New bus service 505 started around 2 years ago, funded by section 106 contributions in Brackley. Unfortunately, the pandemic conspired to undermine this initiative so few passengers benefited and sadly this funding will cease in the near future.

The BSIP process offers an opportunity to re-boot this essential bus link, and to maintain connections with services to/from Banbury and Oxford. The service will also be improved to an hourly frequency and serve the Elmsbrook development area in Bicester.

Following the BSIP funding decision it is anticipated that this service will commence in April 2023.

### **Bus Service Support: SBSF Projects**

Thirteen Oxfordshire bus services were created, or amended, in September 2020, using £588,000 from the DfT's Supported Bus Services Fund. Two of these routes have been selected for continuation:

- Service 46: Cowley – Wheatley. *New Monday to Friday hourly service; and*
- Service 63: Southmoor – Longworth – Appleton – Cumnor – Oxford. *Monday to Friday service consisting of five journeys in each direction.*

Service 46 has recently been enhanced with third-party funds to an hourly service, seven days per week, between Oxford, Cowley, Wheatley and Great Milton. The BSIP funds complement this arrangement and patronage numbers rose fivefold in the first two weeks of operation.

Of the remaining SBSF services, seven are now funded by Section 106 obligations, two are funded by the Council's allocation of Local Authority Bus Subsidy Grant and one has been withdrawn.

### **Journey Planning**

It is proposed to procure the services of a Journey Planning company to conduct research at Oxfordshire's leading employers as a means of understanding the home-to-work travel patterns at these companies, so bespoke interventions can be designed by local bus companies, with the aim of increasing the proportion of people travelling by bus.

## Additional Staff

Additional staffing resource is required in most parts of the public transport function of the County Council, to underpin delivery of a more reliable public transport network, to improve the stock of bus stops and interchanges and to provide much improved information to the travelling public.

It is also considered that the roadworks coordination, traffic signal operation and scheme design functions each require an additional member of staff focused on public transport operations. These will assist in delivery of the BSIP outcomes.

## Journey Time Reliability Fund

In addition to the BSIP funding, the Council currently has a 'Journey Time Reliability Fund' for small-scale works, The proposed budget for the 2022/3 financial year is:

*Table 7 - Programme of works for the Journey Time Reliability Fund in 2022/23*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Budget (£1million)</b>
Parking	Activation of CPE, possible procurement of x5 additional mobile enforcement vehicles for use in District Council areas.	125k
	Additional Enforcement Officers to target hotspots x5	200k
Civil Engineering	Accessibility measures - kerbing, buildouts, lay-by repairs etc (to top up core BSIP bus stop infrastructure funding)	150k
Network Management	Camera infrastructure (to aid Traffic Management & Bus Stop Clearway Enforcement)	200k
	Additional UTMC staff to permit '24/7' operations	100k
	RTPI core system development – disruption messaging, occupancy data, incorporating new operators, cross-boundary links etc (separate from BSIP funded display hardware upgrades)	100k
Bus Priority	RTPI Central system maintenance_(AVL-UTC interface specifically to facilitate Bus Priority)	50k
Consultancy support	Corridor analysis, working up a programme of pinch point interventions for years 3-5 of the programme plus Central Government funding bids.	75k



## 6. OTHER SCHEMES

In addition to the funded schemes, the Council has several aspirational schemes that it is seeking to deliver that will make radical improvements to the bus network across Oxfordshire.

These schemes have no current timescales or funding associated with them. However, the Council and operators are committed to exploring opportunities to bring forward these schemes as soon as is practicable.

These aspirational schemes are summarised below. More details on these schemes can be found in Appendix A.

*Table 8 - Aspirational Bus Schemes*

<b>Scheme Name</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>
<b>Aspirational Capital Schemes</b>		
Barton (Waynflete Road to A40)	Bus link	£3 million
Hinksey Hill A34 Northbound Exit	Bus Lane	£10 million
Pear Tree Park & Ride	Bus Lane extension	£1 million
Benson Lane, Crowmarsh	New bus-only right turn off A4074	£2 million
Kidlington roundabout	Signalised roundabout and bus priority approach	£5 million
Horspath Driftway	Queue relocation	£1.5 million
Transport Hubs	Six new sites	£1.5 million
On-bus equipment	To facilitate integrated ticketing	£0.6 million
Bus stop improvements	Improve stops to new standard	£1.5 million
<b>Aspirational Revenue Schemes</b>		
Improved information	Operational budget for information provision	£0.3 million
Investment in future network	Developing a robust future bus network	Unknown
Direct bus services to Eastern Arc	Early commencement of orbital services	£0.8 million

## 7. REPORTING

Six monthly performance reports against the BSIP targets outlined in Section 3 will be published on the Oxfordshire County Council website, at this link:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/roads-and-transport/public-transport>

The Oxfordshire bus patronage figure will be drawn from DfT annual statistics, with intermediate six-monthly figures estimated from data provided by the main bus operators.

Journey time data would be drawn from published timetable – a spreadsheet would be updated to track changes over time.

Punctuality data is derived from the Real Time Information system. The additional staffing requested in Proposal R6 would assist with analysis of this data. Punctuality Improvement Partnership meetings are held at intervals.

Passenger Satisfaction data would be derived from Annual Surveys by Passenger Focus. It may be the case this is supplemented by additional surveys commissioned by the Local Transport Authority

## **APPENDIX A - Details of Schemes (both funded and aspirational)**

### **Proposal C1: Connecting Oxford**

The 'Connecting Oxford' proposals constitute a radical proposal to make a significant reduction in general traffic levels in the Oxford City area, within the Outer Ring Road. A series of 'Traffic Filters' are proposed at strategic points within this area, which would restrict movement by general traffic, except by buses and other permitted vehicles. These 'Traffic Filters' would be similar to the current successful Oxford City Centre bus gates, which constrain general traffic through the use of camera technology, backed by the appropriate enforcement legislation, signage and penalties for infringement. The reduction in general traffic levels on most roads within the Outer Ring Road will have a beneficial effect on bus journey speeds in this area.

The implementation of these Traffic Filters is currently scheduled for the summer of 2023, subject to the outcomes of consultation and scheme approvals.

The cost of delivering the Traffic Filters, associated signage, back-office set-up and associated studies for the traffic filters and Workplace Parking Levy proposals is estimated to cost £4.4 million between 2021/2022 and 2023/4, of which £1m of Growth Deal funding can be offered as Match Funding,

The Connecting Oxford proposals also include a 'Workplace Parking Levy' (WPL) component, which has a separate approval process. The WPL scheme would charge workspaces used for commuting in much of Oxford £400-600 per annum, commencing in 2024, subject to the outcomes of consultation and scheme approvals. This proposal would not only result in lower levels of car use to and from workplaces, but also raise income to fund additional measures in this area, to deliver improved bus services, especially to workplaces around the 'Eastern Arc' of the City.

The WPL scheme could raise up to £4 million per annum for investment in supporting measures, especially in improved bus services. These funds would likely start to become available from 2024 onwards and would provide much needed longer-term investment.

## **Proposal C2: Upgrading traffic signals for bus priority**

Providing traditional bus priority measures (such as significant sections of bus lane) is not feasible at many of the congestion points in the historic urban environment of Oxford city and the County's towns and villages.

It is therefore considered that a comprehensive upgrade to the County's stock of traffic signals would be a highly appropriate way of reducing bus journey times around the County. Modules can be inserted into each signal installation (junctions and the various types of pedestrian/cycle crossing), and these can then be configured to detect approaching buses through an interface with the AVL (Automatic Vehicle Location) component of Oxfordshire's Real Time Information system. The traffic light sequence at each signal installation can then be progressed more quickly to offer the oncoming bus a green light, or a green signal can be extended to allow an approaching bus to pass.

Oxfordshire currently has 438 named signal locations, of which 158 are road junctions, 278 are pedestrian crossings of various types and there are also two signalled bridges.

It is estimated that the cost of fitting the bus priority modules to site signal controllers would cost £9,000 per junction and £6,500 per crossing, inclusive of supply, installation and testing. which adds up to a proposed investment of £3,103,900 for the entire County. To reflect available financing, traffic signals on priority corridors will be prioritised.

A full-time additional staff position for 3 years would be required to oversee this project and to undertake any feasibility configuration and linking work, at an annual cost of £70,000 including on-costs. This position would probably be a consultant, engaged solely to deliver this programme

Of the 438 sites, 147 are located in the Oxford City area, where there is a higher density of bus journeys and proportionately more delays to buses. On a typical urban corridor with 12 signal installations (thus 24 signals on the round trip) an average 10 second benefit to buses per signal could make a 4-minute journey time reduction on a round trip, thus making a very substantial contribution to better reliability, shorter and more attractive journeys and consequently more bus passengers.

It's proposed that the traffic signal programme would start in the Oxford City and would be rolled out on a corridor-by-corridor basis, starting with those routes which currently suffer from the greatest delays. This programme would then stretch outwards to the inter-urban corridors and the main Oxfordshire towns, before tackling more isolated signal installations. Banbury has 47 signal installations, Bicester 30, Witney 23 and Didcot 16 signalised junctions and pedestrian crossings. There are currently significant delays to buses in these towns.

### **Proposal C3: Barton Waynflete Road link**

This proposal for a new section of one-way bus only road would link the Barton residential estate with London Road, thus avoiding the Bayswater Road exit onto Green Road roundabout which causes very significant delays to buses on the high-frequency co-ordinated route 8. The difference between daytime and evening journey times from Barton to Oxford City centre is as much as 25 minutes – from 44 minutes daytime to 19 minutes evenings. This represents an additional resource cost of at least £360,000 per annum to operators, to maintain the 8 buses per hour level of service. These delays are expected to worsen in the next decade due to the planned major development at Bayswater Brook, which it is expected will increase traffic levels on Bayswater Road.

The design of the Green Road roundabout was last revised around 8 years ago, when a 'hamburger' lane was provided from the A40 (London) approach towards the A40 (Cheltenham) direction. This five-arm roundabout operates at capacity on the four main approaches, but the fifth (Barton) arm is not signalised, and it is very difficult for buses to emerge onto the roundabout circulatory. Signalising the egress (Bayswater Road) from Barton has been investigated as an alternative option, but this would delay on the other four main arms, two of which have significant bus flows, from Oxford City Centre (22 buses per hour) and from Thornhill/London (14 buses per hour).

The Waynflete-London Road link would result in buses being able to avoid the very long delays on the exit from Barton estate, instead actuating a traffic signal which would allow buses to join the flow from London/Thornhill, at the same time facilitating a pedestrian crossing of the A40, which has been strongly requested by local people for many years.

The cost of the Barton Waynflete Road link is estimated to cost £3.2 million. This estimate has been confirmed in recent feasibility work. The land where the bus link would be constructed is all in Council ownership, which would mean that construction could start relatively soon, following local consultation.

### **Proposal C4: A34 northbound – Hinksey Hill bus lane**

Frequent buses from Abingdon and Didcot towards Oxford currently suffer significant delays in the morning peak approaching the Hinksey Hill interchange, where they are routed along the southern bypass route towards Kennington Roundabout and then to the Abingdon Road towards Oxford City Centre. The peak hour scheduled time for an x2/x3 service from Abingdon Town Centre to the City Centre is 36 minutes (Police Station) compared to 22 minutes during the inter-peak period. Around 10 minutes of this excess peak hour schedule can be attributed to the queue approaching the Hinksey Hill interchange.

A bus lane costing around £10 million could be provided by widening the exit slip road – this bus lane would extend back from Hinksey Hill interchange for about 1.5 km adjacent to the A34 trunk road,

A section of bus priority lane is currently proposed on the adjacent £90 million scheme linking Hinksey Hill with Kennington Roundabout, which includes a reconstruction of a bridge carrying the A423 Oxford southern bypass across the Didcot-Birmingham railway line. This project is being delivered with £15 million of MHCLG Growth Deal monies, which will be used as match funding for the Hinksey Hill project.

There are currently 11 buses per daytime hour linking Abingdon/Didcot with Oxford. This number of buses and passengers will increase significantly with the population growth planned in the Abingdon-Didcot area, as well as increased employment development at the science and technology business parks at Milton Park and Harwell Campus. This bus lane is therefore seen as an essential component of a strategy to provide a reliable frequent bus service between Abingdon / Didcot and Oxford.

The A34 northbound- Hinksey Hill bus lane forms an integral part of an ambitious plan to create a continuous bus lane between Abingdon and Oxford, that would be used by the many buses that will operate along this corridor in the future. An increase of two buses per hour on the direct link to Oxford City Centre is proposed by 2025, whilst the proposed direct bus link from Abingdon to Cowley and Headington could add another 4 buses per hour on this critical section of route by the same year, thus increasing the number of buses to 17 per hour.

Further increases in the numbers of buses per hour might be expected post-2025, depending on the construction of new residential development sites in the Vale of White Horse District.

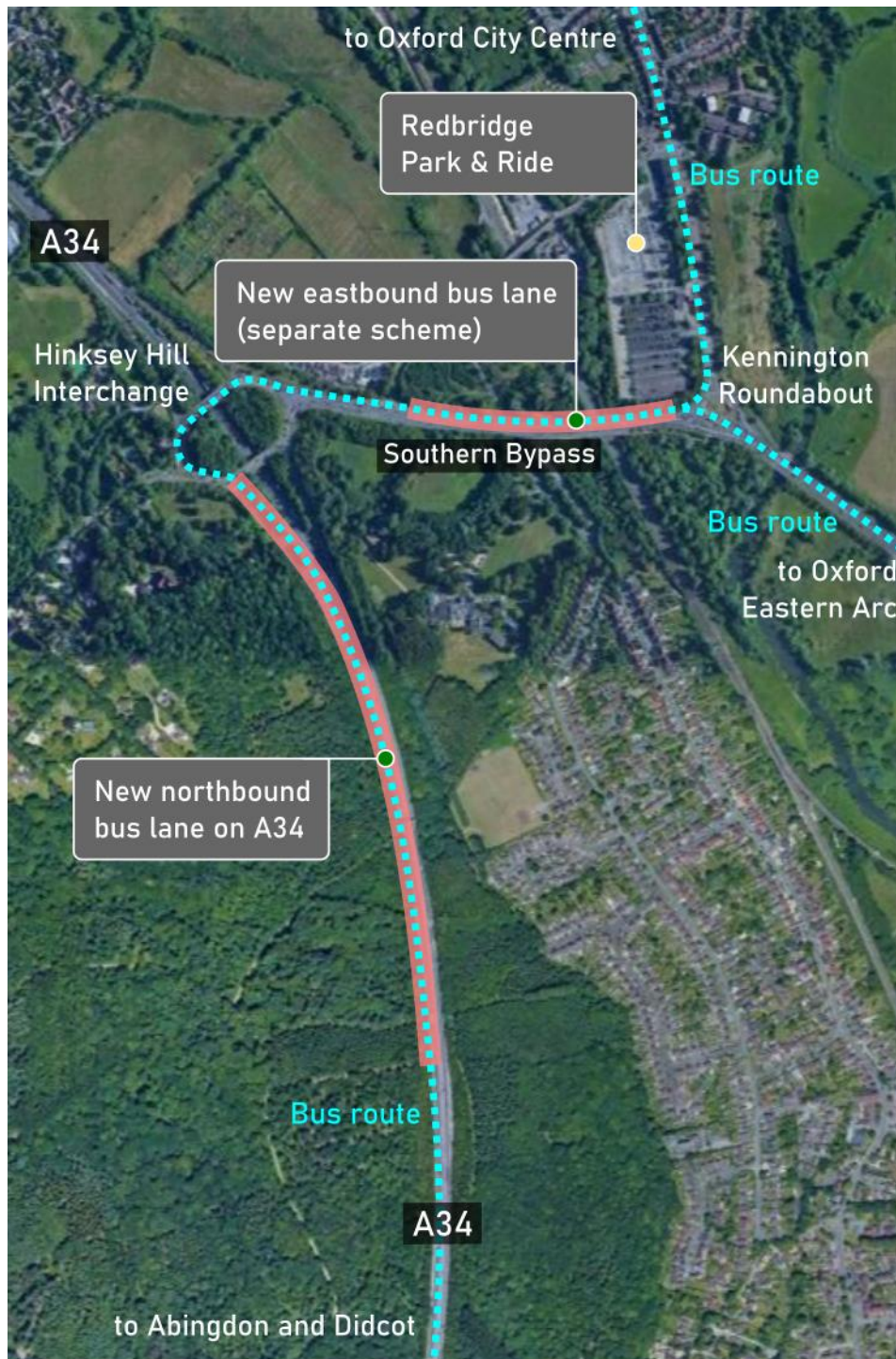


Figure 11 - A34 Northbound Hinksey Hill Bus Lane

## **Proposal C5: Banbury Cherwell Street**

The signalised Bridge Street intersection with Cherwell Street is of particular importance for Banbury's local and inter-urban bus network, as it is the gateway to the terminal area within the Town Centre. This junction operates over-capacity for motorised vehicles, resulting in significant delays to buses, both into and out of the town centre.

The provision of a section of bus lane and reconfigured traffic islands between the George Street and Bridge Street junctions, would save around 2 minutes (one sequence of the signals) for buses approaching the Town Centre on the following routes: B5, B9, S4, 488 (10 buses per hour) as well as on services operated by Johnsons and Community operators. A reconfiguration of the signals would also save around 2 minutes per bus for outbound journeys on the same routes, plus the B3 to Bodicote, the B9 to the Gateway Centre and the 500 to Brackley (so a total of 16 buses per hour) plus Johnsons and Community operators.

As Banbury is a relatively compact town with fairly short local bus routes, delays to buses at this junction have a disproportionate impact on the reliability of the local bus network, which destroys passenger confidence and reduces actual passenger numbers.

The estimated cost for widening Cherwell Street for the new bus lane and making changes to the traffic islands and signal sequencing is £2.3 million. The scheme would also link with the Tramway project costing £3 million and funded through the Growth Deal. The Tramway project will re-route bus service B3 through the Rail Station forecourt area providing direct linkage between residents in several parts of Banbury and the rail station.



## Proposal C6: A44 Pear Tree park and ride junction

The A44 north of Oxford is soon to be transformed as a consequence of major new commercial and residential developments due to Cherwell's new Housing Allocation policy, with bus priority measures being included in a major physical enhancement of this corridor, to accommodate the additional movement which will be generated. The scheme designs aim to cap car travel at current levels, whilst increasing the use of more sustainable modes.

The section of route from Yarnton (Cassington Road) to the Pear Tree Interchange (A44 junction with the A34) will have near-continuous bus lanes and will be funded with £15 million of Growth Deal monies.

The section of route from the A44/A40 Wolvercote roundabout to a junction with a new link road between the A44 and A40 will be constructed as a Planning Obligation by the developers of the Oxford North site. This section will also include bus lanes and new bus stops.

These plans leave a short section of the A44 between the two schemes, which include the junction to the access road to the Pear Tree Park and Ride site. Delays to southbound buses along the A44 during peak hours currently cause significant delays to buses from Chipping Norton, Woodstock and Bicester to Oxford, as their route into the existing southbound bus lane is blocked by protruding traffic islands at this junction. These buses either must make a time-wasting detour into and out of the Park and Ride site, or they must wait until they can join the outer lane. Peak hour buses from Woodstock to the City Centre are currently scheduled to take 48 minutes rather than the inter-peak 38 minutes, an additional journey time of 10 minutes.

The estimated cost of the proposed works at the Park and Ride junction are £1 million, and these can be set against the £15 Growth Deal funded A44 project for the Pear Tree Interchange to Yarnton section.

There are currently 5 buses in the peak hour between Bicester, Woodstock and Oxford along the A44, and this is expected to increase to a minimum of 8 buses per hour by 2025 as a consequence of housing delivery and delivery of the A44 bus lane project between Yarnton and Pear Tree Interchange.



Figure 12 - A44 Pear Tree Park and Ride Junction

### **Proposal C7: Benson Lane, Crowmarsh**

This scheme proposes a signalised right-turn for buses off the southbound A4074, into Benson Lane which is the 'historic' direct route from Oxford towards Crowmarsh Gifford and Wallingford.

Currently Benson Lane is one-way only between the A4074 junction and Howbery Park, which is a major employment site with many bus users travelling from Oxford. Currently these employees need to cross the fast A4074 road and walk some distance to their workplace.

The three current inter-urban buses per hour on routes x38/x39/x40 are required to travel much further than is necessary, to the junction of the A4074 with the Henley Road, before turning west along The Street towards Wallingford

It is thought that creating this right-turn bus-only facility would also much better serve new housing situated along Benson Lane, and potentially allow establishment of a Park & Ride facility for Wallingford at the site of former SODC offices located on Benson Lane, to reduce pressure on car parking and traffic congestion in the historic centre of the town.

### **Proposal C8: Kidlington roundabout**

This signalisation project at Kidlington roundabout, to the north of Oxford on the A 4165/A4260 roads would reduce peak-hour delays to buses passing southbound through Kidlington. Currently there are 15 buses per hour on routes 2, 7, s4, 500 and 700 between Kidlington and Cutteslowe through the roundabout. There would also be significant reductions in journey times from Bicester to Oxford (currently 4 buses per hour on service s5).

The peak-hour journey time from Kidlington (Garden City) to Oxford (City Centre) is 28 minutes, while the inter-peak journey time is 22 minutes, a differential of 6 minutes. The peak-hour scheduled journey time from Bicester (Park and Ride) to Oxford City Centre is 42 minutes, whilst the inter-peak schedule is 31 minutes, a differential of 11 minutes.

The cost of the Kidlington roundabout scheme is £6 million, of which £1 million would be provided by Growth Deal funding, leaving £5 million to be funded. This scheme is being promoted as a response to population growth along the Kidlington to Oxford bus corridor, including a major new residential development between Water Eaton and the Oxford city boundary at Cutteslowe has been designed to maximise the use of bus transport on the Kidlington-Oxford bus corridor, also the Kidlington- Eastern Arc bus route. It is of fundamental importance that buses from Kidlington and Bicester can travel in an unimpeded manner through Kidlington roundabout, so these buses can arrive at regular intervals at the new bus stops adjacent to the new development.

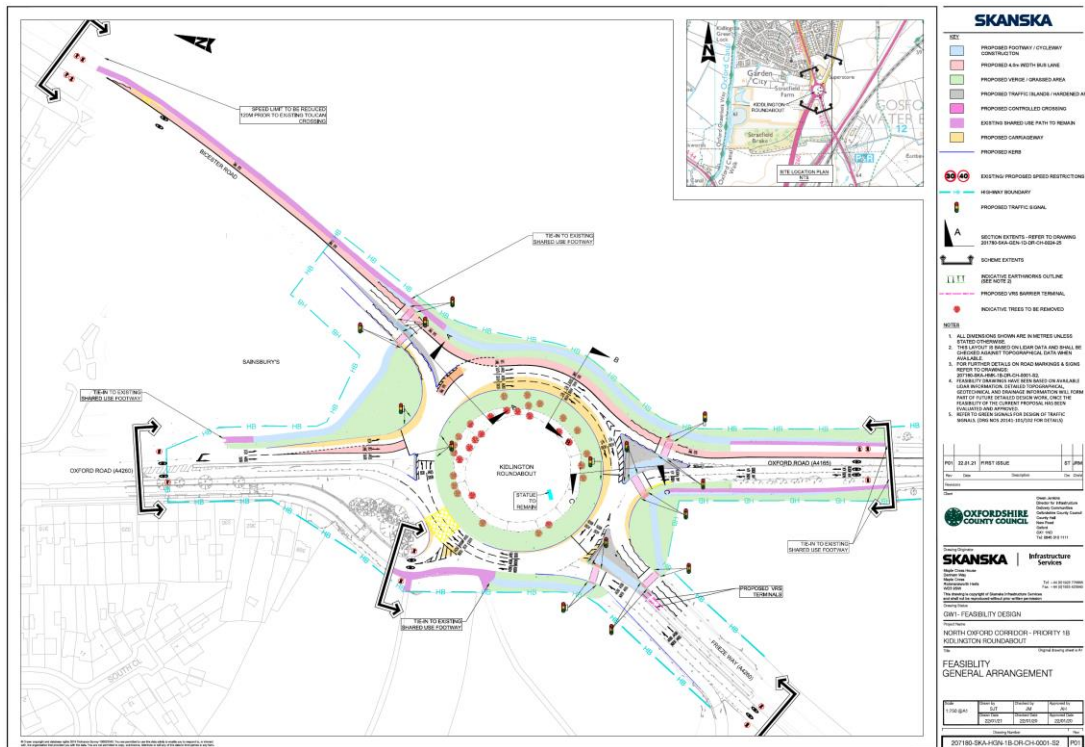


Figure 13 - Diagram of Kidlington roundabout

### Proposal C9: Horspath Driftway

This project aims to relocate queues of cars which build up in peak hours from traffic turning from the Southern Bypass into Horspath Driftway, before turning into The Slade. The configuration of the mini roundabout at the junction of the Slade and Hollow Way results in northbound bus movement becoming blocked. The queue of cars would be relocated into the inner lane of the Eastern Bypass,

Buses on routes 10 and U5 (up to 10 buses per hour) along The Slade would benefit, along with the proposed new services from County towns towards the Eastern Arc, reducing journey times and increasing the reliability of these services. Route 10 is currently scheduled to take 6 additional minutes during peak periods between Cowley and the JR hospital.

The cost of the Horspath Driftway queue relocation scheme is estimated to be £1.5 million.

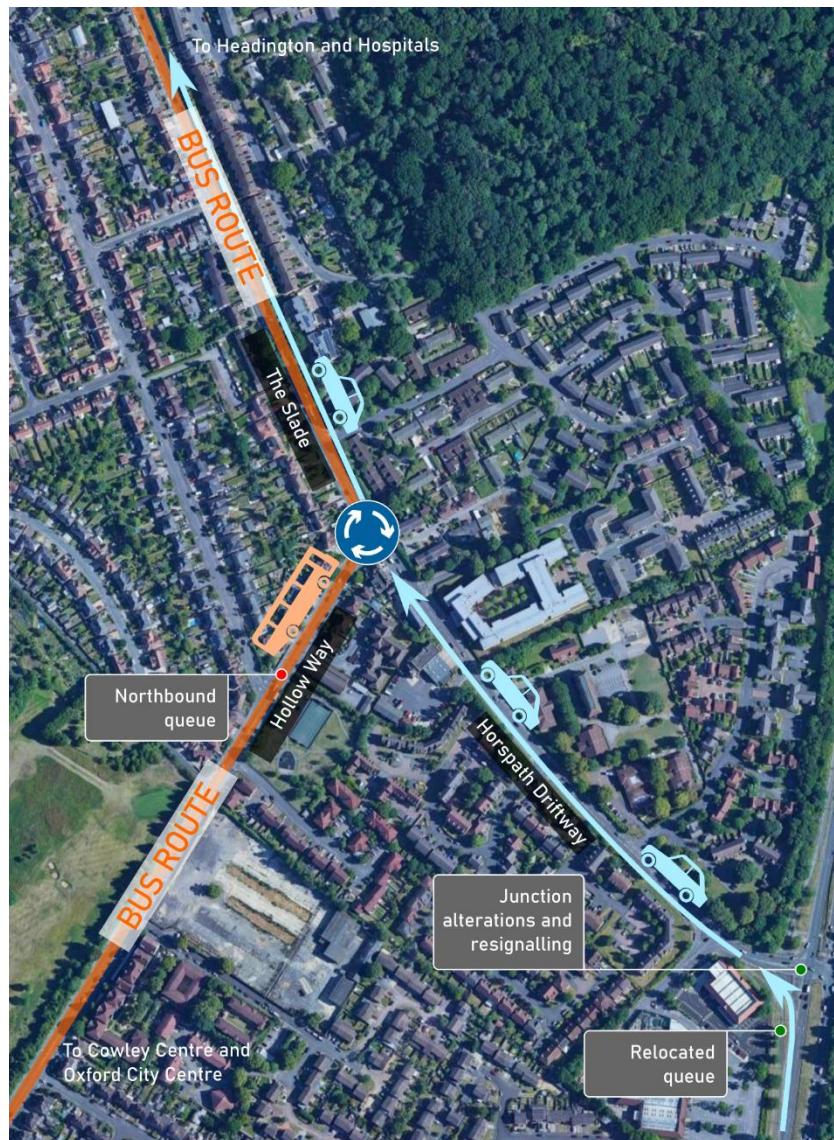


Figure 14 - Horspath Driftway

### Proposal C10: Transport Hubs

There has been much discussion the Transport Hub concept, in an aim to provide much better interchange between several modes of transport, and potentially making the bus more accessible to a wider range of users.

The concept is modular, but sites including more modules (showers, toilets, workspace etc) would take some time to design and deliver, would need planning permission and business cases for staffing etc, which would probably rule out the more ambitious models for delivery within the three-year BSIP timeframe.

However, it appears more likely that this type of hub could be provided through the Development Planning process, in a similar manner to the Bicester Park and Ride site, which was delivered through the Bicester South West (Kingsmere) Planning Application. This type of facility would need to appear in Planning Policy documents before these Development sites come forward, thus generating negotiations, and could take up to 10 years to deliver.

Another route for delivery of hubs might be through partnership working with large supportive organisations, – Science Parks, Universities, Hospitals etc. Whilst the Council has ongoing relationship with these bodies, working up an agreed design and consequent delivery plan would also be protracted, probably over 3 years unless a start has already been made.

The Harwell Science Centre is currently developing plans to construct a ‘Travel Hub’ on its land, so it is proposed that this site becomes the first Oxfordshire Transport Hub in this category, This would benefit a scattered rural population to the south of Harwell campus, as well as providing more options for movement to the further reaches of the very extensive Harwell Campus site, and allowing users of the proposed new Newbury – Harwell – Oxford bus service to utilise the hub to interchange at Harwell for frequent bus services to Milton Park and Didcot.

It is probable that some of the Oxfordshire Park and Ride sites could be modified, as these sites already belong to local Councils. Whilst these of these sites have staff, toilets and a heated waiting area, there would probably not be enough space for showers/workspaces etc without some form of building extension. The amount of covered cycle parking could be increased, however.

Redbridge Park & Ride could become a Transport Hub and act as an interchange point for South/East Oxford residents cycling to interchange with inter-urban bus services heading towards Crowmarsh, Abingdon, Milton Park and Harwell, as well as acting as an interchange point for the new Eastern Arc Rapid Transit service. A new Park and Ride site is scheduled to be constructed soon at Eynsham on the A40 corridor west of Oxford. The site would appear to have the potential for some modifications to the current design to provide elements of the Transport Hub concept.

There is possibly more opportunity for rural ‘opportunity sites’ in Oxfordshire. These would be relatively low-cost upgrades at certain locations, where there is some existing ‘spare’ tarmac which could be formalised as a parking area. There would need to be much better shelters and there would need to be some secure/covered parking for cycles, and some provision of surfaced footway.

There are currently eight indicative rural Transport Hub sites which have been identified along the A420 (Oxford-Faringdon-Swindon) and the A4074 Oxford-Wallingford-Reading corridors.

1. A420 corridor (Served by the S6 inter-urban bus from Swindon to Oxford, 3 or 4 buses per hour)
  - a. West of Southmoor, junction with Charney Lane
  - b. East of Kingston Bagpuize
  - c. Faringdon, Coxwell Road
  - d. Watchfield, Majors Road
2. A4074 corridor (Served by the X38, X39, X40 inter-urban bus from Wallingford to Oxford, 3 buses per hour)
  - a. Benson Marina
  - b. Berinsfield, A415 junction
  - c. Golden Balls Roundabout
  - d. Nuneham Courtenay, opposite Arboretum

The County Council is seeking to adopt a Transport Hubs strategy to provide an overarching framework for the development of the concept across the County. This will include a range of typologies of hub that vary according to the location and levels of services anticipated, with appropriate standards for facilities and maintenance.

Oxfordshire's current proposition is to pursue six pilot hubs, likely to consist of the Harwell Science Centre proposal, one at a Park and Ride site, and two on each of the A4074 and A420 corridors to the west and south of Oxford, before a review of the effectiveness of the concept is undertaken, leading to wider adoption of hubs across the County in future years.

### **Proposal C11: On bus ticketing equipment**

#### *Development and modernisation of Oxford Smartzone*

Oxfordshire has a market-leading multi-operator Smartzone scheme, which has been in place since 2011. This covers all services operated by Go-Ahead and Stagecoach operating in the greater Oxford City area.

Smartzone tickets can be purchased via the following means:

- On-bus, as a day ticket or by topping up a Smartcard. Only tickets of less than 4 weeks duration can be topped up on board buses.
- In a travel shop, by topping up a Smartcard
- Online, by topping up a Smartcard

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Smartzone was highly successful with around 10m journeys being fulfilled each year using these products. A survey from the TAS Partnership in 2018 found that 81% of respondents saw the scheme as offering good value for money.

The scheme is operated as a Limited Company by the bus operators, with no involvement from the LTA. An independent information referee is employed to apportion revenue between operators, and to check and periodically audit data returns made by operators. This model has generally worked well, however as with any mature scheme some areas for development have been identified and we will seek to address these in this plan.

Firstly, the scheme does not include smaller operators operating within Oxford City, such as Arriva, Red Rose / Redline and Pulham's. Both Arriva and Red Rose / Redline are currently in the process of setting up their ticket machines to meet the technical requirements of the scheme.

Secondly, the requirement to first hold a Smartcard to be able to access scheme products acts as a barrier to entry to the scheme and can make it difficult for shorter term visitors to the city to access. To address this, it is planned to introduce Oxford Smartzone QR coded mobile app tickets, with these being targeted for launch around the start of year 1. Operators have already invested in QR coded enabled ticket machines and have drawn up a project plan to implement this technology, however,

£150,000 is needed to allow set up, testing and the onboarding of smaller operators to this. The advantages of doing this will be to remove barriers to travel, reduce scheme fulfilment costs and to act as a “proof of concept” for similar schemes involving differing ETM suppliers.

Thus far, successful QR code based multi-operator schemes have only been implemented where all operators utilise the same ticket machines. This work is essential to ensure that moving forward, operators maintain the ability to keep an open choice for the purchasing of a ticket machine equipment and avoids the possibility of a monopoly developing in the supply chain.

Thirdly, the day ticket element of the scheme is currently operated as an “MIT” product Under the Ticketing Block Exemption, with revenue laying where it falls, unlike the longer-term Smartcard-only tickets which are operated as “MTC” products, with revenue re-apportionment between operators. This limits the ability for joint promotion of the day ticket, as each operator must be free to price these tickets as they see fit under competition law. It is planned to address this issue by converting the day ticket to a QR coded “MTC” product once the app channel has been implemented.

This will enable improved promotion of the day ticket, as well as for multi-operator day tickets to be sold through off-bus channels such as mobile apps for the first time. Similarly, once a paper MTC range is established, this may enable the introduction of an on-bus weekly multi-operator ticket within Oxford, or a county-wide multi-operator day ticket similar to the Hertfordshire “Intalink Explorer”, each which has been noted as a current gap in the range. This will also allow the foundation to be put in place for future deployment of multi-operator capping schemes.

Finally, awareness of the Smartzone scheme is limited – TAS found that 61% of bus users surveyed in Oxford city in 2018 had heard of Smartzone. Operators also market their own products and the choice of tickets of both Smartzone and “operator own” tickets are currently quite broad. Therefore, choosing a ticket can appear confusing, particularly to new or occasional bus users. To address this, we plan to re-launch Smartzone with consistent on-bus and roadside signage denoting where the scheme is valid. We are requesting funding of £50k to support this re-launch and to ensure all vehicles within the Smartzone area carry easily identifiable Smartzone branding on the exterior of the vehicle, to clearly show customers that the ticket is accepted.

#### *Simplification of product range*

Research and feedback from stakeholders has consistently indicated that fares in Oxfordshire, and within Oxford city can be confusing and make it difficult for new users, or those new to the area to work out the best value ticketing products for them, particularly in season tickets and carnets. This is partially due to the operating environment, with Oxford city home to several multi-operator corridors with services shared between operators under Qualifying Agreements. For competition compliance reasons, operators have continued to offer their own single operator products as well as the multi-operator SmartZone ticket, and it has been challenging to communicate simple messages around the inter-acceptance of returns and day tickets within the Smartzone due to competition law factors, as well as the pressures of commercial competition between operators.

Similarly, commercial issues have historically limited the extent to which operators have wished to promote the multi-operator ticket range, with the range generating very low yields for operators due in part to the fact that a significant proportion of the tickets are sold as heavily discounted annual products, often through workplace “salary sacrifice” or “pay monthly” interest free loan schemes.

Under the Enhanced Partnership we hope to address this issue through a review of the season ticket range for both adults and young persons. Within the city it is proposed to withdraw single operator tickets and replace these with the Smartzone range. The Smartzone range will have a weekly on-bus paper variant added, and will be expanded to operate on mobile, as well as on Smartcard. All operators running services within the Smartzone will be required to accept Smartzone tickets for travel and encouraged to join the scheme to benefit from revenue apportionment from the scheme products.

The withdrawal of own operator tickets within Smartzone will make marketing of season tickets for travel on services into Oxford from outside the zone simpler. Operators will work to offer a simple “add Smartzone for £x” message to their own operator period tickets for these journey types, with this being consistently applied across all services.

Some of the longer term Smartzone passes will be rationalised with a view to offering a consistent range across all channels, simplifying the ticket range and removing excessively low-yield products to allow operators to maintain an attractive and low-priced range of on-bus fares. No funding is required from the BSIP for this part of the strategy, but it will form a fundamental building block of making buses more accessible and easier to understand in the county.

#### *Further roll out of Tap on, Tap Off (“TOTO”) in Oxford city*

Oxford is a city with a higher-than-average level of on-bus transactions, and this is partially caused by the challenges with Oxford Smartzone noted above. These impacts boarding times, with TAS finding in their research in 2018 that tickets purchased on-bus took on average 10-11 seconds to issue, compared with 5-7 seconds for QR code or Smartcard ticket transactions to be completed. TAS found that some 80 operating hours per day were spent issuing on-bus single, return or day tickets, and that it may be possible to reduce this by as much as a third, leading to journey time savings with appropriate migration of these purchases to off-bus channels, or to TOTO for those who resist “planning ahead.”

Go-Ahead has offered TOTO functionality with single operator capping on all its services in Oxfordshire through its “Freeflow” product, since June 2020. Currently this makes up only a limited percentage (<10%) of on-bus revenue, due to the lack of consistency between operators of the channels on offer and lack of a multi-operator cap within the Oxford Smartzone area. Go-Ahead has felt that introducing a cap within this zone might lead to competitive tension with Stagecoach, as well as the possibility for confusion for customers, who might expect the cap to work across operators as is the case with many other tickets in this zone and has therefore not proceeded.



To introduce multi-operator capping, it is first necessary for each operator to introduce TOTO functionality with capping for its own services and products. We therefore propose to seek funding to widen the roll out of TOTO to Stagecoach, Arriva, Red Rose, Redline and Pulham's services. This will allow a more consistent customer experience between operators which should in turn lead to increased take up of TOTO, with a corresponding reduction in single fares being purchased. This will lead to an improvement in boarding times within Oxford Smartzone and will allow the foundations to be put in place for multi-operator capping to be delivered, once the industry project CORAL to deliver the industry back-office solution has concluded.

As well as funding physical readers, it is likely that funding will also be required for development of the technology to underpin the scheme, to allow those operators without their own back offices to be able to participate.

### **Proposal C12: Real Time Information**

'Nextbus' information is also currently available on the County's 'Oxontime' website, through electronic displays at 261 bus stops and through a text messaging facility. This system has been in operation for around 15 years and is now increasingly outdated, with increasing failures of equipment

A targeted programme of new 'totem' signs for comprehensive displays at key public transport hubs and interchanges (including rail stations) is proposed. There would also expedite a programme of replacing older signs and providing new sign infrastructure where required. This programme would help to restore Oxfordshire's previous reputation as a nationally recognised leading public transport authority.

An upgrade to the 'Oxontime' system is proposed which would result in network updates to be displayed., which would improve the customer experience. This data is already supplied by operators to the County server, but the system is not currently configured to display such essential information,

These costs are derived from existing contracts and include an allowance for civil engineering works for the new 'standard' and 'totem' signs.

It's possible that one or more totem signs could be located in rail stations, as has already been installed in Didcot Parkway and Oxford stations. However, as the installed cost of a sign in a station would be roughly double the cost of an installed totem sign on-street, then each sign installed on railway land would reduce the number of on-street signs by two.

### **Proposal C13: Improvements to bus stops**

Oxfordshire has around 3,000 bus stops, of which around 2,000 are located on routes with at least an hourly daytime bus. There are up to 1000 shelters at these stops, and there are currently 261 Real-time information signs at these stops.

The quality of these bus stops varies enormously .The Council aims to establish standards for its estate of bus stops, which will be divided into three categories, as follows:

Table 9 - Proposed bus stop standards

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Service specification</b>
<b>Premium</b>	Stops on routes with a turn-up-and-go bus service of at least four buses per hour, currently, or expected to be as a consequence of housing/commercial development in the near future, plus evening/Sunday bus service
<b>Second-tier</b>	Stops on routes with at least an hourly bus service on weekday daytimes
<b>Minor</b>	Stops on routes with less-than-hourly service on weekday daytime

It is proposed to establish minimum standards for each of these types of bus stops. The Premium Route stops will attract the largest numbers of passengers to these access points to the frequent bus network, so these will have higher standards of accessibility (kerb heights, ramp access etc), higher standards of information (wayside displays and in many cases electronic information) and higher standards of comfort (shelter, seat etc),

The Council will also strive to improve second tier and minor bus stops to minimum standards of provision, including hard-standing areas and a distinctive pole/flag/information case unit, which will advertise the stop location for bus users and also provide basic timetable information.,

There was substantial investment in stops along the County's Premium Bus Routes between 10 and 20 years ago, but since then there has been some deterioration of quality. Since that time, stops have been provided on an ad-hoc basis for new development sites, but bus stops elsewhere on the same routes can be much older.

An annual capital budget of £500,000 for each of the next three years is required for a programme to catch up with arrears of maintenance, and to upgrade infrastructure to the proposed standards as required. This amount will also cover the procurement of some new shelters, where these cannot be included in the proposed new advertising shelter contract.

## **Proposal R1: New rural bus route project**

Six semi-flexible new bus routes would be created in the more rural parts of Oxfordshire. The current thinking is that eight new buses would be purchased by the Council, and initially these vehicles would be maintained and operated by the Council's in-house fleet service.

The areas to be served would include villages where all bus services were withdrawn in the last decade, so the new routes would link residents to various services (retail, medical, education and social) in addition to the wider public transport network linking to larger centres.

The new bus users would access a range of travel tickets, including single fares and day tickets from the integrated Oxfordshire range. Currently, it is anticipated that these buses would operate on an hourly or two-hourly basis during weekday daytimes, in a similar manner to the Lincolnshire Call-Connect model or the Call-Connect service that was operated until recently in South Northamptonshire. These buses would be semi-scheduled, so more localities can be served than a fixed route, Buses would leave termini at fixed times, but the actual route would depend on phoned-requests or requests to the driver at terminal points.

It is currently considered that a tech-led operating model using 'apps' would be inappropriate to the probable demographic and potential users in these areas. This facility could be offered at a later stage of the rural bus project, but then there could be significant additional costs. Initially there would be a contractual arrangement with a call-centre.

Currently it is proposed that the Council purchases eight vehicles, similar to the Mellor Strata minibuses currently operated on routes in East Lancashire (County Council contract with Transdev). Purchase cost is to be verified, but currently £100,000 per vehicle is assumed. These lightweight vehicles benefit from low fuel consumption, compared to a standard bus.

Following a two-year evaluation period, the County Council may offer the operation of these services to commercial companies. Ownership of the vehicles would remain with the County Council.

The eight vehicles would include two maintenance spares, so that six different routes could be operated daily.

There would be considerable emphasis on encouraging the use of these routes by local people, to create a sustainable operating model beyond the period of BSIP funding. It is important that regular income is secured, for example by conveying secondary school-pupils and college students at the appropriate times. Income from operating these services will be estimated and will be included in calculation of the net operating cost.

Following the confirmation of BSIP funding, the following list identifies the two routes that will be funded through BSIP, as well as potential future routes. further analysis is required to establish viable services.

Table 10 - Proposed new rural routes

<p><b>A. North Downs – linking to Didcot</b></p> <p>This would link the rural villages of North Moreton, South Moreton, Aston Tirrold, East Hagbourne, West Hagbourne, Blewbury and Upton to Didcot. There will be integration with Premium inter-urban bus services and rail services in Didcot.</p>
<p><b>B. Cherwell Valley - linking to Oxford Parkway</b></p> <p>Linking Kirtlington, Bletchingdon and Hampton Poyle (as a minimum) to bus and rail services at Oxford Parkway station for connections to Oxford and Bicester.</p>
<p><b>C. Otmoor – linking to Wheatley and Bicester</b></p> <p>Could potentially serve Forest Hill, Stanton St John, Beckley, Horton-cum-Studley, Noke, Oddington, Charlton on Otmoor, Fencott, Murcott, Upper Arccott, Piddington, Blackthorn.</p> <p>Would link to Premium Route bus services in Wheatley and in Bicester.</p>
<p><b>D. White Horse - linking to Wantage and Faringdon</b></p> <p>Could potentially serve Letcombe Regis, Letcombe Bassett, Childrey, Sparsholt, Kingston Lisle, Uffington, Woolstone, Ashbury, Baulking, Shellingford, Baulking, Fernham, Longcot, Little Coxwell,</p> <p>Would link to Premium Route services in Wantage and in Faringdon</p>
<p><b>E. North Oxfordshire – linking to Banbury</b></p> <p>Could potentially serve Little Bourton, Great Bourton, Cropredy, Mollington, Claydon, also Hornton, Horley, Shutford, North Newington</p> <p>Would link to bus and train services in Banbury,</p>
<p><b>F. West Oxfordshire – Linking with Burford</b></p> <p>Could serve Idbury, Fifield, Taynton, Fulbrook, Swinbroke, Asthall Leigh, Fordwells With bus connections in Burford</p>
<p><b>G South Oxfordshire Chilterns – Linking Henley with Woodcote</b></p> <p>Could potentially serve Rotherfield Peppard, Rotherfield Greys, Kidmore End, Checkendon, Stoke Row</p> <p>Would link to bus and train services in Henley, to bus services in Woodcote.</p>

<b>H</b>	<b>South Oxfordshire Chilterns – Linking Wallingford with Thame</b>
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Could potentially serve Shillingford Hill, Ewelme, Britwell Salome, Watlington, Pyrton, Lewknor, South Weston, Great and Little Milton, Great and Little Haseley.
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Bus connections in Wallingford, Lewknor and Thame
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<b>I</b>	<b>Bicester – Kidlington</b>
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Could potentially serve Chesterton, Weston on the Green, Kirtlington, Bletchington, Hampton Poyle, Lower Heyford.
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Bus and train connections in Bicester. Bus connections in Kidlington
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## **Proposal R2: Restoration of Cross-boundary bus services**

This project would restore the following bus service links which cross into neighbouring local authority areas, which have been withdrawn in the last two decades. It is assumed that these new/restored services would become fully commercially viable after a period, here assumed to be eight years.

### *Cross-border route A: Newbury-Harwell-Oxford (or Didcot)*

This service would link West Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Historically there was an hourly Newbury to Oxford bus service along then A34, but in more recent times, this service was split into several sections and finally the Harwell Campus to Newbury section of route was lost. Restoration of this link is a priority of the Newbury MP, and there have been meetings to progress this project, with a feasibility study jointly funded between Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Councils having been produced by Stantec.

This scheme would provide access to employment in both directions, as well as providing an hourly all-purpose daytime bus service between the peaks.

Costs of the service between Newbury and Harwell Campus would be shared with West Berkshire Council, and some s106 would be allocated from the Harwell Campus site. Costs of this service enhancement would also be contained by linking the Newbury-Harwell Campus section (with one of the existing bus services operating from Harwell to Oxford (or to Didcot).

Subject to confirmation of West Berkshire's BSIP funding allocation, it is expected that this service will commence in April 2023.

### *Cross-border route B: Oxford-Bicester-Brackley-Northampton*

Historically there was an 'express' direct bus service between Oxford and Northampton, with many connections available to destinations. However, this journey has become more difficult in recent years as routes have been chopped into shorter sections with fewer journeys. In particular, the Bicester-Brackley section of route was lost around 5 years ago during a round of tendered service reductions. However new bus service 505 started around 2 years ago, funded by section 106 contributions in

Brackley. Unfortunately, the pandemic conspired to undermine this initiative, so few passengers benefited and sadly this funding will cease in the near future.

The BSIP process offers an opportunity to re-boot this essential bus link and to maintain connections with services to/from Banbury and Oxford. The service will also be improved to an hourly frequency and serve the Elmsbrook development area in Bicester. Following the BSIP funding decision, it is anticipated that this service will commence in April 2023.

*Potential future Cross-border route C: Oxford-Carterton-Lechlade-Swindon*

Service 64 linked Carterton to Lechlade and Swindon every 2 hours until around 5 years ago, and the loss of this service means that journeys between West Oxfordshire, Lechlade and Swindon are currently not possible by bus, with work, education and social journeys lost. In particular, access is no longer possible to College Education in Swindon for West Oxfordshire residents,

A planned revision to the Oxford-West Oxfordshire bus service pattern now offers an opportunity to create a refreshed link to benefit West Oxfordshire residents, not only from Carterton but also from Witney, at a cost of one additional vehicle allocated to this route.

This route has not been funded through BSIP, but the County Council will explore funding options for this service with operators and neighbouring councils.

*Proposal R3: SBSF services commenced in September 2020.*

Thirteen Oxfordshire bus services were created, or amended, in September 2020, using £588,000 from the DfT's Supported Bus Services Fund. These services have now operated for the full year of the DfT scheme, and more funds have been found internally within OCC to extend their operation until March 2022.

It is proposed that BSIP should fund the continued operation of these services for the next three years, from April up to March 2025. During 2024 it is suggested that a review would determine their future operation:

- Service 11: Watlington – Chalgrove — Garsington – Cowley – Oxford . *Sunday service consisting of 4 journeys each way,*
- Service 20: Rose Hill – Cowley. *Three off-peak journeys in each direction, on Mondays to Fridays.*
- Service 40: Thame – Chinnor – Stokenchurch – High Wycombe. *Sunday service introduced, operating at an hourly frequency.*
- Service 45: Abingdon – Berinsfield – Sandford – Littlemore – Cowley. *New Monday to Friday journeys between Cowley, Berinsfield and Abingdon.*
- Service 46: Cowley – Wheatley. *New Monday to Friday hourly service.*
- Service 47: Lambourn – Ashbury – Bishopstone – Swindon. *Contribution to West Berkshire Council to maintain this service*
- Service 63: Southmoor – Longworth – Appleton – Cumnor – Oxford. *New Monday to Friday service consisting of five journeys in each direction.*

- Service 136: RAF Benson – Benson – Crowmarsh – Wallingford. *Retention of existing Monday to Friday peak hour journeys*
- Service 233: Woodstock – Bladon – Long Hanborough – North Leigh – Witney. *Sunday service introduced, operating at an hourly frequency.*
- Service 488: Chipping Norton – Hook Norton – Bloxham – Banbury. *Sunday service introduced, operating at a broadly two-hourly frequency.*
- Service S4: Banbury – Deddington — Tackley – Kidlington – Oxford. *Additional evening journeys provided on Mondays to Saturdays.*
- Service X8: Chipping Norton – Kingham Station. *New service on Mondays to Fridays connecting with peak-hour rail services.*
- Service X9: Chipping Norton – Chadlington – Charlbury – Finstock – Witney. *Saturday service enhanced to same level as Monday to Friday service.*
- Service X38: Henley – Nettlebed – Crowmarsh – Wallingford. *Sunday service introduced, operating at an hourly frequency.*

£500,000 per annum is required for three years to continue operation of these services, to give them the opportunity to establish a more commercially viable basis, before a review is undertaken in 2024.

Following the BSIP funding decision, two of these routes were selected for continuation:

- Service 46: Cowley – Wheatley. *New Monday to Friday hourly service; and*
- Service 63: Southmoor – Longworth – Appleton – Cumnor – Oxford. *Monday to Friday service consisting of five journeys in each direction.*

Service 46 has recently been enhanced with third-party funds to an hourly service, seven days per week, between Oxford, Cowley, Wheatley and Great Milton. The BSIP funds complement this arrangement and patronage numbers rose fivefold in the first two weeks of operation.

Of the remaining services, seven are now funded by Section 106 obligations and two are funded by the Council's allocation of Local Authority Bus Subsidy Grant.

Service X8 was withdrawn in April 2022 due to very low passenger numbers, aligned to the significant reduction in commuting from West Oxfordshire to London.

#### **Proposal R4: Improved fares offer for Oxfordshire residents**

##### *Expansion of youth fares offering*

In Oxfordshire, both major operators give discounts to young people, however the level of discount in offer is inconsistent between operators and across ticketing channels. Go-Ahead and Stagecoach both give 50% discount to under 16's on their on-bus fares, although outside of the city the two companies offer only 33% discount.

Through off-bus channels such as app or smartcard-based season tickets, young person discounts are available up to and including the age of 18, but at a more modest 25% discount.

Oxford Bus Company and Thames Travel also have a “Get Around” card which gives a flat fare of £1 to those aged 18 and under within Oxford city. However, the card costs £5, and the discounts are not valid outside of the city or on other operators’ services.

This adds up to a confusing picture which it is felt can discourage bus use among younger people and therefore it is proposed to standardise the youth fares offer to cover up to and including 18 years of age at 50% discount for on bus-fares and 25% discount for season tickets, with the reduced discount for seasons reflective of the fact that these are already discounted and are important tools in ensuring the viability of many homes to school services.

We have secured £1.5 million through this BSIP to deliver these discounts, to encourage positive habit forming in our young people between the ages of 16 and 18 and support their continued engagement in education, training or apprenticeships.

#### *Discounts to improve bus usage among low earning NHS workers in Oxford City*

Oxford City is one of the 5 locations in the UK with the highest index of house prices to average earnings. The city sees a large net inflow of workers each day, many of whom are forced to live away from the city in cheaper locations such as Bicester, Didcot, Witney and Abingdon due to the unaffordability of housing within the city.

One of the worst affected employers is the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust. The Trust operates several large hospital sites in the Headington area and employs large numbers of staff in relatively low paid nursing, cleaning and porter roles, the salary level for which is set by central government with no ability for the Trust to adjust salaries to reflect local market conditions. The hospital sites are major traffic generators, with the John Radcliffe site being a major contributor to traffic congestion and bus journey time volatility within the east of the city.

It has been identified by the bus operators, through discussion with the Trust that there is currently an issue with the relative price of bus tickets in comparison with staff parking permit prices at the hospital sites. For example, currently the Trust charges £28.75 per month for a staff parking permit, whereas a 4-week Smartzone bus ticket is £61. For those travelling from further afield – which naturally includes many those in the lower grades, due to the issue with housing availability within the city – an equivalent 4 weekly bus pass will cost as much as £90. This price differential acts as a disincentive to bus travel amongst the lowest paid staff, and while the Trust wishes to increase prices and reduce the number of staff parking permits issued, it must also be mindful of the impact on staff recruitment and retention of such a move, if suitable alternatives are not in place.

At present, Trust staff are unwilling to switch from car to bus travel, and these habits have been hardened during the pandemic, when public transport use was discouraged and when additional, temporary staff parking concessions at NHS sites were introduced. A staff travel survey run in June 2021 collected 2,873 responses from the Trust’s 13,000 employees. Of these, over 1,700 used private cars to get to work. When asked, 1,473 of these stated that they would not consider using public transport to get to work, with many of these stating that cost and lack of subsidies was a reason for this view.



The October 2021 BSIP proposed to trial an enhanced staff discount scheme for those in the lowest paid grades 2-5 at the Trust. These staff will be offered 75% off their bus tickets (grades 2-3) and 50% off (grades 4-5). This covers a total of 5,869 staff based at the Headington sites in Oxford, of whom 2,427 are in grades 2-3 and 3,442 are in grades 4-5. Initially this will be applied for a six-month period to understand take up levels and to allow data to be gathered by the Trust to inform the development of a business case to make the scheme permanent, with match funding from the Trust generated from an increase in parking permit prices for visitors and staff in higher grades.

Consequently, the Trust have delivered their own ticket discount scheme for staff, and are exploring funding local bus services to hospitals. Therefore, this scheme is no longer required, and funding for this scheme has not been secured through BSIP.

The NHS Trust would administer the ticket scheme, using existing structures. They would also commit funding to the scheme if a positive business case can be demonstrated. The ongoing funding proposition would therefore be:

- Year 1: £750k funding for first 6 months, £400k funding for second six months with remainder covered by Trust giving £1.15m in total.
- Year 2: £800k funding in total
- Year 3: £600k funding in total (would hope to either increase share from Trust over time, or see benefit in revenue to justify this)
- Year 4 onwards, to be funded from the Workplace Parking Levy.

### **Proposal R5: Improved information – operational budget**

Unlike many other Local Transport Authority areas, there is currently no central portal for bus service information in Oxfordshire. No maps or diagrams are produced to show the bus service network of all operators, or connection points with the rail network. This BSIP proposes to change this situation by making a significant step-change in provision. Further development of a centrally provided information hub could be an Oxfordshire public transport website, which could then lead to a portal for multi-operator ticket sales.

The provision of good quality public transport information requires investment in staff resources, both by the Council and by operators. Whilst certain types of information can be imported automatically, it is necessary to maintain a central electronic timetable database from which information can be exported in various formats to on-street signs, to websites and apps, to the national Traveline service and to operators for production of information at 'wayside' bus stops.

It is proposed to create a comprehensive County website for public transport information and to produce a suite of maps and diagrams showing the overall Public Transport network across the County and in the different towns. These maps would be used in Interchanges, in Bus Shelters and in other places and formats. An ongoing Revenue Support budget of £300,000 is required to pay for support costs (including fees to the RTI system support contractor, the cost of producing maps, and designing a new website.)

## **Proposal R6: Additional staffing**

Additional staffing resource is required in most parts of the public transport function of the County Council, to underpin delivery of a more reliable public transport network, to improve the stock of bus stops and interchanges and to provide much improved information to the travelling public.

It is considered that the roadworks coordination, traffic signal operation and scheme design functions each require an additional member of staff focused on public transport operations, so a revenue budget of £200,000 is proposed (including on-costs).

An annual revenue budget of £300,000 (including on-costs) is also required to provide adequate staffing for the bus stop maintenance/improvement and the improved travel information functions.

Detailed job descriptions are being drawn up for the three posts with a view to recruiting in late 2022.

## **Proposal R7: Investment in the future network**

This BSIP has demonstrated the fundamental importance of the core bus network to Oxfordshire, primarily the Premium inter-urban routes and the high-frequency urban network in Oxford in providing an efficient and effective means of delivering residents to workplaces and to other activities spread across the County.

This document has also stressed the importance of delivering effective priority to buses operating on this core network. This includes delivery of the Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan proposals and the various capital proposals C2 to C9.

The planned delivery of the A40 bus lane project from Eynsham to Wolvercote is also of critical importance to unlocking population growth in West Oxfordshire and linking these new residents by fast frequent bus services to employment across the Oxford city area, including the critically important service to the Eastern Arc area.

The 'Investment in the Future Network' proposal is a request for some funding to ensure that the planned frequency improvements to the strategic Premium bus network are actually delivered on time, an insurance against any late delivery of bus priority schemes, late receipt of section 106 funding or late implementation of the Workplace Parking Levy. This investment fund would be used to accelerate delivery of the BSIP proposals by procuring additional journeys on key bus corridors to ensure that sufficiently attractive bus services can still be provided to accommodate population growth, where the market conditions or highway network condition for a short period preclude these bus journeys being provided in the normal commercial manner. The amount requested relates to current costs of operating ten additional euro 6 double-deckers in Oxfordshire, this amount reverting to zero over the BSIP period, as commerciality returns to the network and bus-priority schemes are delivered.

## Proposal R8: Direct bus services to Eastern Arc

The Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan proposals include an ambition to introduce a new bus links bus to Eastern Oxford from the nearby major settlements of Witney, Kidlington and Abingdon, thus attracting a significant proportion of the large numbers of people who travel regularly to employment in this area. These new links would also provide good access to employment around the 'Eastern Arc', providing a practical alternative to driving to work and influencing the number of parking spaces provided.

It is planned to launch these new direct services in 2023, alongside other Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan initiatives, to achieve a significant reduction in traffic volumes and congestion within the Oxford outer ring road.

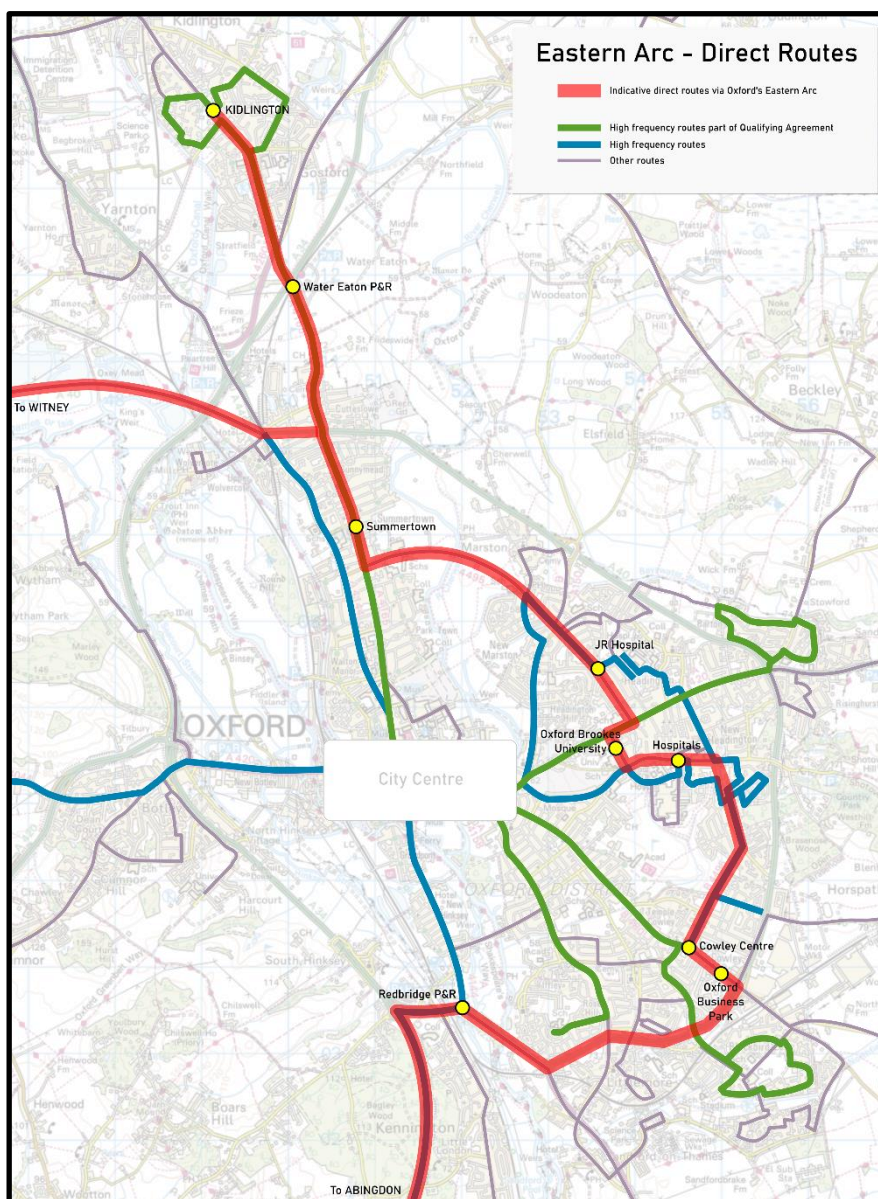


Figure 15 - Eastern Arc of Oxford

It is anticipated that this new bus service will take eight years to become established as a fully commercial proposition. This new service will mainly be funded by proceeds

from the Workplace Parking Levy, proposed to commence from 2024/5 onwards, however there will be a requirement for £2.28 million in 2023/4 to fund the first year's deployment of 13 vehicles on this new route. This expected amount will be offset by £1.44 million of s106 in this first year of operation, leaving £840,000 to be funded from the BSIP bid.

### **Proposal R9: Journey planning**

It is proposed to procure the services of a Journey Planning company to conduct research at Oxfordshire's leading employers. as a means of understanding the home-to-work travel patterns at these companies, so bespoke interventions can be designed by local bus companies, with the aim of increasing the proportion of people travelling by bus.