

Freight Strategy

Road Freight

We rely on an efficient and reliable road freight network for our daily lives, between businesses, their supply chains and their customers to make Oxfordshire an attractive location for business and employment.

Evidence on freight movements and activity in Oxfordshire shows concentration of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) on several main corridors, particularly the A34, A420, A40 and A41. There is also a higher proportion of HGV traffic on other routes including main roads around Banbury, Bicester and Didcot. Locations for major logistics operations in the County are focused around easy access to the main road network, with large sites found in Didcot close to the A34, and Bicester and Banbury close to the M40.[1] Transport trends and forecasts also indicate an increase in use of smaller, lighter goods vehicles on the road network.

Whilst movement of goods brings economic benefits, freight vehicles have negative effects on congestion, road safety, air quality and the environment. There are moves to make lorries and other freight vehicles more environmentally friendly, but this will require significant investment and development of new vehicle fuel types, such as electric or hydrogen propulsion.



There can also be impacts on other modes of transport. Freight vehicles can block roads through on-street loading affecting buses, and park across cycle lanes and pavements, increasing risks to cyclist and pedestrians - HGVs are disproportionately represented in cyclist fatalities. Residents often complain about the environmental impact and danger caused by HGVs travelling through villages and small towns.

The main issue for Oxfordshire is balancing the need to enable an effective freight network, which ultimately is used by every resident, with the environmental, congestion, pollution and other impacts of freight transport.

Rail Freight

We continue to work with Network Rail, rail freight operating companies and businesses to increase the volume of rail freight in and through Oxfordshire. Increased railway loading gauge, which enables larger containers, has already removed thousands of HGVs from the strategic road network. This is most effective for heavy and bulky items,

and the Council is supportive of the ongoing need for the provision of appropriately sited rail freight facilities.

The Oxfordshire Rail Corridor Study has identified an increased requirement for rail freight movements, and the case for investment in strategic infrastructure to enhance the rail network will be strengthened by factoring in more opportunities for rail freight. One opportunity is use of planned rail capacity improvements, such as East West Rail, which could allow more strategic freight movements to be moved by rail (see Regional Transport Topic Paper).

Cargo Bikes

There has been a big increase in ‘last mile’ delivery by cargo bike and other bike courier services in Oxford city, allowing for a more effective network of parcel delivery by bike. This works by means of an edge of town site, where larger vehicles bring deliveries to a hub, to be offloaded into cargo bikes for the last stage of the journey in the city. Cargo bikes bring obvious benefits over vans and car deliveries in terms of congestion, pollution, climate emergency and public health.



Autonomous Vehicles

Whilst in its relative infancy, there is potential for driverless delivery systems to become more common across the county over the next few years. If electric powered, they can contribute to lowering pollution and can support the Oxford Zero Emission Zone and help address air quality problems elsewhere.

Wider considerations

Many freight movements are by nature strategic, with logistics operations being planned over regional, national and international networks. For example, the A34 in Oxfordshire is part of the wider route for HGVs between the port of Southampton and the Midlands/north of England. Many issues and potential solutions are therefore important to consider improve and manage freight at a regional level. England’s Economic Heartland (EEH), a partnership of highway authorities covering the area from Swindon to Cambridgeshire, has recently completed a Freight Study.[2] This has identified many issues and opportunities to better manage strategic road and rail freight movements across the EEH area, including a number related to mitigating environmental impacts, which Oxfordshire can benefit from.

[1] EEH Freight Study, 2019, at:
<http://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/Pages/freight.aspx>

[2] EEH Freight Study, 2019, at:
<http://www.englandseconomicheartland.com/Pages/freight.aspx>

Question 25

Freight Strategy - What do you think?

Do you have any ideas about how to better move and manage freight through and within Oxfordshire? How do you think improvements could be made?

To respond please use the online consultation form.