

Oxfordshire County Council's Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan What it actually proposes

Oxfordshire County Council's Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan (COTP) aims to "[replace or remove 1 out of every 4 current car trips in Oxfordshire](#)" by 2030. In setting this target, the policy deliberately takes no account of the 10% fall in traffic between 2020 and 2022 as a result of the pandemic – the starting point for this target is 2022. The COTP envisions the introduction of many new anti-car measures. It builds on previous schemes that saw the introduction of LTNs in Cowley and East Oxford (which residents rejected in consultations), numerous CPZ schemes (that residents also tended to object to), and the removal of hundreds of roadside car parking spaces outside parks, hospitals, small businesses and houses (notably around Warneford Lane and Morrell Avenue).

The best-known scheme within the COTP is the traffic filters (also known as "bus gates") scheme, which aims to limit access to six of Oxford's main roads. This is the only substantive policy within the COTP where full approval has been given by the OCC cabinet. Most other policies listed below have only been agreed in principle, and will need further consultation before they can be approved. The reason that the traffic filters scheme has been rushed through, even though the Botley Road railway works means the council can't implement the scheme until 2024, is because OCC opted to tie its internal approval for the scheme to a [grant application for electric buses](#). Moreover, OCC cabinet approval had to be granted before the end of 2022 to secure the [best price for the electric buses](#). In approving the traffic filters scheme, the council has effectively put the commercial interests of two bus companies (to secure an electric bus grant) ahead of the remainder of the Oxford economy. Remarkably, the council has no qualms about the ethics of what it has done!

The next major scheme to be promoted via the COTP is a [massive expansion](#) of the council's existing zero emission zone (ZEZ). Currently, the ZEZ has minimal impact, because it is largely confined to semi-pedestrianised city centre streets. However, the ZEZ expansion will force the drivers of most vehicles to pay a daily charge to enter the city centre. Bizarrely, several of the roads affected by the ZEZ will also have traffic filters installed on them: even if you are allowed to drive through the traffic filters, you will still have to pay the ZEZ charge, unless you drive a fully electric vehicle. The scheme is a particularly egregious form of greenwashing, because it will hit drivers of petrol cars ([who cause between 2% - 4.6% of city centre pollution](#)) with daily charges of up to £8 per day by 2025, while also not being levied on buses and coaches (who cause up to 69.9% of city centre pollution).

The council's workplace parking levy (WPL) plan is, effectively, a plan to hit all businesses with 11 or more staff car parking spaces (NOT customer car parking space) with a new tax, initially set at £600 per year, per car parking space. However, had OCC undertaken the most elementary evaluation of this scheme before approving it in principle, the council would have realised virtually no organisations in Oxford have large staff car parks. Indeed, the organisations most likely to be affected by the WPL are potentially toxic for the council. Affected organisations are likely to include [NHS facilities](#) (facing annual bills of more than £1m), suburban Oxford schools (several of whom face annual bills of £26k or more), and organisations based close to the ring road, including Oxfam's headquarters (which is facing a bill of around £60K per year). Because this policy is in the early stages of its formation, its scope remains in flux. Helpfully, any push to exempt hospitals or charities from the WPL (as happened in Nottingham), or schools, will render the policy all-but pointless.

In addition to these three headline schemes, the COTP also includes tentative plans to reduce or remove swathes of city centre car parking (notably at Gloucester Green, Worcester Street, Oxpens and Oxford Train Station car parks), increase on-street car parking charges (those around Walton Street now cost £15 for three hours – expect more of the same), remove residents and business car parking near bus routes (candidate roads include Cowley / Oxford Road and St Giles), impose yet more LTNs and "school streets" (timed street closures), create 13 more CPZs, reduce existing CPZ permit eligibility, and impose many more 20mph roads, including on bus routes.