

## Questions and Answers

### Botley Road closure | Impacts and mitigations

#### 1. Why do you need to close the road at Botley Road bridge?

We're getting underway with a £161 million project that will give Oxford a bigger, better station with improved accessibility and more train services for passengers and freight. It is all part of Oxfordshire Connect; our joint strategy to transform the railway across Oxfordshire and beyond.

To do this we need to replace the railway bridge over Botley Road and before that can happen, we need to do some crucial preparatory work underneath. Currently there are numerous different pipes and wires from 11 different utility companies below the road surface. These all need to be diverted out of the way before the work can be done to improve the highway and replace the bridge. Unfortunately, this can't be done when the road is open, so Network Rail, Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council have agreed to close it to enable the 11 different utility companies to work together to coordinate the removal and redirection of their network pipes that provide critical services to the people of Oxford.

#### 2. Why can't you keep one lane open under the bridge during the work?

This project needs to be complete by end of 2024 to allow for start of East West Rail services that give Oxford and Oxfordshire even greater rail services and connectivity. In order to meet that deadline, a minimum 6-month full road closure is needed this year so that we can complete the utility diversion work in time. This wouldn't be possible with single lane working.

We did consider single lane working in 2024 but this would take much longer - around 16 to 17 months.

Oxfordshire County Council's preference is for full road closure due to impact of traffic backing up along Botley Road and onto A34.

#### 3. Will emergency services be able to go through the closure?

This is an incredibly complex task, which involves digging very large and deep holes in the road, in a tightly constrained space, so we have no choice but to close the road for the work to be carried out safely.

We've been in discussion with the emergency services as we have developed our plans and explored a number of different options but, unfortunately, the risks are too high for any vehicle to pass through during the work. We are continuing to work with the emergency services to explore any potential ways in which we can assist them with providing their vital support to the local community.

**4. Will any other vehicles (blue badge/carers/taxis/Royal Mail etc) be able to go through the road closure?**

No, as there won't be a normal road surface, unfortunately it wouldn't be safe for these vehicles to go through the closure.

**5. Will the train station be open during the work?**

Yes, the train station will be operating as usual during the work except when rail services are closed between 29 July to 6 August 2023. Any temporary impact on train services and alternative travel advice will be advertised well in advance.

**6. How do people and staff get to the station? Where do station staff park? How do those with accessibility needs get to the station?**

Between 11 April and the end of October:

- Motorists that usually use Botley Road to get into the city are advised to use the one of the [city's Park & Ride sites](#) (Seacourt is closest as it is located on Botley Road), to take an alternative route into the city or may wish to consider catching the train instead from a local station with parking
- Buses will turn around just before the rail bridge and use the existing bus stops on Osney Island
- Pedestrians and cyclists will have access into the city throughout the work
- The railway station will be open throughout the works with rail services operating as normal, unless otherwise advertised

**7. Will buses be able to continue using Botley Road while it's closed at the bridge?**

Yes, we are creating a turning circle area by the bridge for buses, and we are working with the bus companies to finalise these plans.

**8. Will all the existing bus routes continue to operate long Botley Road?**

We are in ongoing discussions with the bus companies to finalise this detail.

**9. Will there be bus stops by the turning circle area?**

Unfortunately, due to the restrictions on space and narrowness of the road, including three existing junctions, it's not safe to have bus stops by the turning circle area. Instead, the existing stops on Osney Island will be for the closest pick up and drop off points.

**10. What about people with accessibility requirements?**

The route from the bus stops on Botley Road to the station is step-free but it is, of course, significantly further away than the current drop-off arrangements at the station. We are working with the bus companies and the city council's 'Inclusive Transport & Movement Focus Group' to discuss accessibility requirements and consider what can be done to assist. We are committed to listening to feedback throughout our works and are open to suggestions for any ways that we can improve accessibility.

**11. Last year you were proposing to use Seacourt Park and Ride. Why is that no longer happening?**

Our message to motorists is still to use one of the [city's Park & Ride sites](#) (Seacourt is closest as it is located on Botley Road), to take an alternative route into the city or consider catching the train from a local station which has parking facilities.

**12. Will taxis be able to reach the bridge area?**

Yes, taxis will be able to pick up/drop off in residential streets, but there won't be a taxi rank due to restrictions on space.

**13. Will there be traffic marshals in place to help manage the area by the bridge?**

Yes, there will be traffic marshals in place.

**14. How close will traffic be able to get to the bridge area?**

There will be a 'soft closure' at Ferry Hinksey Road to manage traffic going down towards the bridge area. This is to ensure that only buses, taxis, deliveries, construction traffic and residents are permitted access.

**15. With so many cyclists and pedestrians needing to use the narrow walkway under the bridge, won't it become dangerous?**

There will be traffic marshals in place to help manage the flow of people, but its important people are sensible and respect each other. Cyclists will be required to dismount before going through the walkway. People are also encouraged to consider taking other routes, if possible, e.g. Roger Dudman Way onto Walton Well Road or Osney Lane footbridge.

**16. What are you going to do to assist vulnerable people that need to access healthcare providers etc?**

We are working with the local doctors' surgeries and other healthcare providers to ensure they can put the necessary plans in place.

**17. Will Becket Street car park remain open during the closure?**

Yes, Becket Street car park will be open during the closure but will need to be accessed via Abingdon Road.

**18. What are you going to do to assist parents of school children that need to use that road?**

We are working with the local schools to ensure they can put the necessary plans in place.

**19. Mill Street has two housing developments being built along that stretch at the moment, will you be working with them to coordinate traffic?**

Yes, we are working with the two construction companies (Graham and Henry) to put a traffic management plan in place.

**20. In November you said you were going to close the road for a year. What’s changed?**

Network Rail, Oxfordshire County Council and Oxford City Council have jointly agreed the revised programme of works.

The original plan was for a 12-month closure starting in January 2023, but this was reviewed in light of the complexities involved in diverting 11 different utilities pipe networks whilst maintaining those services to the city, as well as feedback from local communities.

The new plan gives some respite by splitting the road closures into two, while still delivering the railway improvements which are vital for Oxfordshire on schedule for the end of 2024.

**21. Why has it taken so long to finalise your new plan?**

Since December we have been working with partners to refine our plans for the delivery of the project and reduce the overall risk to ensure it can be delivered. Due to the complexity of the project and the number of partners involved, we needed time to work through all the detail with them.

**22. Did you consider any other options for your new plan?**

Yes, we looked at the following six different options during our review.

Option	Utility work road closure (2023)	Closure for road work (2024)	Bridge replacement	Post work	Total length
1	6 months	7 months	4 days (Aug 24)	NA	13 months
2	12-13 months combined		4 days (Xmas 23)	NA	12/13 months
3	6 months	8 months	4 days (Easter 24)	NA	14 months
4	6 months	11-month single lane	4 days (Aug 24)	NA	17 months
5	6 months	11-month single lane	4 days (Easter 24)	NA	17 months
6	6 months	4 month	4 days (Easter 24)	6 months single lane	16 months

*All options assume July/August 2023 closure of railway remains unaffected*

**23. Why didn’t you choose another option?**

Even partially closing a major artery like Botley Road for an extended period will cause significant disruption. There were many considerations which were factored into our joint decision (NR and the Councils). These include:

Programme constraints:

- All work needs to be completed by end of 2024 for start of East West Rail services

- Project requires existing blockade in July/August 2023 for high speed crossovers, signalling and Osney Lane footbridge
- Four days of track access required for bridge replacement between March and Summer 2024
- Bridge replacement prior to March 2024 would again increase the risk profile of the project and put utility diversions back on the critical path
- The need to avoid a clash with major planned works on the railway network e.g. February 2024 – Planned engineering work between Birmingham and Derby

Other considerations:

- BMW shutdown period during first two weeks of August
- Programme for Oxfordshire County Council wider highways plans (including traffic filters), with preference for single 12-month road closure. Project are considering options for single lane working to help reduce the impact
- Road transport for rail replacement services will be a significant challenge outside of the summer period

#### **24. Can you guarantee that you won't need to change your plans again?**

We've always been clear that this was going to be an incredibly complex project which comes with numerous risks. We have been working with partners since December to refine our plans for the delivery of the project, with the aim of reducing the overall risk and allowing for more flexibility within the work programme to help ensure any delays don't have a significant impact on the project.

However, due to the nature of projects like this, the programme will continue to evolve as we progress and could be subject to further changes. We will communicate updates on progress throughout the course of the works.

#### **25. How confident are you that you will deliver these works on schedule?**

For major projects like this we carry out reviews throughout the planning to ensure that the plan is robust and can be delivered. If the confidence level is too low (or risk too high), we do not proceed. Our confidence for this project is currently over 90% and we continue to make tweaks to the programme to further improve this. The project will also be undergoing another detailed review in the coming weeks to thoroughly test this confidence rating. Nevertheless, complex programmes are just that, and we will keep the community fully up to date as these works progress.

#### **26. Has there been a financial impact to this change in plan? If so, who is covering the additional cost?**

The total funding for this project has not changed. One reason for this is that we have continued to progress with our preparatory works while our review with all partners has been undertaken.

## Utility diversion work

**27. How many different utility companies are going to be involved with this work?**

11 – Thames Water, Vodafone, O2, Virgin, SSE, SGN, Lumen, Openreach, NEOS, GTC and Oxford University.

**28. Why don't you have more control over the utility companies and the work they need to do?**

The process for managing utility diversion work is set out in the 'New Roads & Streetworks Act 1991'

(<https://www.standardsforhighways.co.uk/ha/standards/mchw/vol6/sect2/sa1005.pdf>). There are a number of stages involved (C2 to C9) which need to be completed with each utility company involved (11 in this case). Five of the stages (C2 to C6) need to be completed before the work can be done. For more information visit <https://www.premierenergy.co.uk/blog/utility-diversions/>

**29. Given you say that there is a lot of risk associated with the utility diversion work, shouldn't the companies themselves be doing more?**

Given the number of utility companies involved (11), our contactor, Kier, is coordinating the work programme with them to ensure there is a single approach. While Kier will be able to do the majority of the preparation work, some of the more specific technical work will need to be done by the individual companies themselves to ensure their services are not disrupted.

**30. What assurances have you got from the utility companies?**

At the end of last year we wrote to each company to remind them of the significance of this project and get their assurance they will do all they can to support the delivery of it. We have also setup a utility forum which will oversee the work and help deal with any issues. This group has been meeting weekly and has been well attended, with representatives engaging from each of the major companies.

**31. When will you be able to confirm the schedule of work for each utility company?**

The utility companies were given a deadline of Monday 27 February to confirm their outline plans with us. These will be finalised over the coming weeks.

**32. Have you been able to coordinate your project with the work that Thames Water needs to do on Osney Bridge?**

We are in ongoing discussions with Thames Water and Oxfordshire County Council to finalise the plans for this work etc.

## Rail service impact

### 33. When will rail services be affected?

There will be periods in both 2023 and 2024 when rail services will be affected into and out of Oxford station.

In 2023 there will be preparatory and follow up work either side of a nine-day upgrade of signalling, track and structures:

- Sunday 26 March
- Sunday 2 April
- Saturday 29 July - Sunday 6 August
- Sunday 13 August
- Sunday 10 September
- Sunday 15 October

In 2024 we will be replacing the Botley Road railway bridge. Dates for disruption to rail services are yet to be confirmed but these will also include shorter preparatory and follow up work either side of a longer period of work which is likely to take place in the summer.

### 34. What will passengers do then?

Alternative travel advice will be advertised well in advance. For more information see [www.nationalrail.co.uk/engineering](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/engineering) or [www.GWR.com/upgrade](http://www.GWR.com/upgrade)

### 35. Why do you need to stop rail services?

Some of the work to improve the railway can only be done when trains aren't running. We always try and schedule this at times when passenger numbers are lower so that we disrupt as few people as possible. We will keep people moving and alternative arrangements and travel advice will be published well in advance.

### 36. What work will take place during when there are no rail services?

We will be completing the high-speed crossover work that we started last summer (some of which got postponed due to the death of The Queen), necessary signalling work, as well as work on Osney Lane footbridge.

### 37. Why can't the bridge be replaced during the 2023 blockade?

Due to the complexity of the utility diversion work, it would not be completed in time and therefore we would not be ready to replace the bridge. That's why we have moved it to 2024.

### 38. Why can't you move all the work into one next year?

Closures of sections of the railway are planned years in advance, in consultation with train and freight operating companies so that they can plan accordingly and look to minimise

disruption. Any changes would require further consultation with them and likely result in increased costs through compensation payments etc. We also aim to time railway closures in Oxford with the two-week shutdown period of the BMW plant in August to minimise any disruption to their operations.

**39. When will you know the dates for the bridge replacement?**

We are currently in discussions with train and freight operating companies to finalise this.