

Chapter 5

Identifying Priorities for Action

Chapter Overview

This chapter sets out in more detail the process that the County Council has used to identify and prioritise Oxfordshire's worst transport problems to ensure that the improvement programme includes the best value for money schemes.

Introduction

The objectives of this Local Transport Plan will only be achieved if the actions and strategies set out in Chapters 3 and 4 are focused on the right places, and if solutions are developed based on thorough analysis of the available evidence. To ensure that the Council's investment in transport contributes as much as possible to achieving the objectives of this Local Transport Plan, the County Council has developed an Investment Prioritisation Process, grounded in a sound and growing evidence base, to identify priorities for action over the next five years.

Oxfordshire's process for prioritising transport investment consists of two key stages, which are summarised below and in Flow Diagrams 4 and 5:

1. Problem Identification and Prioritisation, consisting of:
 - > A review of congestion, accessibility, road safety, air quality, and street environment problems in the county, drawing on a range of sources.
 - > The development of a systematic problem assessment framework, which allows these identified problems to be scored against a range of criteria.
 - > The application of this assessment process to the full list of identified problems, resulting in a list of priorities for investment.

2. Solution identification: detailed investigation of problems and their causes, and identification of solutions which deliver the best improvements possible per pound spent.

The first stage of this process has already been completed, and the results of it form the basis of chapters 6 to 13. The second stage has been used to some extent to develop schemes for 2006/7, but the Council intends to use this part of the process much more extensively in developing solutions for the remaining four years of this Plan.

Stage 1: Problem Assessment

Most traditional approaches to the prioritisation of transport measures focus on the assessment and comparison of solutions or schemes. This has usually meant taking a list of schemes (pedestrian crossings, cycle tracks, road improvements etc) and prioritising them by assessing the benefits they will deliver against the costs associated with implementing them. This process is undoubtedly a critical part of the process of building a programme that delivers value for money. However, this relies upon the prior identification of where to focus scheme development and the selection of the most appropriate solution. It is in this area, the identification and prioritisation of transport *problems*, that the emphasis has been put in developing this Plan.

Schemes should address real and recognised problems - otherwise they are of limited value. A bus lane, for example, will only represent good value for money if it can be shown to have successfully addressed a particular transport "problem" - for example if it has been installed on a congested road to allow buses to bypass queueing traffic. The best value for money schemes are likely to be those that address the biggest problems most successfully for the least amount of money. To deliver value for money schemes, it is therefore essential, in the first instance, to get an accurate picture of what the transport problems are and how bad they are relative to one another.

The second Local Transport Plan provides an excellent opportunity to make this problem prioritisation process rigorous and focused on tangible outcomes. The County Council has taken up this opportunity by developing a comprehensive process, based on the priority objectives, for prioritising transport investment. This will also ensure that there is a consistency across the county to the choice of which problems should be selected for action.

The Problem Assessment Framework

The most important part of the County Council's investment prioritisation process is the framework through which the county's transport problems are assessed and prioritised. At this stage it was considered that the assessment

should be relatively straightforward and based on existing data sources. Rather than attempt to quantify the absolute level of any problem, the intention is to categorise the relative priority that it should have within our programme as compared to others within the county.

Where problems have been identified as priorities for action within the Plan then a more detailed and quantified assessment will be needed, including any required additional data collection, to ensure that the best value for money solutions are implemented. At this stage, the impact of schemes on the environment, wider local policies and planning objectives will also be assessed. The table overleaf shows the criteria used to assess the identified potential problems.

For this Provisional Plan it has not been possible to incorporate within the prioritisation process any details of any accessibility problems which have been identified through the Framework Accessibility Strategy process. It is the intention of the County Council that these will be incorporated in the final LTP submission.

An initial list of problems for consideration in this process from across the county was developed internally within the County Council. This has formed the basis for the assessment reported below and in subsequent chapters. It is the intention of the County Council that this process should be reviewed throughout the development of the final Plan and indeed throughout the Plan period so that any emerging problems can be identified and the programme adjusted to take account of this.

The County Council will continue to develop this framework to improve its ability to identify and prioritise problems in line with the overall objectives of the Council. In particular the Council will be looking to see how additional priority can be given to locations with road safety problems involving vulnerable road users. The Council is keen that the prioritisation process is consistent with best practice in road safety (and indeed all other areas of transport planning), and the process will be kept under constant review in order to improve its usefulness and relevance.

The County Council has already sought opinions from stakeholders (including District and local councils and other groups and organisations) on whether there are any problems which have not been included to date. This will continue when a wider public consultation on the Plan is carried out in Autumn 2005. Additional problems identified through these consultations will be included in the analysis for potential inclusion in the final Plan.

Problem Type	Criterion	Significance
<i>Tackling Congestion</i>	Length of road affected by the congestion	Proxy for amount of delay experienced by road users - longer stretches score more highly than short stretches
	Duration of congestion	Indication of how long the stretch of road identified is congested for on a typical day
	Traffic Flow	Taken together these give an indication of the total number of travellers affected by delay
	Number of bus services	
	Access to Oxford	Recognises Oxford's importance as a service and employment hub for the county and region.
<i>Delivering Accessibility</i>	Criteria to be determined as part of the county's accessibility audit, but likely to include an assessment of severity of accessibility problem and numbers of people affected by that problem identified through the accessibility modelling process and will also take into account levels of social exclusion on a number of parameters across the county.	
<i>Safer Roads</i>	Number of reported injury accidents in last five years	Shows frequency of accidents
	Number of people killed or seriously injured at location or on stretch of road	Shows how severe accidents are, when they occur. This criterion ensures that locations with relatively infrequent, but severe, accidents are not overlooked.
<i>Better Air Quality</i>	Severity - based on monitoring data from district councils	Areas designated as Air Quality Management Areas are given priority.
	Extent - length of road affected by problem	Proxy for the likely number of people exposed to exceedences.
<i>Improving the Street Environment</i>	Pedestrian flow	Proxy for the potential of the street to become a vibrant public space.
	Public access to property	Proportion of properties to which public have access (inc. shops, pubs, restaurants etc)
	Traffic flow	Provides an indication of the extent to which motorised traffic is intruding on a public space, and creating an unpleasant environment for pedestrians and cyclists.
	Quality of existing streetscape	Subjective judgement, assessing the quality of existing street environment.

The results of this process are that the identified problems have been split into four categories:

- > **High Priority** - the County Council will seek to identify and, where practically possible, implement proposals to resolve these problems during the second Local Transport Plan period. It is recognised, though, that some of the problems identified may require the development of schemes, or programmes of schemes, that cannot be delivered within this relatively short timescale.
- > **Medium Priority** - the County Council will aim to identify solutions to the medium priority problems within the second Local Transport Plan period and implement solutions to these where this is practically possible and where this will not prejudice the ability to resolve high priority problems.
- > **Low Priority** - in general the County Council will seek to implement solutions to the problems in this category in the second Local Transport Plan period where doing this will also contribute to the resolution of problems in the higher categories. For example where a low priority street environment problem affects the same area as a medium or high priority congestion problem then the solution devised would need to address both congestion and street environment issues.
- > **Non-priority** - A large proportion of the problems assessed did not score at a level where it would represent good value for money to consider the inclusion of solutions to them within the LTP programme. These will be kept under review in case the scale of the problem deteriorates through the Plan period. As with low priority problems, any opportunities to resolve these as part of schemes for higher priority problems will be taken.

Identified Transport Problems

The twenty worst transport problems identified through the process outlined above are listed below. The full results of the problem identification and prioritisation process, and the details on these and the other priority problems, form the basis of chapters 6 to 11.

Location	Problem Type
A40 Witney to Oxford	Congestion
London Road, Oxford	Congestion
Abingdon Road, Oxford	Congestion
A415 Newbridge to Standlake	Road Safety
A420 High Street/St Aldates, Oxford	Road Safety
Cowley Road, Oxford	Road Safety
London Road, Oxford	Road Safety
Banbury Road, Oxford	Road Safety
Green Road Roundabout (Oxford Ring Road)	Road Safety

Botley Road, Oxford (east of Binsey Lane)	Road Safety
A415 Gyratory, Abingdon	Road Safety
Banbury Road, Oxford	Congestion
A34 (Trunk Road) Oxford to M40	Congestion
A415 Marcham Road, Abingdon	Congestion
A41 Bicester to M40	Congestion
A423 Hinksey Hill to Heyford Hill (Oxford Ring Road)	Congestion
Botley Road, Oxford (east of Binsey Lane)	Congestion
A44 Salford Hill (north of Chipping Norton)	Road Safety
Oxford City Centre	Air Quality
A4165 Kidlington - Cutteslowe	Congestion

Achieving Value for Money Through Problem Prioritisation

This process will inform the County Council how to best direct its transport investment to achieve the best possible value for money - in particular:

- > It will allow the Council to compare problems of one type (e.g. congestion) directly with problems of another type (e.g. road safety) and assess their relative severity.
- > The scoring was carried out on a countywide basis. As a result, the process has led to a review of the geographical distribution of investment, both in terms of capital and revenue expenditure.
- > The problem prioritisation system reveals locations and routes where a range of problems coincide - for example, where congestion, road safety and air quality problems occur on the same stretch of road. Opportunities will be taken in such cases to identify a single solution or set of solutions to multiple problems at the same location, resulting in potentially exceptional value for money.
- > By incorporating weightings based on the results of public and stakeholder consultation the system allows the Council to modify the prioritisation to reflect local concerns and priorities.

Stage 2: Developing Value for Money Solutions

Having identified the problems that should be given priority it is then necessary to determine what would be the most appropriate solution. This will be covered in more detail in following chapters where the nature of the problems and the potential actions to resolve these are considered. In many cases there will not be a single scheme which, if implemented, would resolve the identified problems. This is particularly the case in the county's urban areas where it is likely that the most appropriate and effective course will be through a package of measures which together can resolve a number of the problems. Flow Diagram 5 sets out in more detail the Council's approach to the identification of evidence-based, value for money solutions.