Regional Transport Network

The Regional Transport Network

Transport and travel planning in Oxfordshire does not occur in isolation. Oxfordshire is a nationally and regionally significant transport authority, contributing to a growing economic area and a fundamental part of connectivity throughout the south of England. There are several relevant regional transport activities of which Oxfordshire is a part.

Ox-Cam Arc

The Oxford to Cambridge Arc area has been recognised by central government[1] as a globally significant area, supporting up to 2 million jobs, and contributing £111 billion of annual Gross Value Added (GVA) to the national economy per year. In this context, government have identified the need for better co-ordination to help ‘unlock the area’s potential.’ In March 2019, central and local government published ‘The Oxford to Cambridge Arc: Government ambition and joint declaration between Government and local partners,’ identifying a need to progress joint work on the four identified policy pillars of productivity, place-making, connectivity and environment.[2]

England’s Economic Heartland and the proposed Transport Strategy

England’s Economic Heartland (EEH) was set up in 2014 and is the sub-national Transport Body for an area between Swindon and Cambridge. Lead by a partnership of highway authorities in this area including Oxfordshire, it works with a wide range of partners, including central government, Network Rail, Highways England and district authorities to plan improvements to connectivity. The area covered by EEH is different to the identified OxCam Arc area.
East West Rail

East West Rail is a long-held ambition to re-open a strategic rail line between Oxford and Cambridge which is now being developed and delivered in phases[3]. Phase 1 between Oxford and Bicester opened in 2017 enabling new train services between Oxford-Bicester Village, Buckinghamshire and London. Phase 2 build is planned to commence shortly and will connect Bicester Village Station to Milton Keynes and Bedford with new services between Aylesbury-Winslow and Milton Keynes. Phase 3 includes a new railway between Bedford and Cambridge. Consultation on route options took place earlier in 2019, and if prioritised for investment by government it could be delivered by the end of the 2020s.

Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

Central government has also identified the need for improvements in east-west road capacity and a route between Oxford and Cambridge. Much of the existing route between Milton Keynes and Cambridge has already been identified as having good dual carriageway status, with proposals to upgrade a short section between the A1/ A421 (Black Cat Junction) and Caxton Gibbet in Cambridgeshire in the more advanced stages of planning[4]. The latest focus of work by central government was on progressing proposals for road upgrades between Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire, defined as the ‘missing link’ by Highways England.[5]

Highways England have been developing Expressway route options, with consultation on these possible in 2020. However, in September 2019, the Council agreed a motion saying “Oxfordshire does not support the building of the Expressway irrespective of which route is chosen”[6]. The Expressway is also likely to be reviewed under the new government.

Major Road Network

The Major Roads Network (MRN)[7] consists of local authority ‘A’ roads that provide important connections across a wider area; seen as the middle tier of roads between the
national Strategic Road Network (SRN), which includes the M40 and A34 in Oxfordshire, and local roads.\[8\] The MRN in Oxfordshire includes the A40, A420, A41 and A418.

Oxfordshire continues to work with partners, including surrounding authorities and EEH to develop plans for other parts of the defined MRN network. For example, the A420 between Swindon and Oxford has been identified as needing improvements, including for public transport, and further work is planned to be progressed to help identify priorities for investment on this route.

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Question 19

Regional Transport Network - What do you think?

How do you think Oxfordshire should ensure it remains a significant authority across the region? How might the schemes above play a role in mitigating climate emergency, improving air quality or supporting healthy place shaping? How beneficial do you think it might be for Oxfordshire to be better linked to Cambridge by new transport links?

To respond please use the online consultation form.