

Policy & Programmes

HEAD OF SERVICE: [REDACTED]



By email:
transport@reading.gov.uk

CONTACT OFFICER: [REDACTED]

planning.policy@southoxon.gov.uk

Tel: 01235 422422

Textphone: 18001 01235 422422

Abbey House, Abbey Close, Abingdon,
OXON, OX14 3JE

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Dear Reading Borough Council,

Thank you for inviting responses on Reading's Local Transport Plan (LTP) concerning Reading's future travel planning and management.

South Oxfordshire District Council objects to proposals for the provision for a new Thames River Crossing and supporting orbital road which would increase traffic pressures on the local road network in Reading, Wokingham, and South Oxfordshire. We and Oxfordshire County Council have consistently raised objections to these proposals, we are therefore disappointed to see that the LTP continues to pursue a new bridge for all traffic across the river as we explain in more detail below.

However, South Oxfordshire District Council does support the policies in the draft LTP that promote modal shift and facilitate innovation in travel and transport planning. With the exception of the Cross-Thames Travel scheme, with Caversham Orbital Road, and strategic Park & Ride sites in South Oxfordshire, the LTP schemes and initiatives appear to support these aims and objectives.

Cross-Thames Travel (New Bridge) with Caversham Orbital Road (New Road)

The draft LTP's foreword epitomises our objection to the bridge and road scheme: *"It is not acceptable for the many thousands of vehicles and lorries who have no origin, destination or purpose in Reading to continue to use the town as a short cut, causing additional congestion, polluting our air and damaging our health. This document will help tackle that injustice. It is a situation no responsible local authority can ignore."*

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The draft LTP's overarching aims conflict with each other, with a desire to reduce through traffic and car dependency, while specific proposals (Cross-Thames Travel Bridge and Caversham Orbital Road) comprise road building that will improve through traffic capabilities of the local road network in Reading, Wokingham and South Oxfordshire.

The bridge and road proposals have significant implications for road building and strategic travel in South Oxfordshire. The proposed bridge crossing would provide a strategic north-south route on the edge of Reading, in a location where residential areas are shared between Reading and Wokingham. This seems counter intuitive to removing through traffic from Reading. Providing an additional Thames crossing would result in improved through traffic capabilities in the Reading area, resulting in an increased demand for vehicle journeys into and through the town, contradicting the sustainable travel priorities highlighted as key objectives in the draft plan. There is no need for additional strategic routes north-south given that the M4 provides access for the A34, as well as the A404 for the M40, both avoiding Reading. Standard navigation routing systems such as Google maps show strategic routing from Basingstoke to the M40 does not pass the eastern side of Reading, as the draft LTP proposes. Instead they use the A33 to access the M4, A404 and M40.

The proposed Cross-Thames bridge scheme and Caversham Orbital Road would funnel traffic through the Chilterns National Landscape (formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty), causing harm to this irreplaceable asset. The National Planning Policy Framework states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now termed Natural Landscapes) which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues and that "permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances".

Your previous consultation indicated clear local support for non-car initiatives as highlighted by early LTP engagement, with support for car-free spaces (90%), reallocating road space for sustainable transport (75%), as well as improving the connectivity of the walking and cycling network in Reading (92%).

The details of the scheme indicate that the new Thames crossing would be constructed alongside an Orbital Road around Caversham, unmapped but which could only be entirely within Wokingham and South Oxfordshire, so that vehicles may travel to or from the A4074. This would effectively increase traffic flows on Kings Road (A329) and London Road (A4) for Sutton Seeds Roundabout and also increase traffic demand on the highway located between the Earley (Reading) and Woodley (Wokingham) residential areas to the east of Reading, which conflicts with the desire to reduce through traffic in Reading.

It is apparent that a future crossing of the Thames near the eastern boundary of Reading would likely connect to Thames Valley Park Drive, A3290, A329(M), and Junction 10 of the M4. Existing road capacity associated with the road network to the south of the proposed crossing does not match that found in South Oxfordshire. The highway design along the A3290 and A329(M) for Junction 10 of the M4 allows for high capacity vehicle flows with multi lane movements in each direction. However this is not matched on the A4074, with single lane movements catered for and properties built in close proximity to the carriageway in both Shillingford and Nuneham Courtenay (which is a conservation area).

The Caversham Orbital Road is clearly designed to facilitate vehicular movements between the proposed bridge and A4074, as opposed to improving active travel and public transport capabilities in Reading. It thus does not match the objectives and policies in the draft LTP.

An outline Strategic Business Case for the Cross-Thames scheme was undertaken in September 2017, since that time the Cross Thames Travel Group sought to prepare a joint statement (see [here](#)) which South Oxfordshire District Council did not support (see [here](#)), particularly if the scheme came forward as a road for general traffic. Our letter of December 2020 highlights the conflicts of the scheme with regard to anticipated increase in through traffic in South Oxfordshire, impacts of car-based road building on mitigation for the climate change emergency and net-zero emissions targets. Furthermore, the Draft LTP makes reference to conclusions made by the Cross-Thames Travel Group which appear to suggest that all parties are in agreement that the project, as described, has merit for progression toward delivery. This is not the case and as such we request that the explanation on document page 101, paragraph 2, be revised to reflect this.

Furthermore, the document page 32 highlights extensive areas of flood zone 2 and 3 for the area in which a bridge and landing zones would need to be constructed. The construction would require considerable flood mitigation and hard engineering measures to mitigate flood impact. The ongoing maintenance costs of such an expansive bridge would fall on South Oxfordshire and Wokingham with no clear benefit to the two authorities.

Strategic Park and Ride

The draft LTP illustrates three northern 'Park and Ride Hub' sites (page 121), which are anticipated to be located outside of Reading's boundary, in South Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire County Council's new Mobility Hub Strategy (see [here](#)) seeks to move away from the traditional Park and Ride provisions, where car journeys are encouraged up to the boundary with a more densely urban settlement, at which point a large scale car park and frequent bus is provided for the urban journey only. Instead the new strategy seeks for a more multi modal and considerate approach to transport interchange.

Summary

The council objects to the LTP proposals for Cross-Thames Travel scheme, with radial road, and strategic Park & Ride sites in South Oxfordshire. These would require land in South Oxfordshire that is not within the remit of your plan and there is neither support from the district or county council to deliver these schemes.

Yours sincerely

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South Oxfordshire District Council