

## Policy and Programmes

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Friday, 24 December 2021

Dear Sir or Madam

### **National Highways: Vision for route strategies – planning for the future of our roads**

Thank you inviting our district to comment on the above and provide feedback on the National Highways routes in our district. We understand that these comments will be considered as part of your work on the next Route Improvement Strategy (RIS3) 2025-2030. Oxfordshire County Council will also be submitting comments and their comments are broadly supported by our District.

The Vale of White Horse District covers the area between Swindon and Oxford and this means a large section of the A34 is within our District (from north of Botley at Oxford to Gore Hill near Chilton). Officers attended the useful session held by National Highways in November on the A34 and to summarise, our Council would like to make the following observations:

#### *A34 South of Oxford*

The A34 is a key route for HGV traffic from the Midlands to the Solent but it is also a key route for local residents. Any future plans for the A34 must consider how to safely accommodate the likely future increases in all forms of traffic. Significant new housing and employment is already planned in the Science Vale areas in and around Didcot which will put additional pressure on the A34. Highways improvements set out in our Local Plans are also coming forward. For example those projects in Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 1 (reviewed 2021): Core Policy 17: Delivery of Strategic Highways Improvements within the South-East Vale Sub-Area (including relief to the road network at Rowstock, Didcot Science Bridge) with others completed, such as the junction improvements at Chilton and Milton Interchange.

At Abingdon, plans are well advanced for the planned delivery of new southbound slips at Lodge Hill, which are essential to help deliver new housing, as well as help reduce the impacts of traffic emissions on Air Quality in central Abingdon through providing an alternative way of access/ egress to the A34 (Vale of White Horse Local Plan Part 2 Core Policy 12 a). This project would allow redistribution of vehicles onto the A34 in the Abingdon area.

Some key bus routes in Oxfordshire also operate on parts of the Strategic Road Network, notably the A34 between Oxford and Abingdon and Didcot, so it will be important for us to work with National Highways in any plans for improvements. Our Vale Local Plan (Part 2 Core Policy 12a) safeguards a park and ride site for accessing Oxford from the A34 corridor at Lodge Hill and a single carriageway north-bound bus lane between the Lodge Hill A34 interchange and Hinksey Hill Interchange. These proposals have yet to be delivered.

Oxfordshire County Council has recently produced a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP<sup>1</sup>). The BSIP focuses on identifying measures to improve Oxfordshire's bus network, including enhanced services such as the proposal to provide around 166 new electric buses in and around Oxford, better information and bus stops, more simplified fares, and a number of proposed infrastructure measures to improve bus service journey time reliability and improve interchange including new mobility hubs.

Between Abingdon and Oxford there is often peak period congestion on the approach to the Hinksey Hill interchange at Oxford. This impacts on bus journey time reliability, particularly for the high frequency services between Abingdon and Oxford where there is over 10 minutes difference in peak and off-peak journeys, but also services from Didcot and Harwell. The recently published Bus Improvement Plan (BSIP) identifies the opportunity to deliver a new bus lane on the Hinksey Hill off-slip (Project C4) which alongside additional bus priority on the Oxford by-pass would significantly improve bus journey times, thereby encouraging bus use away from car use on this stretch of the A34. This is a proposal our council would like to see come forward.

### *A34 around Oxford*

Congestion is an irritation to us all and has economic impacts as an obstacle to job recruitment and retention. However air pollution is a more important reason to act, on two scales, both to mitigate climate change and to address the effects of poor air quality on people health and day to day lives. Given the proximity of the A34 to built-up areas on the edge of Oxford, National Highways must do more to help reduce vehicle emissions on the designated Air Quality Management Area at Botley<sup>2</sup>. Air pollution has health effects (morbidity and mortality) on our residents living in the AQMA in Botley. This pollution is generated by traffic on the A34, and as thousands more homes are built near the A34, more local traffic is likely to use the A34. Current mitigation efforts do not appear to be resolving the problem, and there is an urgent need to improve air quality where people live and children attend school. Two schools in Botley are affected by unacceptably high levels of air pollution when measured against WHO standards.

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<sup>1</sup> [\(CA\\_OCT1921R11 - Annex 1 Draft BSIP document bid.pdf \(oxfordshire.gov.uk\)\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Vale of White Horse | Local Air Quality Management \(air-quality.info\)](#)

On rights of way, between the Hinksey Hill Roundabout and the Peartree Interchange there are a number of pedestrian and cycle routes that either run alongside the A34, or cross over or under it, that have been identified as needing improvement as part of the Oxford Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. In several places the A34 severs footpaths and key local active travel routes, and we ask for the opportunity to be taken to upgrade these routes alongside any improvements on this stretch of the A34.

### *A34 Diversion routing*

Thank you to National Highways (Greg Stone) for attending our Council's Scrutiny Committee on the 25<sup>th</sup> November to discuss the issues raised by residents as result of night-time closures on the A34. National Highways should consider whether further investment in this part of a network could help reduce use of diversion routes. For example, making it easier to set up a contra-flows on the A34 to avoid the use of diversion routes which impact so negatively on residents.

### *Our emerging Joint Local Plan*

Our Council's Corporate Plan has a priority 'Tackling the Climate Emergency' and this will influence the development of our next Local Plan. Our Council is currently preparing this plan (together with South Oxfordshire District Council) and a key aim will be to introduce measures to address the climate emergency and transition to a decarbonised transport system. If there are proposals that will help support electric vehicle users on the national highways routes A34 and other adaptations to support decarbonisation of HGVs and other vehicles, the Councils should be approached at an early stage so that the merits of safeguarding land for such facilities adjacent to national routes can be considered in our Joint Local Plan.

I trust these observations are helpful in preparing the next Route Improvement Strategy.

Yours Sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted contact information]