

Climate Emergency and Transport

In October 2018, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report on limiting global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees[1] brought the risks of climate change – and particularly the short time frame left to avoid the worst of its impacts - into sharp focus. These impacts are already being felt around the globe (from extreme heat and drought in Australia to retreating sea ice in the Arctic) and here in the UK as increasingly frequent extreme weather events.

Responding to the growing global concern, the government declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency and in June 2019 became the first country to adopt a legally binding target to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.[2]

Transport is the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions in Oxfordshire (45% of the total). Other sectors, such as housing and industry have reduced their emission by around 1/3 over the past decade, transport emissions have increased during this time. All six Oxfordshire authorities have now recognised a climate emergency, committing to act to reduce emissions from their estates and activities and to influence emission reductions across their wider geographical areas.

The Oxfordshire Energy Strategy, launched in November 2019, sets an ambitious objective to reduce county wide emissions by 50% by 2030 (from a 2008 baseline) and set the pathway to net zero by 2050[3] echoing the target in the Climate Change Act and set against a backdrop of significant growth. Some of our District Councils have set a stretch target to reach area wide net zero by an earlier date.

Forecasts suggest that we will not meet these targets if we continue ‘business as usual’. However, they also show that we could reduce emissions by almost 60% by 2030 by taking positive actions across all sectors now.

A recent government poll found that 80% of people interviewed said they were either fairly concerned (45%) or very concerned (35%) about climate change[4]. This is the highest level of concern since the question was first asked in June 2012. Asked what behaviour would have the biggest impact on tackling climate change (if everyone does it) most people (56%) highlighted choosing to walk, cycle or use public transport more instead of using a car.

Active and healthy travel choices improve personal health and wellbeing. National evidence suggests that switching to active travel for short motor vehicle trips could save £17bn in NHS costs, with benefits found within 2 years for some conditions. Fewer vehicles on the road reduces congestion, improves air quality and reduces associated health impacts.

What can we do about it?

We need to reduce emissions from transport. Whilst the County Council has some influence over other sectors, as Local Transport Authority we have the opportunity through the development of this Plan to guide the changes needed. We will need to work with partners and stakeholders across the county to reduce the number of journeys made, increase active travel and switch to low carbon transport across all modes, covering buses, freight and cars

Local actions already happening

- Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council are introducing the world's first zero emission zone in central Oxford to improve air quality, manage congestion and reduce carbon emissions; alongside controlled parking zones. (see Connecting Oxford topic paper)
- The County Council's Innovation team (the iHub) is working with partners in the City and District Councils to trial and roll out electric vehicle charging infrastructure across the county. It is also trialing innovative projects to reduce congestion, improve local travel choices and other solutions for low carbon delivery vehicles.
- The County Council is working to improve connectivity and safe cycling and walking routes, by developing Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plans. It has also updated walking and cycling design standards to guide developments.
- We are working with bus operators to continue bringing in low carbon bus fleet and new technologies including electric buses.
- The Oxfordshire Hydrogen Hub, based at Harwell is working with local partners to develop hydrogen-fuelled transport fleets
- The Council's Climate Action programme^[5] commits to reprioritise road space for low carbon travel. Making this shift will not only reduce carbon emissions but will bring further benefits for people and communities across the county.

[1] IPCC, 2018: Summary for Policymakers. In: Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, H.-O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, and T. Waterfield (eds.)]. World Meteorological Organization, Geneva, Switzerland, 32 pp

[2] UK Climate Change Act, 2008 (amendment Order June 2019)

[3] Oxfordshire Energy Strategy, 2018 <https://www.oxfordshirelep.com/energystrategy>

*[4] BEIS public attitude tracker, wave 29. March 2019
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/800429/BEIS_Public_Attitudes_Tracker_-_Wave_29_-_key_findings.pdf*

[5] <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/about-council/ClimateActionDeclaration.pdf>

Question 12

Climate Emergency and Transport: What do you think?

We know that doing nothing is not an option. What could you do, and the Council realistically support you to do, to help you make a long-term change to a much less polluting/carbon emitting mode of transport?

To respond please use the online consultation form.