

Bus Strategy

Buses are at the heart of our ambition to deliver a zero-carbon, public transport network for the county. It is imperative there is mode shift from cars to buses to improve air quality, lower carbon emissions, better manage congestion and have a healthier population.

Current Situation

The bus network is currently based mainly on Oxford City radial routes, linking further out to the main county towns, and within growth areas linked to new development. In recent years bus operators have improved both the service offer in terms of vehicles and the service frequency on these routes. The County Council continues to support this, for example using developer contributions to invest in initial service improvements and enable them to become commercially sustainable. The Oxfordshire Bus Strategy defines a number of core bus routes on which a certain level of service is expected[1].

Away from this core network, particularly in towns and rural areas, commercial services are difficult to justify and recent funding cuts have reduced the bus offer in many areas.

Data and Evidence

There were 40.6 million bus passenger journeys in 2017/18. This was higher than in 2009/10 with 35.8 million passenger journeys but lower than the high point of 43.2 million passenger journeys in 2013/14.[2] Therefore we need to find ways to reverse the decline and return to a steady long term growth.

Current plans and future opportunities

The bus network is the core part of the public transport network for both Oxford and Oxfordshire as well as inter-urban travel, providing transport access to and from most of the main settlements in Oxfordshire and beyond. OCC supports buses playing a bigger role in the county's transport network, as they can provide the following benefits:

- Tackling climate change, managing congestion and improving local air quality
- Moving large numbers of people around more efficiently, especially where there is limited road space available
- Supporting healthier travel choices, particularly where linked to accessing services by walking or cycling - see separate Topic Paper on Sustainable Healthy Integrated Functional Travel ('SHIFT') network proposals
- Delivering equality outcomes in terms of providing access to services and facilities to the part of the population who do not have access to a private car
- Enabling sustainable growth by connecting new development areas with existing facilities, services and jobs

Challenges

There are several challenges which makes operating bus services more difficult, impacting on the bus service offer and potential for growth. These challenges include:

- Traffic congestion, which impacts on reliability of services and has led to a reduction in average bus speeds on many corridors, leading to less efficient operations

- The ability to operate commercially sustainable bus networks outside core routes in Oxford and between Oxford and Oxfordshire's main settlements
- The lack of bus priority measures and parking controls on some main routes
- The difficulty in achieving integrated ticketing especially between buses and other modes
- There can be long boarding times on sections of busy urban routes
- There are varied levels of integration with other transport modes; rail, cycle and walking
- The recruitment and retention of bus drivers
- The environmental impacts of buses, particularly nitrogen dioxide and carbon emissions, where they operate in narrow streets and other areas with identified poor air quality
- That people in areas of deprivation are the greatest users of buses, but often cannot afford to invest in cheaper-per-journey season tickets.

Improving the bus service offer is a strategic transport priority for the County Council and for future new investment. In summary, this is likely to focus in the following areas:

- Tackling congestion to improve bus speeds and reliability of bus journey times, for example through traffic signal priority and management of the network
- Implementing schemes like Connecting Oxford, to enable provision of new and re-allocated road space for buses, especially on core routes – including bus lanes where these can be justified and any necessary land acquired
- Planning our future strategic bus network, for example by reviewing our approach to Premium Bus routes, including their potential to develop into Rapid Transit Networks
- Using technology to improve bus passenger experience, for example in payment, ticketing and information provision
- Making the transition to zero emission vehicles by converting bus fleets to electric and other low/zero emission technology
- Looking for opportunities to fund and develop demand responsive and rural services
- Continuing to influence the development planning process, especially through Local Plans, to promote development that supports increase bus use, provides funding to improve services, and builds in appropriate new facilities for bus operations
- Improving interchange integration with rail services and other bus services at key points on the public transport network, for example at existing and new Park & Ride sites or providing smaller parking areas / mini Park & Rides along main bus routes
- Safer and more secure access to the bus network for pedestrians and cyclists, to help integrate travel by sustainable, mixed-mode options

[1] <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/roads-and-transport/connecting-oxfordshire/county-and-corridor-strategies>

[2] <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/bus01-local-bus-passenger-journeys>

Question 9

Bus Strategy: What do you think?

Could you do more of your journeys by bus if something changed? If so, what?

Are there other areas that would help to make the bus network better for you, given our current constraints? What else could our bus strategy consider?

Most bus routes go in and out of Oxford; would you use the buses to go to other places, instead of Oxford, if it were possible/easier?

To respond please use the online consultation form.