

Active Travel Fund Temporary Bus Gates Frequently Asked Questions:

1. What is a bus gate?

- A bus gate is a form of access restriction that allows only buses, cyclists, emergency vehicles and other limited exempt users to access certain sections of roads between specified times of day.
- They are not actual gates but will use cameras to prevent most traffic from going past a specific point on the road. There is currently a bus gate, for example, on the High Street and George Street in Oxford.
- Bus gates are specifically designed to allow access to all parts of the city by other routes. While access will be maintained through the bus gates for certain modes of travel and vehicles, with other traffic will still be able to get to their destination via alternative routes.
- Under normal conditions, vehicles use the city centre as a cut through. The aim is to reduce the use of city centre as a through-route, thereby cutting traffic levels and congestion within and on the approaches to the centre.

2. Where will the proposed temporary bus gates be located?

It is proposed that the two temporary bus gates for the city centre are to be located:

- On Hythe Bridge Street or Worcester Street, between Frideswide Square and Beaumont Street
- On St Cross Road or South Parks Road, between Parks Road and Manor Road

The exact location of the bus gates is to be decided, and due to their experimental nature, they might even be repositioned after installation in response to feedback.

A third bus gate is also being considered on Thames Street or Oxpens Road and may be introduced if monitoring of the two initial bus gates suggests this would be beneficial.

3. When and how will the proposed temporary bus gates operate?

The proposed temporary bus gates would operate seven days a week between 7.30 am and 6.30 pm, aligning to the existing restrictions at the High Street gate. It is proposed that only cyclists, buses, coaches, taxis, private hire vehicles, Blue Badge holders and disabled tax allowance vehicles will be allowed through the bus gates during the hours of operation. Mopeds and motorcycles are being considered for access also. The granting of limited

access through one bus gate for residents within the central area of the city is also being considered.

3a. Why are tourist coaches being granted access through the bus gates?

We want to ensure tourist coaches don't remain in central areas like St Giles once they have dropped passengers off or wait in residential side street near the city centre. Instead we will require them to go on to designated coach parking at Redbridge Park and Ride, which will be encouraged by access through the bus gates.

4. When will they be installed?

We aim to install the temporary bus gates by the earliest at end of September, following consultation with statutory stakeholders, including bus operators and the emergency services and after a public survey to gather feedback on the proposals.

5. Have they been tried before?

Bus gates, were introduced in Oxford city centre in the late 1990s and have been very effective in reducing traffic levels and speeding up bus journey times; in the years immediately following their introduction traffic levels fell by around 60% in Oxford High Street, around 40% on Magdalen Bridge and around 20% in the city centre overall.

6. Why are you introducing temporary bus gates now?

Various measures are being introduced in Oxford by Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council to support recovery from COVID- 19, consistent with the Government's national plan to create an environment which is safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

With the Oxford city centre economy highly reliant on people arriving by bus (a survey undertaken in Oxford city centre in 2017 confirmed that for shopping, 70% came by Park & Ride or bus on the days surveyed), it means it is more vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19 due to people's reluctance to use public transport.

By reducing traffic levels and traffic congestion, it is intended that the bus gates will allow us to build bus use back safely in several ways:

- **Faster buses** = less time on the bus = less risk of exposure
- **More reliable buses** = less time waiting at bus stops = less risk of exposure

- **Evenly spaced buses (buses bunch in congestion)** = less crowded buses = less risk of exposure
- **More frequent buses** = less time waiting at stops & less crowded buses = less risk of exposure.

Cars cutting-through makes the city less attractive to visitors, local people, and tourists by creating congestion and polluted air. [New compelling data](#) shows that polluted air increases Coronavirus infections, hospital admissions and deaths.

The bus gates also offer the possibility of providing wider cycle lanes and allowing safer spaces for pedestrians– possibly temporarily closing roads to traffic to allow restaurants to place tables and chairs in the street and to create safer and more attractive civic spaces.

7. What is the role of the two councils?

The decision-making body when it comes to transport matters is the transport authority, which is Oxfordshire County Council rather than Oxford City Council. The City Council will be funding the installation of the bus gates, the County Council will be implementing them.

8. What is the guidance on bus travel?

The Government’s guidance on safe travel changed on 17th July to say: “Travel safely during the Coronavirus outbreak: You can help control Coronavirus and travel safely by walking and cycling, if you can. Where this is not possible, use public transport or drive. Public transport users must wear face coverings.” While it may have been the Government’s intention that people should avoid public transport earlier in the lifting of the lockdown, it clearly is its intention now to promote a return to it.

9. Why are bus gates being installed on streets with no buses?

Both of the proposed gates do have bus services using them. The ST1, ST2 and City Sightseeing service go via St Cross Road / South Parks Road and the City Sightseeing service would use the Hythe Bridge Street / Worcester Street gate.

Whilst the bus gates will be beneficial for some bus services on those particular routes, they are also expected to bring significant improvements for bus services generally (with improved journey times) and also for pedestrians and cyclists by reducing the volume of through traffic on all radial routes coming into the city centre, not just where the bus gates would be located.

10. Why are you introducing bus gates if you want more people want to walk, use a bicycle or drive into the city centre?

There is significant scope for more people to walk and cycle, particularly for those who are able and who are travelling shorter distances. During lockdown there has been increased cycling and walking in Oxford and across the country as reduced traffic levels created a safer environment for cyclists. If this is to be sustained, we need to minimise traffic dangers and maximise the space for cycling and walking. Bus gates will help achieve this by reducing traffic levels.

Bus gates offer the opportunity of reducing traffic levels and reallocating road space to create an improved pedestrian and cycling environment – such as new or wider cycle lanes, or even temporarily closing roads to traffic to allow restaurants to place tables and chairs in the street.

In terms of driving, Oxford has limited city centre car parking. Car visitors therefore represent a small proportion (less than 10% based on a survey undertaken in 2018) of total city centre footfall. However, before COVID-19, car parking was already at capacity, particularly at weekends. There is therefore no scope for more arrivals to the city centre by car.

11. What is the legal basis for introducing temporary bus gates and will there be a public consultation?

The new temporary bus gates would be implemented using experimental traffic regulation orders following guidance recently issued to local authorities by the Department for Transport to assist in the delivery of emergency active travel measures and other pandemic recovery schemes.

[The guidance for the relevant emergency legislation of 23rd May can be found here.](#)

A period of formal consultation with key stakeholders is needed before the council makes a decision to go ahead. Views and opinions are also being sought from the public using a questionnaire available on the county council's website.

The Experimental Traffic Regulation Order process is designed to allow for proposals to be trialled in the real world, and for further and wider consultation to take place during the implementation phase, alongside the collection of data. This consultation period runs for six months from the date the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order comes into force and is extended if changes to the Order are made. As such, this approach is different to a permanent Traffic Regulation Order, which requires a period of consultation prior to implementation. The experimental nature of the proposals mean that the bus gates could be changed, or even withdrawn, to respond to issues if they arise. As noted above, this approach is being encouraged by central Government.

Additionally, views are being sought from the public using a questionnaire available [here](#).

12. How long will the temporary bus gates be in place?

No timescales have been set, but Experimental Traffic Orders have a maximum time limit of 18 months' duration.

13. Aren't these proposals the same as the Connecting Oxford plan?

The [Connecting Oxford plan](#) includes proposals for permanent rather than temporary bus gates in the city centre as well as the eastern area of the city.

The new temporary bus gates in the city centre will be outside of the Connecting Oxford process, given their experimental nature and because they are being introduced to specifically support the recovery from COVID-19.

The Connecting Oxford bus gates could also differ in terms of locations, timing of operation, exemptions and physical layout. The Connecting Oxford proposals are also subject to further engagement and consultation with the public and are linked with additional measures including the provision of new orbital bus services and enhanced cycling infrastructure.

The temporary bus gates will however yield vital data including their impact on improving bus speeds and reliability, bus patronage, air quality, and cycle and walking levels.

14. Are there going to be exemptions including for Blue Badge holders and residents?

Exemptions will apply to all buses and coaches, taxis and private hire vehicles.

Blue Badge holders and disabled tax class vehicles will also be exempt from the new temporary bus gates.

Further exemptions are under consideration including for residents living within close proximity of the temporary bus gates and we welcome your views on this in the survey via the link at the end of these questions and answers.

15. I live close to one of the new bus gate locations; are you stopping me driving to and from my home during the hours of operation?

No, even during the hours the bus gates are in operation, you will still always be able to drive to and from your home although you may need to take a different route to now.

It may be further and take you longer, but with less traffic and congestion on the city's roads it should allow journeys to become more reliable compared to

normal traffic conditions. Also, see above for the possibility of exemptions for residents living close to the temporary bus gates.

16. For those who are not residents but need access to properties e.g. tradesmen, delivery drivers or carers, how do they access properties once the new bus gates are implemented?

Depending on the time of travel and route taken, then the journey may not be affected.

For affected journeys, bus gates do not prevent access to properties in the city centre, although they may well require an alternative route to be taken which might mean journeys are longer. With less traffic and congestion on Oxford's roads however, it should mean journeys are often more reliable compared to normal traffic conditions.

17. How does this affect schools based in the city centre?

The Government's guidance on re-opening schools says: "Schools should encourage parents, staff and pupils to walk or cycle to school if at all possible."

The advice from the Government is that schools, parents and local transport authorities should work together to make active modes like walking and cycling possible and safe, and where they aren't to use staggered starts.

The councils encourage schools to work with them to support safer walking and cycling and public transport.

18. Why are you introducing these temporary bus gates at the same time as extensive roadworks on Botley Road?

Various measures including temporary bus gates are being introduced to support recovery from COVID-19, with the Government driving forward a national plan to create an environment which is safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

Changes to Botley Road were planned well in advance of these temporary measures being introduced, with steps already being taken to minimise disruption. With traffic levels on the road expected to fall because of the bus gates, it should mean that any disruption caused by the roadworks is less severe than it would have been under normal traffic conditions.

19. How are the new bus gates going to help the city centre traders to recover?

Increasing footfall in the city centre is vital to the recovery. Buses are critical to this.

A survey undertaken in Oxford city centre in 2017 confirms the city centre economy is highly reliant on people arriving by bus with 70% coming by Park & Ride or bus on the days surveyed. This means the city centre economy is more vulnerable to the impacts of COVID-19 and the public's reluctance to use public transport.

The bus gates are intended to reduce the number of vehicles typically driving through the city centre each day.

By reducing traffic levels and traffic congestion, the bus gates will enable buses to operate more quickly and reliably, which means less crowded buses and therefore potential exposure to COVID-19. If people have a positive, safe experience on the bus, they are much more likely to come back.

Visitors to the city centre that need to use a car, can still do so, with all the car parks still being accessible, from all points, under these proposals. Measures, such as the bus gates, which will improve bus journey times are critical in bringing more footfall back to the city centre.

20. Will the new bus gates not just push traffic elsewhere in the city such as onto the ring road and A34?

Some traffic may be displaced to other routes, albeit with traffic levels still considerably lower compared to pre-COVID-19 levels the impacts are not expected to be significant especially in the short term. This will of course be closely monitored and action taken to address concerns as necessary.

21. Will mopeds and motorcycles be exempt from the new bus gates?

These and other potential exemptions will be considered in light of feedback received.

22. What happens next?

- You can give us your views via our ['fast feedback' survey](#). This isn't a standard consultation, and we can't allow the normal time for it, but the survey will give us valuable information which will inform decisions about the scheme.
- The temporary bus gates will be installed at the end of September at the earliest - because we propose to introduce the temporary bus gates using Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) powers, there would need to be a period of consultation and engagement with statutory stakeholders e.g. emergency services, bus operators etc. This would take place before the final decision about whether to go ahead with the temporary bus gates.
- The scheme timetable is of course subject to change in response to public feedback, changing government guidance or the local COVID-19 situation.

Bus Gate Feedback Survey:

We welcome feedback on the proposed temporary bus gates. Our feedback survey runs until 9 August 2020 at 23.59:

<https://consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult/ti/oxfordbusgates/consultationHome>