

Traffic Management Sub-Committee

13 June 2024



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	Oxford Road Eastbound Bus Lane Revocation - Statutory Consultation Results
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	James Clements, Transport Programme Manager
Lead councillor	Cllr John Ennis, Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport
Ward(s)	Battle
Corporate priority	Healthy Environment
Recommendations	The Sub-Committee is asked to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Note the content of this report.2. Approve the implementation of the proposed measures.3. Authorise the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services to make the Traffic Regulation Order and that no public inquiry be held into the proposal.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. This purpose of this report is to inform the Sub-Committee of objections and other feedback received during the statutory consultation undertaken on the revocation of the eastbound bus lane on Oxford Road, between 816 Oxford Road and Tidmarsh Street. This revocation is required to enable the new westbound lane to be introduced in line with our previously approved BSIP programme.

2. Policy context

- 2.1. The recommendations within this report support the objectives of the Council's Corporate Plan for the years 2022/25, and contribute towards the key themes of:
- Healthy Environment
 - Thriving Communities
 - Inclusive Economy
- 2.2. Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council's website](#). These priorities and the Corporate Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.
- 2.3. The National Bus Strategy 'Bus Back Better' was published in March 2021 as part of a £3 billion funding package aimed at building back Britain's bus services. It sets out how the Government intends to deliver on its commitment to achieve ambitious and far-reaching reform of the bus services sector. As part of this funding, the Council were awarded £26m to improve the Bus Services and infrastructure, and to support growth of the public transport network.

- 2.4. The Council published its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in October 2021 and established an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with all local bus operators. The EP sets out the schemes and measures to be delivered through the BSIP funding and formed our funding bid to DfT. The content of the EP was approved by the Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee in March 22 and November 22.
- 2.5. The BSIP is a sub-strategy and core element of our emerging Reading Transport Strategy, which sets a vision to make Reading a greener and healthier town by providing better sustainable travel choices, including buses. The transport strategy also contributes towards the vision of a net zero carbon Reading by 2023, as set out in the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy.
- 2.6. The Berkshire West Health & Wellbeing Strategy (2021-2030) sets out the cross-borough priorities to deliver positive health outcomes to residents within Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire. The implementation of the schemes detailed within this report, and through promoting the use of Public Transport (as well as Active Travel initiatives) can directly support positive outcomes, particularly for those residents and visitors living and walking alongside busy roads.

3. The proposal

- 3.1. This report is further to our previous report to the sub-committee on 11 January 2024 where the sub-committee approved that officers proceed with the BSIP Bus Lanes, including the westbound bus lane on oxford road, between Pangbourne Street and Norcot Road Junction.
- 3.2. Whilst the designs that were appended to the previous sub-committee briefing set-out the details of the scheme, officers did not clarify to the sub-committee the requirement to revoke the existing eastbound bus lane between 816 Oxford Road and Tidmarsh Street, nor seek approval to undertake a consultation to this effect.
- 3.3. The removal of the eastbound bus lane is not expected to have a detrimental impact on bus or vehicle movements as this section of oxford road has been observed to be relatively free flowing, and traffic will clear through each signal phase at the Grovelands Road Junction, as it is seen to do now.
- 3.4. At the sub-committee meeting on 6 March 2024, officers were approved to consult on this basis.
- 3.5. A Statutory consultation was carried out between 21 March and 12 April 2024, in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996, advertised on street, in the local printed newspapers and on the Council's website (the 'Consultation Hub').
- 3.6. A total of 5 responses to the consultation were received, of which 3 were objections and 2 were in support of the proposal.
- 3.7. The common objection regarding the removal of the bus lane is the perceived lack of significant traffic improvements that it would have. It should also be noted that the objections identify the westbound bus stop (in the area) as causing traffic disruption, which the implementation of this scheme will improve.
- 3.8. Supporters also highlight the necessity of the new outbound lane to enhance bus journey speed.

- 3.9. Further to the consultation results, Officers are recommending that the sub-committee approve the proposed revocation of this bus lane, to facilitate the implementation of the new Westbound Bus Lane between Pangbourne Street and Norcot Road.

4. Contribution to strategic aims

- 4.1. The proposals as set out within this report will help to deliver the following strategic aims of the Council through the delivery of a thriving public transport network in the town:

Health Environment

- The implementation of bus lane will help alleviate delays to services along main corridors into the town centre. This can lead to a reduction in motor-vehicle journeys, which can reduce emissions and improve air quality.

Thriving Communities

- The bus lanes will improve accessibility and journey times for those using the bus, making it a more appealing option than using a private vehicle

Inclusive Economy

- The bus lane proposals will encourage bus usage and reduce congestion. They can offer equality of access to the town centre and other areas of employment.

5. Environmental and climate implications

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 5.2. Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total carbon emissions. As set out in the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25, this figure is lower in Reading with transport accounting for around 20% of carbon emissions. However, significant investment in sustainable transport solutions is vital in order to respond to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.
- 5.3. A Climate Impact Assessment has been conducted for the recommendations of this report, resulting in an overall ***Medium Net Positive***. It is expected that the introduction of additional bus lanes will see a shift from private vehicle usage resulting in less emissions and air pollution. There will be an improvement to air quality by providing a more efficient and attractive way to travel.

6. Community engagement

- 6.1. A 4-week informal consultation detailing the 6 bus lane schemes was run from 19th May to 16th June 2023. The consultation link was shared on social media and on the RBC Consultation webpage. An update on the feedback received during this consultation period was given verbally at the meeting.
- 6.2. A formal statutory consultation detailing the bus schemes ran from 9th November to 7th December 2023. The consultation link was shared on social media, the RBC Consultation webpage and the local press. Drop in events were held for the Reading Transport Strategy 2040 consultation, and drawings of the bus lane schemes were on display with officer's present to answer questions.
- 6.3. To facilitate the construction of the BSIP schemes the existing eastbound bus lane is required to be revoked. A Statutory consultation was carried out for this revocation between 21 March and 12 April 2024, in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic

Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996, advertised on street, in the local printed newspapers and on the Council's website (the 'Consultation Hub').

- 6.4. Traffic Management Sub-Committee is a public meeting. The agendas, reports, meeting minutes and recordings of the meetings are available to view from the Council's website.

7. Equality impact assessment

- 7.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2. It is not considered that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is required at this time as the proposals are not deemed to be discriminatory to persons with protected characteristics, and the proposals will help the travel needs of users. The Statutory Consultation provided an opportunity for the content of objections/support/concerns to be considered prior to a decision being made on whether to implement the proposals.
- 7.3. Further EIA assessments, where necessary, may be undertaken once the schemes are developed in detailed design.

8. Other relevant considerations

- 8.1. None

9. Legal implications

- 9.1 New, or changes to existing, Traffic Regulation Orders require advertisement and consultation, under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and in accordance with the Local Authorities Traffic Orders (Procedure) (England and Wales) Regulations 1996. The resultant Traffic Regulation Order will be sealed/revoked in accordance with the same Regulations.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1. Funding for the detailed designs and statutory consultation has been funded through the BSIP funding allocation.
- 10.2. The Council has secured £15.9m in capital funding through its BSIP, however inflationary pressures have had a significant impact on the cost of individual schemes within the overall BSIP package.
- 10.3. There are no additional costs associated with the revocation of this eastbound bus lane.

11. Timetable for implementation

- 11.1 Works have commenced on the Oxford Road Scheme between Zinzan St and George Street and once complete it is expected that works will commence on the scheme between Pangbourne Street and Norcot Road Junction. The works on the 2 Oxford Road Schemes are expected to be complete by Winter 2024.

12. Background papers

12.1 None

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Oxford Road Eastbound Bus Lane - Statutory Consultation Results
Appendix 2 – Oxford Road Location Drawing