

# Pedestrianising Oxford Street

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**LONDONASSEMBLY**

**Research Unit**

## Overview

Oxford Street has long been considered the premier retail destination in London, and is a strategic part of London's road network.

This paper provides a history of proposals for the transformation of Oxford Street made by successive Mayors of London, London Assembly Members, Westminster City Council and other stakeholders.

The proposals described in this paper date back to the Oxford Street tram proposed by Ken Livingstone in 2004, to the latest proposals for pedestrianisation announced by Mayor Sadiq Khan in September 2024.

## About the Research Unit

The London Assembly Research Unit provides an impartial research and information service. We undertake research and analysis on key issues in London to inform the Assembly's work.

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# 1 Introduction

On 17 September 2024, [Mayor of London](#) Sadiq Khan announced plans to pedestrianise Oxford Street in the [City of Westminster](#). Other proposals to transform Oxford Street had been announced previously by Sadiq Khan in 2016, while his predecessors as Mayor, Boris Johnson and Ken Livingstone, also set out plans to improve the area through the introduction of new transport services, traffic reductions and public realm improvements.

Sadiq Khan's new plan is the first to propose a Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) for Oxford Street, which may become the planning authority for the area, and also involves transferring responsibility for Oxford Street from Westminster City Council to the [Greater London Authority](#) (GLA) and [Transport for London](#) (TfL) (see section 6). The proposal to establish an MDC also means that the London Assembly has a significant role in any decision on the proposals, as the Assembly has the power to veto the establishment of an MDC.

This paper provides a history of the proposals from successive mayors, London Assembly Members, Westminster City Council and other key stakeholders to transform Oxford Street, since the establishment of the GLA in 2000. The paper does not seek to assess the merits of any of the proposals, but where relevant does share information on stakeholder views about the proposals that have been made.

## Oxford Street

Oxford Street is London's premier retail destination, which has been described as "the city's most famous street and the busiest shopping destination in Europe."<sup>1</sup> It is home to more than 300 shops, designer outlets, high-street chains and landmark stores, as well as other cultural attractions.<sup>2</sup>

Around 1.9 kilometres long, Oxford Street runs from Marble Arch at its western end, to Tottenham Court Road at the eastern end. It adjoins both Regent Street and Bond Street, which are also major retail streets.

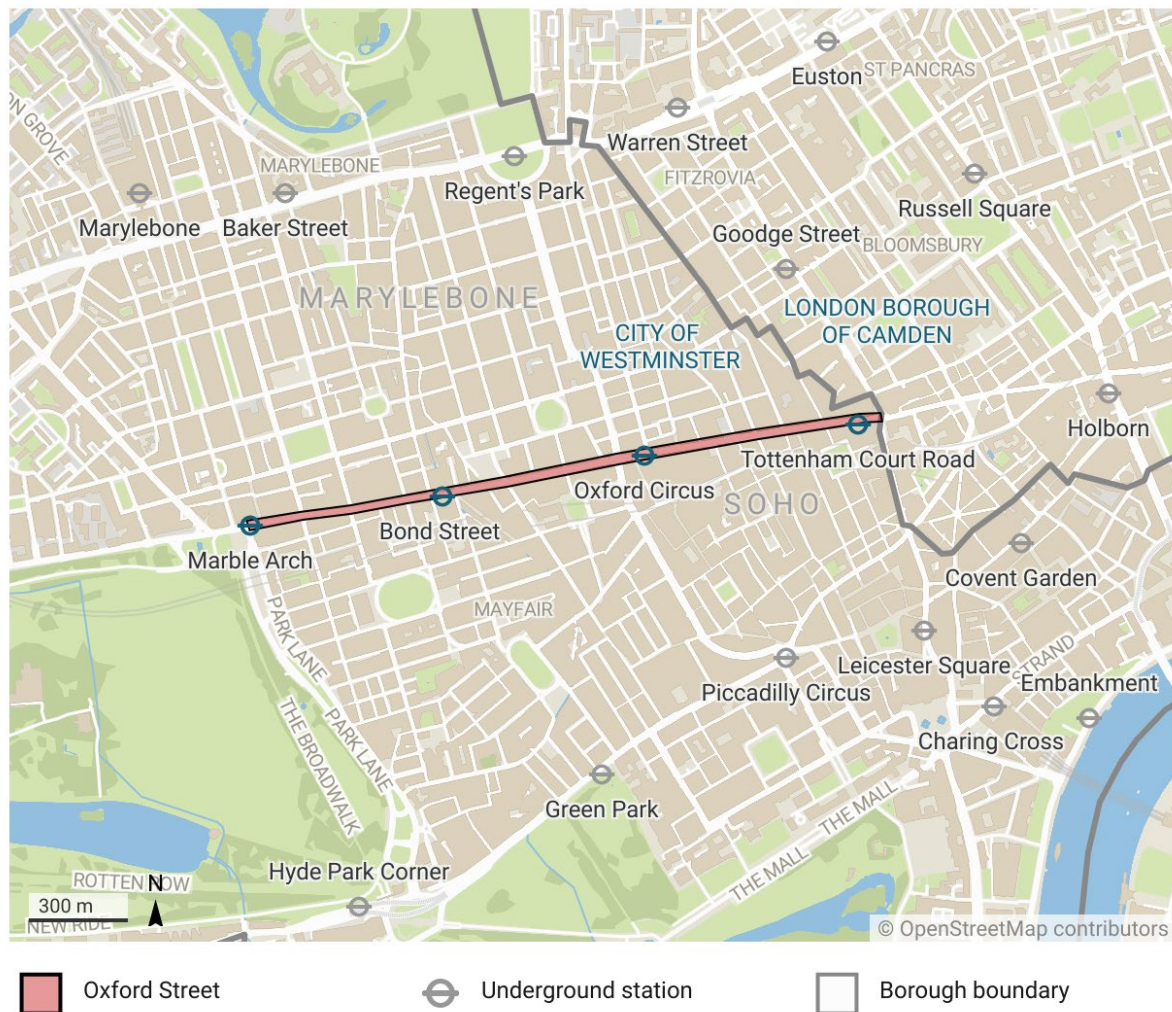
Oxford Street is entirely within the City of Westminster, which also covers the area to the west, north and south of the street. In the east, Oxford Street runs to the border between Westminster and the [London Borough of Camden](#), which starts at Tottenham Court Road.

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<sup>1</sup> London Chamber of Commerce and Industry, [LCCI supports Mayor's plans to transform Oxford Street](#), 17 September 2024

<sup>2</sup> Visit London, [Oxford Street](#), accessed 22 October 2024; [West End Shopping itinerary](#), accessed 22 October 2024

**Figure 1: Location of Oxford Street within central London**



Source: London Assembly Research Unit / Datawrapper

Oxford Street is in London’s ‘West End’. There is no single definition of the West End. In 2014 the West End Partnership (see section 3.3) defined the core West End as covering the whole of the St James and West End electoral wards in the City of Westminster, and half of the Holborn and Covent Garden ward in the London Borough of Camden.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> West End Partnership, [The West End: Vision 2030](#), 2014, page 29

**Figure 2: London’s West End**



Source: [West End Partnership](#), 2014

## Economic contribution

Oxford Street makes a significant contribution to the London economy. As set out in Sadiq Khan’s announcement of his pedestrianisation proposals in September 2024:

“Oxford Street is famous across the world. It still welcomes more than 500,000 visitors every day and generates approximately five per cent of the capital’s economic output (Gross Value Added), the equivalent of £22.75 billion (in 2019). It is home to numerous flagship stores, including Selfridges and John Lewis, as well as being a key commercial centre.”<sup>4</sup>

There are concerns, however, about the economic prospects of Oxford Street. Some flagship stores have closed, such as House of Fraser in 2022 and in recent years there has

<sup>4</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayor of London and government announce bold plans to transform Oxford Street](#), 17 September 2004

been an increase in candy, vape and souvenir stores.<sup>5</sup> Competition from online retail and new shopping centres such as Westfield has grown in recent years, and retailers on Oxford Street and surrounding areas have called for a fairer business rate regime.<sup>6</sup> A report prepared for [Westminster City Council](#) highlighted risks to the area in July 2023:

“In recent years Oxford Street has been threatened, initially by increased competition from online retailers and large retail complexes like Westfield shopping centre, and significantly rising business costs, particularly rents and business rates.”<sup>7</sup>

## Overcrowding, road safety and air quality

A range of other issues facing Oxford Street have been considered by those proposing transformation schemes. In 2021, Westminster City Council described each of the issues below as ‘urgent’:<sup>8</sup>

- **Overcrowding:** TfL have described levels of pedestrian overcrowding in the busiest parts of the day as ‘severe’, and stated this can act as a deterrent to people with mobility issues visiting the street.<sup>9</sup>
- **Road safety:** In 2017, TfL said there had been on average 60 injuries per year as a result of collisions over the previous three years.<sup>10</sup> In a written answer to the Assembly, Mayor Sadiq Khan said there had been four fatalities and 125 serious injuries as a result of collisions on Oxford Street between May 2016 and May 2024.<sup>11</sup>
- **Pollution:** Air quality and noise pollution Oxford Street have consistently been raised as issues by stakeholders.<sup>12</sup> Air quality has improved on Oxford Street in recent years; London’s Air Quality Network monitoring statistics found that so far in 2024, pollutant levels on Oxford Street are within the Government’s Air Quality Strategy limits.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> BBC News, [House of Fraser: Oxford Street flagship store to close](#), 17 November 2021; Westminster City Council, [Leader statement on candy stores and souvenir shops](#), 24 May 2023

<sup>6</sup> New West End Company, [Business leaders launch manifesto for growth ahead of General Election](#), 10 June 2024

<sup>7</sup> Westminster City Council, [Oxford Street and Oxford Circus Projects: Full Business Case - Technical Executive Summary](#), July 2023, page 3

<sup>8</sup> City of Westminster and The Crown Estate, [Oxford Street District: Oxford Circus](#), June 2021, page 4

<sup>9</sup> TfL, [Oxford Street Transformation Update](#), Programmes and Investment Committee, 13 October 2017, item 9, page 100

<sup>10</sup> TfL, [Oxford Street Transformation Update](#), Programmes and Investment Committee, 13 October 2017, item 9, page 100. A London Assembly report in 2014 found 24 collision hotspots in London, with 10 of these on Oxford Street. See London Assembly, [Feet First: Improving Pedestrian Safety in London](#), March 2014, page 20

<sup>11</sup> Mayor of London, [Killed or Seriously Injured \(KSI\) Incidents](#), 15 October 2024. The figures for 2024 are provisional at the time of writing and will be finalised in September 2025.

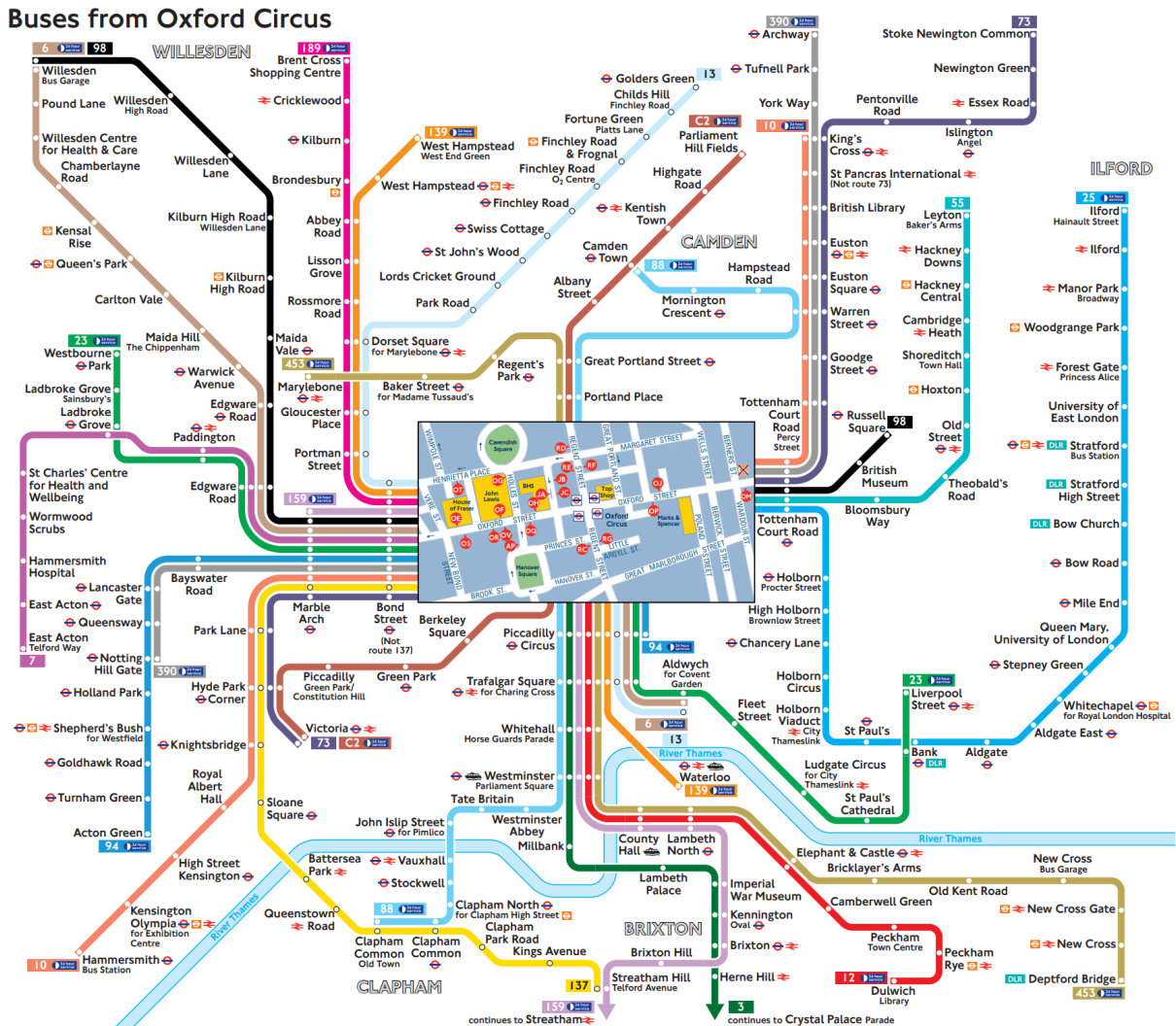
<sup>12</sup> See London Assembly, [Streets Ahead: Relieving congestion on Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street](#), February 2010; West End Commission, [Final Report](#), April 2013; Living Streets, [The Mayor of London and Government have announced bold plans to transform Oxford Street](#), 17 September 2024; City of Westminster and The Crown Estate, [Oxford Street District: Oxford Circus](#), June 2021

<sup>13</sup> London Air Quality Network monitoring statistics, [Westminster – Oxford Street](#), accessed 16 October 2024

### Bus services

As well as being a major retail destination, Oxford Street is a strategic road, providing one of the few major east-west routes through central London. Although most of Oxford Street is closed to private cars from 07:00 to 19:00 every day except Sunday,<sup>14</sup> it serves as a key route for bus services crossing central London, as well as for taxis and cyclists.

Figure 3: Oxford Circus bus map<sup>15</sup>



Source: [Transport for London](https://www.tfl.gov.uk), accessed 16 October 2024

<sup>14</sup> BBC News, [Oxford Street to be pedestrianised by 2020](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-london-13581111), 14 July 2016

<sup>15</sup> This diagram shows only buses passing through Oxford Circus, which is at the centre of Oxford Street. It may not include some routes that use the street at either end of Oxford Street.

The large number of buses using Oxford Street – often moving slowly due to congestion – has been a challenge that stakeholders have attempted to address when proposing transformation plans, as discussed in a number of the reports cited in this paper.<sup>16</sup>

TfL has made changes over several years to reduce the number of buses using Oxford Street.<sup>17</sup> At least 16 routes continue to use the street, as shown in the diagram from TfL on the previous page, displaying routes that serve Oxford Circus, in the centre of Oxford Street.<sup>18</sup>

## 2 2000 to 2008

Transformation of Oxford Street was not an early priority for the first elected Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone. In his Mayor's Transport Strategy, published in 2001, Oxford Street was not mentioned in the text of the strategy.<sup>19</sup> During Mayor Livingstone's second term, however, he made new proposals for major changes to Oxford Street and the surrounding area, as well as supporting annual traffic-free days.

### 2.1 Traffic-free days

Traffic-free days, styled as 'Very Important Pedestrian' (VIP) days, were first introduced to Oxford Street in 2005, and held annually until 2012. The days were organised by the [New West End Company](#), the Business Improvement District for the area, which represents Oxford Street retailers and other West End businesses. They were supported by TfL, which produced pedestrian maps for visitors, as well as re-routing buses serving Oxford Street.<sup>20</sup> The traffic-free days took place on a Saturday in the run-up to Christmas.

In 2007, Mayor Livingstone was asked by the Assembly if he intended to expand the traffic-free days beyond one day per year. His response stated:

"This event requires a good deal of planning by TfL, the City of Westminster, LB Camden and other agencies to ensure the VIP Day is a success each year. More frequent closures or greater pedestrianisation would require a review of transport

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<sup>16</sup> For instance, see Mayor of London, [Way To Go! Planning for better transport](#), November 2012; West End Commission, [Final Report](#), April 2013; London Assembly, [Letter from Caroline Pidgeon AM, Chair of Transport Committee to Mayor of London](#), 5 September 2016

<sup>17</sup> See Mayor of London, [Oxford Street buses](#), 25 May 2009; TfL, [Oxford Street Transformation Update](#), Programmes and Investment Committee, 13 October 2017, item 9, page 103

<sup>18</sup> TfL, [Buses from Oxford Circus](#), accessed 16 October 2024

<sup>19</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayor's Transport Strategy](#), 2001. Similarly in the first London Plan, published in February 2004, Oxford Street was mentioned but there were no policies specifically aimed at improving conditions on the street. See Mayor of London, [The London Plan: Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London](#), February 2004, page 232

<sup>20</sup> TfL, [Transport for London supports Very Important Pedestrian Day](#), 1 December 2006. Ken Livingstone was the Chair of Transport for London, and as Mayor had significant powers over the organisation, including the appointment of the TfL Commissioner, setting TfL's budget and a general power of direction. See London Assembly Research Unit, [Transport for London](#), 2024

operations in and around the area and it is this aspect which is being examined as part of feasibility work for a tram scheme.”<sup>21</sup>

**Figure 4: Very Important Pedestrian Day on Oxford Street, 2008**



Source: Robert Scoble [[CC BY 2.0](#)]

## 2.2 Tram proposals

During the 2004 Mayoral election, the Liberal Democrat candidate Simon Hughes stated in his manifesto that he wanted to make Oxford Street “pedestrian friendly”, and made a further pledge during the election campaign to fully pedestrianise the street.<sup>22</sup>

Ken Livingstone did not advocate full pedestrianisation of Oxford Street. He publicly stated in a Mayor’s Question Time meeting with the London Assembly in 2006 that to pedestrianise Oxford Street would be a “disaster.”<sup>23</sup> He said his focus was on “taking out the buses and the cabs, and putting in a tram.”<sup>24</sup> He also voiced his support for the annual traffic-free days, which he said had led to “a dramatic increase in sales” on those days.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Mayor of London, [Traffic Free Shopping Day](#), 10 December 2007

<sup>22</sup> Simon Hughes, [For a London United](#), 2008, page 3; The Guardian, [Hughes vows to pedestrianise Oxford Street](#), 27 April 2004

<sup>23</sup> London Assembly, [Mayor’s Question Time](#), 13 September 2006, page 10

<sup>24</sup> London Assembly, [Mayor’s Question Time](#), 13 September 2006, page 10

<sup>25</sup> London Assembly, [Mayor’s Question Time](#), 13 September 2006, page 12

The central feature of Mayor Livingstone's plan for Oxford Street was the introduction of a new Oxford Street tram service.<sup>26</sup> No formal proposal was published by the Mayor or TfL to fully outline this idea, although some details were reported in the media and discussed with the London Assembly.

The tram was proposed to run along the entire length of Oxford Street, from Marble Arch to Tottenham Court Road. Buses and taxis were to be removed, and redirected to other nearby streets.<sup>27</sup> There would be new transport interchanges at either end of Oxford Street, with the Marble Arch gyratory to be removed and public realm improvements introduced at Tottenham Court Road. The planned completion of the tram and related projects was 2012-13.<sup>28</sup>

Mayor Livingstone spoke to the Assembly about the challenges of delivering the proposals:

"I have to tell you this is a decision that I have made and is not one that is welcomed by the bus operators, or by TfL. It is going to cause huge problems. There will be huge logistical problems which is why you have to have major works at Marble Arch, as we do away with the gyratory system, and much of the land saved will be a point where people can get off the bus and transfer to the tram. That is the easy bit of it. At the other end, at Centre Point, we will need to work around the works of Crossrail – the Crossrail station immediately at Tottenham Court Road<sup>29</sup> – and come up into a plaza which has sufficient space there, and that is much more difficult."<sup>30</sup>

In November 2006, TfL published an update to its Business Plan. The new version briefly referenced the Mayor's proposal, noting: "Development work will also take place on the proposed Oxford Street tram."<sup>31</sup> This was one of a number of different tram projects mentioned as priorities in the Business Plan, although none were funded.

## 2.3 West End Retail Area Planning and Development Commission

At the time of publicising the tram proposals in summer 2006, Mayor Livingstone had already established a West End Retail Area Planning and Development Commission, with the objective to "develop policy options to inform review of the London Plan and other mayoral

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<sup>26</sup> Ken Livingstone proposed several other major tram projects, which were mostly not delivered. For instance, the [Cross River Tram](#) was a proposed tram link from Camden Town to Brixton and Peckham. Consideration had been given to delivering the Oxford Street tram as a branch of the Cross River Tram, but Ken Livingstone ruled this out in 2006. London Assembly, [Mayor's Question Time](#), 13 September 2006, page 10

<sup>27</sup> Private cars are prevented from using Oxford Street, between 07:00 and 19:00, every day except Sunday.

<sup>28</sup> London Assembly, [Mayor's Question Time](#), 13 September 2006, page 10; BBC News, [Mayor's Oxford Street tram vision](#), 31 August 2006

<sup>29</sup> This is now the Tottenham Court Road Elizabeth line station, which opened after significant delay in May 2022.

<sup>30</sup> London Assembly, [Mayor's Question Time](#), 13 September 2006, pages 11-12

<sup>31</sup> Transport for London, [Business Plan](#), November 2006

strategies.”<sup>32</sup> The Commission included representatives of West End retailers and other businesses, Transport for London, Westminster City Council, Camden Council and academics. The Commission was chaired by Ian Henderson, the Chair of the New West End Company at the time, with the GLA providing administrative support.

This Commission produced its final report in November 2006. It described the Commission’s overall conclusions as:

- “The West End needs urgent action to sustain and develop its distinct retail offer, based on availability of a unique breadth of shopping and the presence of large, flagship or otherwise distinctive shops.
- There is a need for a holistic approach that addresses the needs and opportunities presented by the whole area.
- The nature of the area (particularly in the retail core of Oxford, Regent and Bond streets) means there is a tension between what makes it successful – the range and choice of shops – and the things that put people off – notably congestion (both traffic and pedestrian) and environmental quality (including fumes and pollution, litter and dirt). That these are often different sides of the same coin highlights the difficulty of the issues – and choices – considered by the Commission.
- Although at the moment the links between retail and other leisure uses are not as strong as they could be (with the exception of eating and drinking), there are a number of overlapping and mutually-supportive retail, leisure, creative and visitor-based agglomerations in the area and there is real scope to make more of these.”<sup>33</sup>

On the issue of pedestrianisation and the proposed tram, the Commission backed Mayor Livingstone’s position. It stated that, “we do not think that wholesale pedestrianisation of the area is practical or desirable,” but did advocate devoting more space for pedestrians on Oxford Street.<sup>34</sup> The Commission welcomed and supported Ken Livingstone’s tram proposal:

“Over the longer term, we warmly welcome the proposal made by the Mayor for a tram-based public transport system for Oxford Street. While we have not had the time or capacity to examine this idea in detail, we consider it is just the kind of creative and innovative idea that should be examined carefully for the longer term.”<sup>35</sup>

The Commission called for other transport improvements in the area, including increasing capacity at London Underground stations in the area. The Commission also advocated reviews of how taxis and buses use Oxford Street, with the aim of reducing traffic overall.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Report of the West End Central Retail Area Planning and Development Commission, November 2006, page 3. This report is not available online.

<sup>33</sup> Report of the West End Central Retail Area Planning and Development Commission, November 2006, pages 7-8.

<sup>34</sup> Report of the West End Central Retail Area Planning and Development Commission, November 2006, page 61

<sup>35</sup> Report of the West End Central Retail Area Planning and Development Commission, November 2006, page 64

<sup>36</sup> Report of the West End Central Retail Area Planning and Development Commission, November 2006, page 63

## 2.4 Oxford Street Transit Feasibility Study

In a written answer to the Assembly, Mayor Livingstone confirmed that a feasibility study for Oxford Street transit would begin in November 2007.<sup>37</sup> TfL commissioned three companies to undertake a study of different aspects of the transit options for Oxford Street and their implications: Mott Macdonald on transport, John McAslan & Partners on the public realm and Colin Buchanan & Partners on the economic impact.<sup>38</sup>

In a further answer to the Assembly, the Mayor stated that this study would be published in 2009.<sup>39</sup> However, the study was suspended after the GLA elections in 2008, when Ken Livingstone left office. A report from the study based on findings so far was produced and later provided to the London Assembly Transport Committee.<sup>40</sup> As of August 2008, the study had identified a shuttle bus, tram and pedestrianisation as the three main options for transit options on Oxford Street:

“The shuttle bus transit offers a high quality transit system while facilitating a step change in the amount of space available to pedestrians and improvements to the public realm. Thereby achieving the greatest retail impact and benefit. It can be introduced relatively quickly and without recourse to [Transport and Works Act] processes. However, further work is needed to quantify the costs and benefits, in order to demonstrate its financial viability and its advantages over the other options considered.

The tram/light rail option could achieve similar retail impact benefits but at considerably greater cost, with extensive and prolonged disruption during construction including to Park Lane and at far greater risk and delay due to the approval process.

Pedestrianisation/vehicle exclusion provided the greatest environmental and pedestrian benefits thereby delivering the same wider economic impacts. There would, however, be a reduction in accessibility along Oxford Street which would require further study.”<sup>41</sup>

## 2.5 Shift in priorities

Ken Livingstone’s proposal to introduce an Oxford Street tram was not implemented.

TfL published a further update to its Business Plan in December 2007, in which the Oxford Street tram proposal was no longer mentioned.<sup>42</sup> Other tram projects were noted as being

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<sup>37</sup> Mayor of London, [Cross River Tram](#), 21 October 2007

<sup>38</sup> London Assembly, [Written submission from Transport for London to Transport Committee](#), 2009

<sup>39</sup> Mayor of London, [Oxford Street tram feasibility study](#), 14 November 2007

<sup>40</sup> The study is unpublished but was provided to the Assembly by TfL during Victoria Borwick’s rapporteurship into traffic congestion on Oxford Street. It is not available online.

<sup>41</sup> TfL, [Oxford Street Transit Feasibility Study: Project Suspension Report](#), August 2008

<sup>42</sup> TfL, [Business Plan](#), December 2007

under development, including the Cross River Tram and extension of Croydon Tramlink, although neither was funded.<sup>43</sup>

In March 2008, Westminster City Council, TfL and the New West End Company (representing retailers on Oxford Street and other West End businesses) published a joint action plan for improving Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street (the 'ORB Action Plan').<sup>44</sup> This included a range of actions to improve the public realm. There were plans set out to review bus stop and taxi rank locations, and a goal to reduce traffic levels, although there was no overall plan to remove buses and taxis. The action plan instigated the introduction of the diagonal 'X' pedestrian crossing at Oxford Circus, which was delivered in 2009 and is now a distinctive feature of the area.<sup>45</sup>

**Figure 5: 'X' pedestrian crossing at Oxford Circus**



Source: GLA – Caroline Teo

<sup>43</sup> Ken Livingstone proposed several major tram projects, which were mostly not delivered. The [Cross River Tram](#) was a proposed tram link from Camden Town to Brixton and Peckham. Consideration had been given to delivering the Oxford Street tram as a branch of the Cross River Tram, but Ken Livingstone ruled this out in 2006. London Assembly, [Mayor's Question Time](#), 13 September 2006, page 10

<sup>44</sup> New West End Company, TfL, City of Westminster, [Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street: An Action Plan for the Retail Streets](#), March 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Mayor of London, [ORB action plan](#), 25 May 2009; BBC News, [Oxford Circus 'X-crossing' used by 90 million people](#), 2 November 2010

The ORB Action Plan did not contain any proposal for pedestrianising Oxford Street. There was a reference to Mayor Livingstone's tram proposal, although without confirmation this would go ahead, and the term used in the plan was 'transit system' rather than tram. It stated:

"The Mayor of London has made clear his interest in exploring the possibility of a transit system for Oxford Street, and TfL is considering the various options for how this could be achieved."<sup>46</sup>

By the time of the 2008 Mayoral election, Ken Livingstone was no longer advocating an Oxford Street tram as an immediate priority. There was no specific reference to a tram in his manifesto, and he spoke during the campaign needing to avoid the disruption of a major construction project during the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, which were to be held in London. He also appeared to shift focus towards providing a shuttle bus service rather than a tram. At his transport manifesto launched, he said:

"We can't get a tram in Oxford Street before 2012 and it most likely wouldn't be a good idea to have Oxford Street dug up during the Olympics... What we're looking to do as you know is reduce the number of buses that are running through with a good interchange at Marble Arch and another one at Centre Point, and going down perhaps in the first instance to a single dedicated bus route just going backwards and forwards."<sup>47</sup>

## 3 2008 to 2016

Boris Johnson was elected Mayor in 2008. Early in Mayor Johnson's term of office, there was a clear indication that he intended to address congestion on Oxford Street, although he opted not to take forward his predecessor's proposals.

### 3.1 Cancellation of tram proposal

In November 2008, the Mayor announced when launching a new TfL business plan that, on cost grounds, he was halting further development of several transport infrastructure schemes that had been in development under Ken Livingstone. This included the unconfirmed proposals for an Oxford Street tram, or other transit system, which had not been funded at this stage. TfL's press release stated:

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<sup>46</sup> New West End Company, TfL, City of Westminster, [Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street: An Action Plan for the Retail Streets](#), March 2008, page 27.

<sup>47</sup> London: Mayor & More, [Livingstone's Transport Policy Launch](#), March 2008. An audio recording of Ken Livingstone's speech and question and answer session is available on this page, with Oxford Street addressed from around 26 minutes and 40 seconds.

**“Schemes that lack funding and will not be progressed by the Plan:**

Many of these projects promised by the previous Mayor were never funded beyond their initial design stages and had no money set aside to deliver them. To build them all now would require over £3bn in additional funding.

...

**Oxford Street Tram/Transit (£500m):**

The proposal to improve links between Marble Arch and Tottenham Court Road is unaffordable and the disruption during construction would be very substantial. TfL is working with Westminster Council to implement streetscape improvements as part of New West End Company ORB proposals. TfL is also assessing options to reduce bus volumes along Oxford Street at minimum negative impact to bus passengers.”<sup>48</sup>

## 3.2 Victoria Borwick rapporteurship

In 2009-10, Victoria Borwick AM was appointed as a rapporteur by the [London Assembly Transport Committee](#), to lead an investigation into congestion in Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street area.<sup>49</sup>

This report set out a wide range of challenges facing Oxford Street and the surrounding area, including road safety, air pollution, and poor bus reliability and inefficiency, noting negative impacts for local residents and businesses. The Committee recommended new benchmarks to assess the delivery of improvement plans, and measures to improve the public realm. On long-term solutions, the report backed further consideration of both a shuttle bus option and part-pedestrianisation:

“The Committee also examines more radical, long-term solutions. It notes that there is no work currently being carried out to reconsider the long-term operation of the transport system in the area. It recommends that this should be undertaken and should include consideration of a comprehensive reconfiguration of the bus network to take the pressure off the area. This would open up other radical options which have the potential to enhance the streets in the West End. In particular, the Committee recommends that two options should be considered in more detail: a shuttle bus to replace the major bus routes travelling up and down Oxford Street and pedestrianisation of the short area between Oxford Circus and Bond Street.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> TfL, [Mayor outlines 10-year plan for massive transport expansion](#), 6 November 2008. It is not clear what the £500 million cost estimate was based on; this figure did not appear in the business plan or in the earlier Oxford Street Transit Feasibility Study. Other schemes that Boris Johnson announced would not proceed included the Cross River Tram, Thames Gateway Bridge and extensions of the Croydon Tramlink and Docklands Light Railway.

<sup>49</sup> A rapporteurship investigation involves one individual Assembly Member leading an investigation on behalf of a Committee, with the final report then agreed by the Committee as a whole.

<sup>50</sup> London Assembly, [Streets Ahead: Relieving congestion on Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street](#), February 2010, page 9

### 3.3 Mayoral plans and strategies

In a November 2008, early in Mayor Johnson's first term of office, a publication entitled 'Way To Go!' set out a 'direction of travel' for a forthcoming transport strategy. In this publication, Mayor Johnson discussed the number of buses on Oxford Street, asking: "Oxford Street is still bisected by a panting wall of red metal. Can we really leave it as it is?"<sup>51</sup>

Mayor Johnson and TfL set an ambition to reduce bus traffic, with the Mayor telling the Assembly in a written answer: "TfL is implementing a 10 per cent reduction in bus services on Oxford Street in 2009, and developing plans for a further 10 per cent reduction during 2010."<sup>52</sup> This ambition was in keeping with the ORB Action Plan, as discussed in section 2.

When a new Mayor's Transport Strategy was published in May 2010, there was no reference to Oxford Street.<sup>53</sup> Several other plans and strategies were published by Mayor Johnson in his second term of office (2012-2016), relating to London's roads and transport infrastructure. Oxford Street was referenced in some of these reports, although without new plans or priorities being set out:

- Mayor Johnson published a '2020 Vision' in June 2013, setting out proposals for a range of transport schemes including new road tunnels, extending the cycle hire scheme, constructing a new airport and devolving National Rail Services; Oxford Street was mentioned in this vision as an example of improvement work undertaken, but no new proposals were discussed.<sup>54</sup>
- The Roads Task Force was an independent body set up by the Mayor, which reported in July 2013. Oxford Street was one of the case studies in the Task Force report. The report ruled out pedestrianisation, but envisaged that in the long-term the removal of taxis during peak shopping hours might be an option to relieve congestion.<sup>55</sup>
- The Pedestrian Safety Action Plan, published in July 2014, did not refer to Oxford Street.<sup>56</sup>
- The London Infrastructure Plan 2050, also published in July 2014, did not refer to Oxford Street.<sup>57</sup>

It is important to note that this was a period in which there were other significant developments on London's transport network.<sup>58</sup> Notably, construction of Crossrail (now the Elizabeth line) got underway, including two stations in the Oxford Street area, and the London Underground was being upgraded. London's streets underwent significant change in

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<sup>51</sup> Mayor of London, [Way To Go! Planning for better transport](#), November 2012

<sup>52</sup> Mayor of London, [Oxford Street buses](#), 25 May 2009

<sup>53</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayor's Transport Strategy](#), April 2010

<sup>54</sup> Mayor of London, [2020 Vision: The Greatest City on Earth: Ambitions for London by Boris Johnson](#), June 2013

<sup>55</sup> TfL, [Roads Task Force](#), July 2013, Annex 3

<sup>56</sup> TfL, [Pedestrian Safety Action Plan](#), July 2014

<sup>57</sup> Mayor of London, [London Infrastructure Plan 2050](#), July 2014

<sup>58</sup> For further discussion see BBC News, [The transport legacy of outgoing mayor Boris Johnson](#), 6 May 2016

many areas as segregated cycle lanes were introduced, and a cycle hire scheme was established. The Olympic Park (now Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park) was also being constructed, including several major sporting venues, for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

### 3.4 West End Commission

In 2012, Westminster City Council established the West End Commission, to explore how to ensure the success of London's West End. The Commission considered the transport infrastructure of the West End, its governance and leadership, environment, crime and safety, business community, and other areas.

The Commission's final report in April 2013 made a wide range of recommendations. The Commission was particularly concerned about reducing bus congestion, and suggested consideration of new bus interchange facilities at either end of Oxford Street. The Commission also recommended a significant expansion of existing traffic-free days on Oxford Street:

**“Reducing vehicular traffic and rebalancing the streets:** weekend car-free days should be expanded into a more coherent programme similar to New York's 'Summer Streets' and the advent of Crossrail should be used as an opportunity to look at an improved balance of street use which reduces the dominance of vehicles. The question of rebalancing the use of street and square space in favour of those on foot is inescapably at the heart of the challenge for the West End, and the Commission has received a significant volume of evidence on this subject. In particular, it has been able to draw upon the experience of 'VIP days' or 'event days', when either or both of Oxford Street and Regent Street (and Bond Street) have been closed to general traffic. These days have been highly selective, but research in general shows increases in visitor numbers, visitor satisfaction and retail sales, as well as decreases in local air pollution. The success of these days is sufficient to place the idea of a broader programme of traffic-free days firmly on the agenda; as demonstrated by the success of New York's 'Summer Streets', the idea that their justification should rest on some type of special event is unnecessary, although themed promotion will no doubt need to play a part. Traffic-free weekend days should be made more frequent, with potentially a major programme through the summer holiday period, for example. The Commission can see in principle a good case right away for perhaps as many as 15 traffic-free days per year on the West End's major retail streets.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> West End Commission, [Final Report](#), April 2013, page 40

This recommendation was not implemented. In fact, later in 2013, it was confirmed that the annual traffic-free day on Oxford Street (see section 2.1) expected in December that year was being cancelled,<sup>60</sup> and no further traffic-free days on Oxford Street have taken place.

### 3.5 West End Partnership

The West End Partnership was established in 2013 following conclusion of the West End Commission, which had advocated for a ‘single voice’ for the area.<sup>61</sup> The Partnership included representatives of the GLA, TfL, Westminster City Council, Camden Council, business groups and the [West End Community Network](#), representing residents.

The Partnership aimed to ensure the West End would be economically successful, culturally vibrant and safe, with improved transport access, less congestion, better air quality, and high quality public space.<sup>62</sup>

Oxford Street was a priority for the Partnership, although it did not advocate pedestrianisation or any new form of public transport. Its focus was on traffic reduction:

“The major east-west routes of Oxford Street and Euston Road will be a key focus for significant change. Working with the Mayor, the Partnership will reduce traffic volumes on Oxford Street and develop solutions to remedy long-standing transport challenges.”<sup>63</sup>

The Partnership later produced a Delivery Plan for its vision. This included plans for public realm improvements, particularly on the western side of Oxford Street. Regarding traffic reduction on Oxford Street, the Partnership defined its priorities as:

#### “Reducing Traffic

- A comprehensive reduction in vehicles of all types with greater use of suitable surrounding streets for loading, servicing and taxi pick up.
- Improvements in public realm and prioritisation of pedestrians to create the right ambiance for a successful trading environment.
- Radically improve the street’s air quality and additional measures to reduce traffic accidents.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The London Assembly agreed a motion regretting the cancellation and calling on the Mayor to make representation to the New West End Company and Westminster City Council, but he declined to do so. London Assembly, [Very Important Pedestrians Day](#), 6 November 2013; Mayor of London, [Letter to Darren Johnson AM, Chair of the London Assembly](#), 27 February 2014

<sup>61</sup> West End Commission, [Final Report](#), April 2013, page 48

<sup>62</sup> West End Partnership, [The West End: Vision 2030](#), 2014, page 8

<sup>63</sup> West End Partnership, [The West End: Vision 2030](#), 2014, page 16

<sup>64</sup> West End Partnership, [The West End: Delivery Plan 2015-2030](#), 2014, page 16

### 3.6 Stephen Knight report and petition

In 2014, the London Assembly's Liberal Democrat group published a report, led by Stephen Knight AM, entitled 'Oxford Street: The Case for Pedestrianisation'.<sup>65</sup> This report set out challenges facing Oxford Street that were similar to those identified in Victoria Borwick's 2009 report. It also highlighted a potential increase in pedestrians due to the opening of Crossrail, and growing competition from other retail centres.

The report made a number of recommendations, including the re-introduction and extension of traffic-free days. For longer-term transformation, the report recommended a two-stage programme:

- By 2017, remove all current bus routes from Oxford Street and introduce a dedicated shuttle bus service running the length of Oxford Street
- By 2020, fully pedestrianise Oxford Street

In November 2015, Stephen Knight presented a petition at the London Assembly meeting, making similar proposals:

“We call on the Mayor of London to work with TfL and Westminster City Council to remove all motor traffic from Oxford Street, introduce a zero emission shuttle bus, leading to full pedestrianisation of Oxford Street by 2020.”<sup>66</sup>

Boris Johnson's response to the petition in December 2015 stated:

“Transport for London and Westminster City Council are, on behalf of the West End Partnership, examining a range of options for improving the environment for pedestrians on Oxford Street. Crossrail provides a unique opportunity to reconsider how transport serves Oxford Street and the wider West End. Options aimed at providing additional, better quality space for pedestrians include, reducing traffic, widening footways, reducing and relocating bus stops and pedestrianisation.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> London Assembly Liberal Democrat Group, [Oxford Street: The Case for Pedestrianisation](#), October 2014

<sup>66</sup> London Assembly, [Pedestrianisation of Oxford Street](#), 4 November 2015

<sup>67</sup> Mayor of London, [Letter to Stephen Knight AM](#), 22 December 2015

## 4 2016 to 2021

In the May 2016 election for Mayor of London, four leading candidates all made manifesto pledges to pedestrianise and/or remove motor traffic from Oxford Street: the Labour Party's Sadiq Khan, the Conservative Party's Zac Goldsmith, the Green Party's Siân Berry and the Liberal Democrats' Caroline Pidgeon.<sup>68</sup>

### 4.1 Transport Committee hearings

Shortly after Sadiq Khan's victory, the London Assembly Transport Committee held a meeting in June 2016 to discuss the new pedestrianisation proposal. Representatives from TfL, the New West End Company, [Licensed Taxi Drivers Association](#), [London TravelWatch](#) and [Living Streets](#) attended the meeting.<sup>69</sup>

A second meeting was held with the new Deputy Mayor for Transport, Valerie Shawcross, to discuss the proposals and other transport issues. The Deputy Mayor confirmed to the Committee that the pedestrianisation scheme would be going ahead as a priority.<sup>70</sup>

After these meetings, the Committee wrote to Mayor Khan to share its views.<sup>71</sup> The Committee welcomed the Mayor's ambition and set out what it saw as the key challenges for delivering pedestrianisation, including developing a shared vision among all local stakeholders, innovative changes to bus services to reduce their number on Oxford Street without diverting them to nearby streets, and ensuring a strategic approach across the West End. The Committee also highlighted the need to ensure continued access to Oxford Street for disabled visitors, the importance of delivering new east-west cycle routes in central London, and the need for safer pedestrian crossings between Oxford Street and Hyde Park.

### 4.2 The Mayor's pedestrianisation proposals

In November 2017, Sadiq Khan and TfL published a full set of proposals for the pedestrianisation programme, for public consultation.<sup>72</sup> The proposals were also included in

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<sup>68</sup> Sadiq Khan, [A Manifesto for all Londoners](#), 2016, page 8; Zac Goldsmith, [My Action Plan for Greater London](#), 2016, page 70; Siân Berry, [The Power of Good Ideas](#), 2016, page 10; Caroline Pidgeon, [Making London work for everyone](#), 2016, page 39. These were the four candidates finishing with the highest number of votes in the Mayoral election.

<sup>69</sup> London Assembly, [Transport Committee meeting](#), 15 June 2016, item 9

<sup>70</sup> London Assembly, [Transport Committee meeting](#), 13 July 2016, item 5, page 1

<sup>71</sup> London Assembly, [Letter from Caroline Pidgeon AM to Mayor of London](#), 5 September 2016

<sup>72</sup> Mayor of London, [Plans for transformation of Oxford Street published for consultation](#), 6 November 2017. The original consultation material has been archived: TfL [Have your say on the transformation of Oxford Street](#), 6 November 2017. An earlier consultation on principles for the programme also took place: TfL, [Have your say on the transformation of Oxford Street](#), 24 April 2017

TfL's new Business Plan, and the Mayor's Transport Strategy, published in December 2017 and March 2018 respectively.<sup>73</sup>

The plan proposed by Mayor Khan included a staged removal of traffic and pedestrianisation, along the whole of Oxford Street. Subject to consultation, the first stage was to focus on the western section of Oxford Street, with around 800 metres of the street between Oxford Circus and Orchard Street (approximately two-thirds of the distance from Oxford Circus to Marble Arch) being pedestrianised. Traffic would not be fully removed from this area, as the north-south roads crossing Oxford Street in this area would still be operational, but there would be no east-west traffic along this stretch of Oxford Street; this would include a prohibition on cycling along the pedestrianised area.

Other proposed measures included:

- raising the carriageway to the level of the existing pavement
- 25 improved pedestrian crossings
- new seating along the street
- a new 800-metre long work of public art to be commissioned
- new and extended taxi ranks
- further reduction in bus services along Oxford Street
- new cycle routes on nearby roads, subject to further consultation.<sup>74</sup>

The first stage, including pedestrianisation of the western section, was due to be achieved in 12 months, in time for the planned opening of the Elizabeth line in December 2018.<sup>75</sup> Mayor Khan planned to carry out a further consultation in spring 2018 on further transformation of the eastern section between Oxford Circus and Tottenham Court Road. The objective set out by the Mayor was to complete the full transformation programme by 2021.

In a written answer to the Assembly, Mayor Khan confirmed the projected costs for the scheme:

“The Transport for London budget to deliver the transformation of Oxford Street and its surrounding district was £92.5m. Of this, £43m was allocated to the Oxford Street West phase of the project, £39m to Oxford Street East and £10.5m to the Marble Arch end of Oxford Street.”<sup>76</sup>

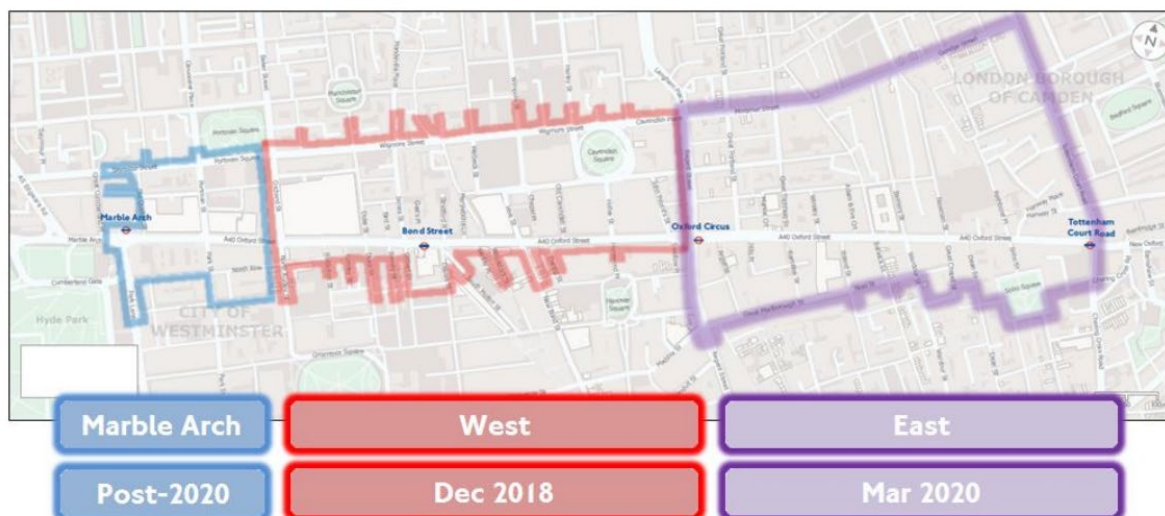
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<sup>73</sup> TfL, [Business Plan 2018/19 to 2022/23](#), December 2017; Mayor of London, [Mayor's Transport Strategy](#), March 2018

<sup>74</sup> Mayor of London, [Plans for transformation of Oxford Street published for consultation](#), 6 November 2017. Summary list produced by Research Unit.

<sup>75</sup> Mayor of London, [Plans for transformation of Oxford Street published for consultation](#), 6 November 2017.

<sup>76</sup> Mayor of London, [Oxford Street pedestrianisation \(4\)](#), 25 June 2018. This answer was given after the scheme was cancelled.

**Figure 6: 2017 Oxford Street transformation scope and delivery phases**

Source: [Transport for London](#), 2017

The programme was to include joint governance arrangements via the West End Partnership (see section 3.5), which included the GLA, TfL Westminster City Council, Camden Council and the New West End Company.<sup>77</sup> The Partnership established both an Oxford Street Strategic Board and an Oxford Street Project Board.

### 4.3 Cancellation in 2018

The pedestrianisation proposals set out by Sadiq Khan in 2017 were not implemented, primarily as a result of Westminster City Council withdrawing its support for the scheme.

The Council had initially appeared to support the Mayor's proposals, subject to consultation with residents. Westminster City Council's Deputy Leader, Councillor Robert Davis, provided a supportive quote in the Mayor's announcement of the scheme in 2017, stating: "we have a once in a lifetime opportunity to transform the Oxford Street district into the world's best outdoor shopping experience and an unrivalled place to live, work and visit."<sup>78</sup> Councillor Davis had also stressed that the plans were not finalised, stating: "we now want to hear from as many people as possible about what they think about the detailed plans before we take any final decisions."

After the conclusion of the consultation in December 2017 and the Council elections in May 2018, the Council's position shifted. The then Council Leader, Councillor Nickie Aiken, was reported to have stated: "It was clear through two public consultations and recent council elections that local people do not support the pedestrianisation proposals."<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> TfL, [Oxford Street Transformation Update](#), 13 October 2017, page 101

<sup>78</sup> Mayor of London, [Plans for transformation of Oxford Street published for consultation](#), 6 November 2017

<sup>79</sup> BBC News, [Oxford Street pedestrianisation plans ditched](#), 8 June 2018

In response to a written question, the Mayor told the Assembly:

“It is Westminster City Council who have unilaterally decided to abandon two years of joint work developing a project that would have been in the best interest of Londoners by addressing the issues facing Oxford Street and the West End. This is shown by the nearly three quarters majority support in the recent consultation.

I have stated that I will not walk away from Oxford Street, but have also set out the clear challenges that any alternative scheme must address, as the original proposal would have done. Transport for London will provide technical input, but Westminster must now show that they can address those challenges.”<sup>80</sup>

## 5 2021 to 2024

In the May 2021 election for Mayor of London, delayed from 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, two of the leading candidates made manifesto pledges relating to Oxford Street. The Liberal Democrats’ Luisa Porritt restated the party’s long-term commitment to pedestrianising the street, while the Green Party’s Siân Berry’s pledged to use Mayoral powers to add Oxford Street to the TfL Road Network to enable strategic transport projects (see section 6.2 of this paper).<sup>81</sup>

Sadiq Khan was re-elected as Mayor at this election. In his second term, Mayor Khan did not pursue the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street as a policy priority. Much focus in this period was on responding to and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. The fall in passenger income during the pandemic had a significant financial impact on TfL.<sup>82</sup> There were, however, a number of major changes on London’s transport network, including the introduction of the Ultra Low Emission Zone and the opening of the Elizabeth line. As set out in section 5.2, TfL also implemented changes to bus services, particularly in central London.

Although there was no new Mayoral initiative focused on Oxford Street in the 2021-2024 period, Westminster City Council launched a major programme to improve Oxford Street, which included new plans for partial pedestrianisation.

### 5.1 Oxford Street District

In June 2021, Westminster City Council announced its ‘Oxford Street District’ programme for the improvement of the area, in partnership with [The Crown Estate](#), which has significant

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<sup>80</sup> Mayor of London, [Oxford Street \(1\)](#), 23 July 2018

<sup>81</sup> Siân Berry, [A New Start for London](#), 2021, page 38; Luisa Porritt, [Take London Forward](#), 2021, page 18. Oxford Street was not discussed in the manifestoes of the Labour Party’s Sadiq Khan, the incumbent Mayor, or the Conservative Party’s Shaun Bailey. See Sadiq Khan, [For London](#), 2021; Shaun Bailey, [My Plan to Give London a Fresh Start](#), 2021. These were the four candidates finishing with the highest number of votes in the Mayoral election.

<sup>82</sup> See London Assembly Research Unit, [Transport for London](#), 2024.

land and property holdings in the vicinity. Initial plans for the programme had been set out as part of a wider strategy in 2019.<sup>83</sup>

The centrepiece of the plan was the part-pedestrianisation of Oxford Street, in the immediate surroundings of Oxford Circus. This included the creation of two pedestrian-only ‘piazzas’ the the west and east of Oxford Circus, from Great Portland Street to John Princes Street. In total, the pedestrianised area would be a 150-metre stretch of Oxford Street.<sup>84</sup>

The pedestrianisation scheme was to be introduced using a six-month Experimental Traffic Order by the Council, effectively allowing the impacts to be monitored before a decision on whether the changes should be permanent.<sup>85</sup> The piazzas were due to be delivered by autumn 2021.

Westminster City Council allocated £150 million for the Oxford Street District scheme in 2021, while noting that the full programme would cost £232 million and require support from the private sector.<sup>86</sup>

Although smaller in scale than Sadiq Khan’s previous plans for pedestrianisation, the creation of the traffic-free piazzas would have required significant changes to bus services on Oxford Street. By September 2021, TfL had already made plans to remove several bus routes from Oxford Street, with some routes diverted to surrounding streets and others terminated at earlier stops before reaching Oxford Circus.<sup>87</sup>

## Cancellation of piazzas

The plans for part-pedestrianisation were opposed by residents’ groups in the area. The West End Community Network, bringing together several residents’ group, had opposed Mayor Khan’s pedestrianisation scheme, and similarly opposed the Oxford Street District plans. Its response to the initial strategy in 2019 stated:

“The most worrying of all the three proposals is the scheme to pedestrianise Oxford Circus. This not only violates the promises made by Westminster City Council to abandon pedestrianisation for good, both during and after the election, but resurrects some of the worst aspects of the Mayor’s discredited scheme. In routing all traffic around neighbouring roads it reintroduces pedestrianisation by recreating a miniature version of the previous plan – that is by creating a needless diversion around a straight line.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Westminster City Council, [Oxford Street District: Place Strategy and Delivery Plan](#), February 2019

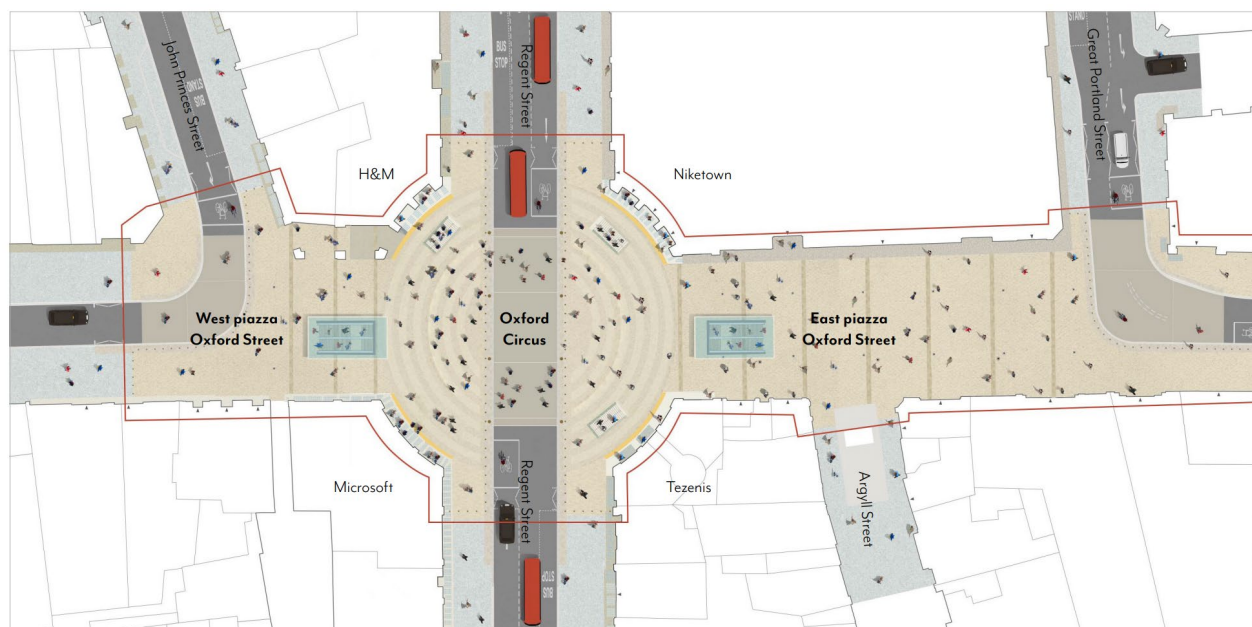
<sup>84</sup> Westminster City Council, [Unveiling our plans for ‘iconic’ Oxford Circus](#), 16 June 2021. This webpage is no longer live but has been accessed via an internet archive.

<sup>85</sup> Westminster City Council and The Crown Estate, [Oxford Street District: Oxford Circus](#), June 2021, page 8. Experimental Traffic Orders can last for up to 18 months and are made under [section 9](#) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

<sup>86</sup> Westminster City Council, [Oxford Street District: Business Case and Investment Approval](#), 9 April 2019

<sup>87</sup> TfL, [Oxford Street Pedestrianisation/Buses Impact](#), 1 September 2021

<sup>88</sup> West End Community Network, [Oxford Street plans](#), January 2019

**Figure 7: Plans for pedestrian piazzas at Oxford Circus, 2021<sup>89</sup>**

Source: [Westminster City Council and The Crown Estate](#), June 2021

Ultimately, Westminster City Council decided not to proceed with its Oxford Circus piazzas proposals. The first indication of a change in plans from the Council was in September 2021, several months after the proposals were announced. A statement from the Council noted resident concerns about the proposal, although held open the possibility that it might go ahead:

“Having listened to residents and reviewed the cost effectiveness of the proposal for a pilot for the Oxford Circus piazzas, we have decided that it’s better to move forward with a focus on permanent schemes. Therefore, the temporary piazzas previously planned to open at Oxford Circus later this year will not now go ahead, along with all associated enabling street works. We’ll be focusing on engaging with residents and other stakeholders on potential permanent schemes for piazzas at Oxford Circus, along with associated enabling works.”<sup>90</sup>

In October 2022, after the 2022 Westminster City Council elections returned a Labour Party majority on the Council, the Council confirmed that it would not be taking forward the pedestrianisation plan:

“Whilst we support having additional space for pedestrians, we do not believe complete pedestrianisation is the way forward. Previous attempts to pedestrianise Oxford Street have met significant opposition and we have considered the concerns raised about the potential impact on public transport, traffic diversions and disabled access in the area. Reopening the debate will be a costly and time consuming

<sup>89</sup> Westminster City Council and The Crown Estate, [Oxford Street District: Oxford Circus](#), June 2021, page 9

<sup>90</sup> Westminster City Council, [Update on Oxford Street](#), 14 September 2021. This webpage is no longer live but has been accessed via an internet archive.

distraction when our priority is to deliver much needed improvements as quickly as possible.”<sup>91</sup>

## 5.2 Bus action plan and Central London Bus Review

In March 2022, TfL launched a [Bus action plan](#), aimed at improving the experience of travelling by bus in London, in order to support modal shift toward public transport. The five priorities of the plan are:

- **“Journey times:** We urgently need to deliver a transformational improvement to bus journey times in order to provide a bus service Londoners will choose to use
- **Connections:** We need a bus network that works as part of an integrated public transport system
- **Decarbonisation and climate change resilience:** We need to deliver a zero-emission bus fleet, but for this to be most effective we also need a high quality service that will attract people away from cars
- **Inclusive customer experience:** We need to build confidence in the experience of taking the bus
- **Safety and security:** Londoners expect their bus network to be safe and secure. The pandemic has underlined this”<sup>92</sup>

In June 2022, TfL followed the action plan with a consultation on a [Central London Bus Review](#). This review set out to help enable TfL to implement some of the action plan priorities, while also responding to other challenges including the need for financial savings and a reduction in passenger numbers as a result of COVID-19.<sup>93</sup> As set out by TfL:

“Our plan to achieve the savings required by the Government includes a four per cent reduction in bus kilometres. Demand has reduced over the years on some roads leading into central and inner London due to changing travel patterns, which have been accelerated by the pandemic. In response to this and the savings we have been required to make, we are consulting on changes to some bus routes in and around central London.

We are consulting on withdrawing some individual bus routes or sections of routes where they are covered by other high-frequency services or are close to alternative stops. These proposals aim to ensure we still have a strong bus service to support London’s economic recovery, while simplifying the network to ensure buses are operating frequently and reliably in the areas that need them most.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Westminster City Council, FAQs about our updated plans for Oxford Street

<sup>92</sup> TfL, [Bus action plan](#), March 2022

<sup>93</sup> For further information see London Assembly Research Unit, [Transport for London](#), 2024

<sup>94</sup> TfL, [Central London Bus Review](#), 1 June 2022. This webpage is no longer live but has been accessed via an internet archive.

The review did propose changes to the way Oxford Street would be served by buses, but these were not of the scale envisaged in previous traffic removal schemes. The New West End Company's response – submitted on behalf of Oxford Street retailers and other West End businesses – reflected the modest nature of the proposals, as stated in TfL's consultation report:

“New West End Company and its partners held a long-standing aspiration to significantly reduce bus frequencies on Oxford Street and support the principles of TfL's approach. However, it stated that while several proposals would reduce the number of buses on parts of Oxford Street, it was disappointed the opportunity for further reductions was not taken as part of these proposals. The stakeholder would like to see bus stops rationalised and shortened and road widths adjusted where possible. Ideally, they would like to see zero bus standing in the Oxford Street District area, particularly the north-south routes across Oxford Street.”<sup>95</sup>

Ultimately, most of the proposals put forward by TfL for service reductions were not implemented. There were 78 specific proposals from TfL in the review, relating to 71 different bus routes. Following the consultation, eight of the proposals were confirmed as going ahead, with a further 10 being introduced in a modified form. 60 of the specific proposals did not go ahead; this included proposals to remove routes 12 and 74, serving Oxford Street.<sup>96</sup>

### 5.3 Oxford Street Programme

In 2023, Westminster City Council launched a new initiative called the 'Oxford Street Programme'. This programme had similar elements to the earlier Oxford Street District proposals, although it did not include the pedestrianised piazzas of the earlier plan. Westminster City Council described its overall vision as:

“Oxford Street is a destination for cultural vibrancy and a great place to live, work and visit. We want to make your experience even better by making it a more inclusive, prosperous and sustainable high street for everyone.

We propose an enhanced public space with wider footways, better seating, more trees and other planting, attractive lighting, clearer signage and more direct vehicle routes. The Oxford Street Programme has been developed to deliver just that.”<sup>97</sup>

Specific measures proposed for Oxford Street in the programme included:

- “Widen pavements and upgrade pavement materials
- Create amenity spaces for rest and play and upgrade existing spaces

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<sup>95</sup> TfL, [Central London Bus Review 2022: Consultation Report](#), November 2022

<sup>96</sup> TfL, [Central London Bus Review 2022: Decision summary and next steps](#), November 2022.

<sup>97</sup> Oxford Street Programme, [Welcome to the Oxford Street Programme](#), accessed 27 October 2024. This webpage is no longer live but has been accessed via an internet archive.

- Create areas of respite along the street
- Plant new trees and other greenery where possible
- Upgrade the street lighting
- Raise all signalised junctions along Oxford Street to the same level as the footways
- Upgrade existing and provide new signalised pedestrian crossings
- Remove all central medians and traffic islands along the length of Oxford Street.”<sup>98</sup>

The programme did not include any plan to pedestrianise Oxford Street, although some side streets including Davies Street and James Street would be pedestrianised.<sup>99</sup>

Following public consultation on the plans, Westminster City Council announced that it would be going ahead with the scheme.<sup>100</sup> Work was due to begin on implementation of the scheme in autumn 2024. The expected cost of the overall Oxford Street Programme was £90 million.<sup>101</sup>

However, as of October 2024, the Oxford Street Programme has been cancelled by Westminster City Council, in light of Mayor Khan’s new pedestrianisation proposals (see section 6 for further information). The website for the programme now states:

“Due to the announcement from the Mayor of London, the Oxford Street Programme will not proceed further. The Council is committed to working constructively with the Mayor and the Government to ensure the best outcomes for local communities, businesses and London.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Oxford Street Programme, [Oxford Street](#), accessed 27 October 2024. This webpage is no longer live but has been accessed via an internet archive.

<sup>99</sup> Oxford Street Programme, [Oxford Street](#), accessed 27 October 2024. This webpage is no longer live but has been accessed via an internet archive. See also BBC News, [Roads near Oxford Street to be pedestrianised](#), 13 December 2023

<sup>100</sup> Westminster City Council, [Oxford Street plans given go ahead by two-thirds of residents, visitors and businesses](#), 9 January 2024

<sup>101</sup> Westminster City Council, [Oxford Street plans given go ahead by two-thirds of residents, visitors and businesses](#), 9 January 2024

<sup>102</sup> [Oxford Street Programme](#), accessed 27 October 2024

## 6 Sadiq Khan's new proposals

In the May 2024 election for Mayor of London, one of the leading candidates made a manifesto pledge relating to Oxford Street: the Liberal Democrats' Rob Blackie stated he would be "working towards the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street".<sup>103</sup>

In the election, Sadiq Khan was elected to a third term as Mayor. Two months after the GLA elections, a General Election took place, which was also won by the Labour Party.<sup>104</sup> On 17 September 2024, around four months after the Mayoral election, Mayor Khan announced new plans to pedestrianise Oxford Street.<sup>105</sup>

Although specific details of Mayor Khan's plans are not yet known at the time of writing, the Mayor's announcement gave an overview of the proposals, emphasising both the pedestrianisation element and the support of the Government:

"The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan has today set out bold proposals to transform Oxford Street, including turning the road into a traffic-free pedestrianised avenue, creating a beautiful public space.

The plans backed by the new government would ensure Oxford Street becomes a driver of London's economic prosperity for decades to come. Today the Mayor Sadiq Khan will say he wants Oxford Street to "once again become the leading retail destination in the world.

The Mayor has previously tried to implement major changes to Oxford Street, but was blocked from implementing his plans. Now, with the new Government taking a partnership approach to working with cities and Mayors, there is agreement to work together with a view to unlocking Oxford Street's full potential for the benefit of London and other parts of the UK."<sup>106</sup>

The Government indicated its support with a quote on the Mayor's press release from the Deputy Prime Minister, Angela Rayner MP:

"Oxford Street is a world-renowned shopping destination and we want it to stay that way. By working with the Mayor and local leaders, we can ensure it gets the boost it needs. This plan to revitalise Oxford Street will drive growth by creating new jobs,

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<sup>103</sup> Rob Blackie, [Fix the Met, Fix London](#), 2024, page 5. Oxford Street was not discussed in the manifestoes of the Labour Party's Sadiq Khan, the incumbent Mayor, the Conservative Party's Susan Hall or the Green Party's Zoë Garbett. See Sadiq Khan, [A fairer, safer, greener London for everyone](#), 2024; Susan Hall, [A Mayor who listens](#), 2021; Zoë Garbett, [My Plan for a Greener, More Affordable London](#), 2024. These were the four candidates finishing with the highest number of votes in the Mayoral election.

<sup>104</sup> Oxford Street was not discussed in Sadiq Khan's 2024 election manifesto. See Sadiq Khan, [A fairer, safer, greener London for everyone](#), 2024

<sup>105</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayor of London and government announce bold plans to transform Oxford Street](#), 17 September 2024

<sup>106</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayor of London and government announce bold plans to transform Oxford Street](#), 17 September 2024

generating economic activity, and giving a much-needed boost to London's night-time economy.”<sup>107</sup>

It has been reported in the media that the Mayor's plans may cost £150 million to implement.<sup>108</sup>

## 6.1 Mayoral Development Corporation

Mayor Khan's proposals differ significantly from those made in 2016, with respect to the proposed governance regime for the changes. In 2016, Mayor Khan did not propose to alter the governance or legal control of Oxford Street. In the revived proposal, the Mayor is proposing to designate the area as a 'mayoral development area'.

Under the Localism Act 2011, the Mayor has powers to designate mayoral development areas in Greater London.<sup>109</sup> Before a Mayor designates an area, they must consult:

- the London Assembly
- London Assembly constituency members within the area
- Members of Parliament whose parliamentary constituency is within the area
- London borough councils within the area
- if relevant to the area: the Common Council of the City of London, the Inner/Middle Temple
- any other person the Mayor considers it appropriate to consult.

The Mayor must lay proposals to designate a mayoral development area before the London Assembly. The Assembly has the power to veto the Mayor's decision to designate by a two-thirds majority.

When a designation is made by the Mayor for a new development area, the Secretary of State must then establish a Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC).<sup>110</sup> There are two existing MDCs in London. These are the London Legacy Development Corporation, responsible for the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and surrounding area, and the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, which is seeking to regenerate the area around the planned Old Oak Common High Speed 2 station.<sup>111</sup>

MDCs are functional bodies of the GLA. The Mayor is able to exercise significant powers over MDCs, including appointing the Chair and Board, and a general power of direction.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Mayor of London, [Mayor of London and government announce bold plans to transform Oxford Street](#), 17 September 2004

<sup>108</sup> BBC News, [Mayor 'forcing through' Oxford Street pedestrianisation](#), 17 September 2024

<sup>109</sup> Localism Act 2011, [chapter 2](#)

<sup>110</sup> Localism Act 2011, [section 198](#)

<sup>111</sup> See London Assembly Research Unit, [London Legacy Development Corporation](#), September 2024; [Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation](#), July 2024

<sup>112</sup> Localism Act 2011, [section 220](#) (power of direction); [Schedule 21](#) (appointments)

The Mayor may decide whether MDCs become the planning authority for the area they cover.<sup>113</sup> MDCs are able to acquire land in the area or elsewhere, to develop a Local Plan and to provide infrastructure or facilitate the provision of infrastructure.<sup>114</sup> The Localism Act states that the primary aim of any MDC is the regeneration of a given area and permits MDCs to take any action appropriate to fulfilling its aim.<sup>115</sup>

Mayor Khan's has not yet specified details of a proposed MDC for Oxford Street. Regarding the proposed powers of the MDC, the Mayor has told the Assembly:

“My proposals for a Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) for Oxford Street are at an early stage and are subject to consultation with the London Assembly and others. The exact powers to be given to the MDC are yet to be determined but they will need to be aligned with my ambition of ensuring that the regeneration of Oxford Street secures the maximum benefits for London, residents and businesses in the area.”<sup>116</sup>

Regarding the geographical boundaries of the MDC, the Mayor has told the Assembly:

“As part of the engagement and consultation process with key stakeholders on the scheme, I will also be consulting on the boundaries of the proposed Mayoral Development Area. The boundary will enable an effective scheme that works for residents, public transport users and businesses, and maximises the benefits of the regeneration of Oxford Street.”<sup>117</sup>

## 6.2 GLA Act Section 261 powers

The establishment of a Mayoral Development Corporation would not provide the Mayor with the powers required to close Oxford Street to traffic and pedestrianise the road. This would require the powers of a highway authority; at the present time, Westminster City Council is the highway authority for Oxford Street.

In response to a question from the Assembly, Mayor Khan indicated that he is considering plans to designate Oxford Street as a 'GLA road', and make it part of the TfL Road

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<sup>113</sup> Both the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation and London Legacy Development Corporation were made the planning authority for their area when established as MDCs.

<sup>114</sup> MDCs can only carry out compulsory purchases of new land if the Mayor and the Government authorise it to do so. Localism Act 2011, [section 207](#)

<sup>115</sup> Localism Act 2011, [section 211](#)

<sup>116</sup> Mayor of London, [Oxford Street Mayoral Development Corporation](#), 15 October 2024

<sup>117</sup> Mayor of London, [Oxford Street Mayoral Development Corporation \(2\)](#), 15 October 2024

Network.<sup>118</sup> This would require use of powers under Section 14B of the [Highways Act 1980](#), which was inserted by Section 261 of the [Greater London Authority Act 1999](#).<sup>119</sup>

Section 261 powers can only be used if the Mayor has the consent of the relevant highway authority, or if that consent is refused, consent is given by the Secretary of State for Transport. Therefore, in the event that Westminster City Council does not consent to Oxford Street becoming a GLA road, the Mayor would require the support of the Government to take this step.

Mayor Khan was asked by the Assembly in 2018 whether he would consider using Section 261 powers, when previous plans for pedestrianisation were opposed by Westminster City Council.<sup>120</sup> At the time it appeared that the Mayor did not have the required support of the Government to override Westminster City Council's objection.

### 6.3 Responses to the Mayor's proposals

A range of stakeholders have responded publicly to Mayor Khan's proposals.

Westminster City Council set out concerns about the lack of notice of the announcement and the disruption to existing plans (see section 5.3). As noted above, the Council has cancelled its own Oxford Street Programme in light of the Mayor's proposals. In a statement, the Chief Executive of the Council said:

"Westminster City Council has spent the last two years working closely with businesses and resident groups to develop detailed proposals to redesign and improve Oxford Street. These plans are shovel ready, have had the support of retailers and the local community and were intended to deliver significant economic growth whilst also securing a successful future for our thriving neighbourhoods in the West End.

The latest pedestrianisation proposal from the Mayor of London was only shared with us last Thursday. It will be important to receive further details about what is planned, including how long it could take to be delivered and how the concerns of local residents and users of the street will be addressed. We will want to know how they will benefit from any proposals, particularly given the practical challenges pedestrianisation may have for the wider area."<sup>121</sup>

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Adam Hug, also wrote to the Mayor and Government asking a series of detailed questions about the proposals. This include questioning whether

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<sup>118</sup> Mayor of London, [Oxford Street Mayoral Development Corporation \(4\)](#), 15 October 2024

The TfL Road Network (TLRN) is the network of major roads in London, for which TfL is the highways authority. Around five per cent London's roads are in the TLRN, which is also known as the 'red routes'. See TfL, [Red routes](#), accessed 15 October 2024

<sup>119</sup> Greater London Authority Act 1999, [Section 261](#); Highways Act 1980, [Section 14B](#). Under [Section 121A](#) of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, as amended by [Section 271](#) of the Greater London Authority Act 1999, TfL is the traffic authority for every GLA road.

<sup>120</sup> Mayor of London, [Oxford Street](#), 23 July 2018

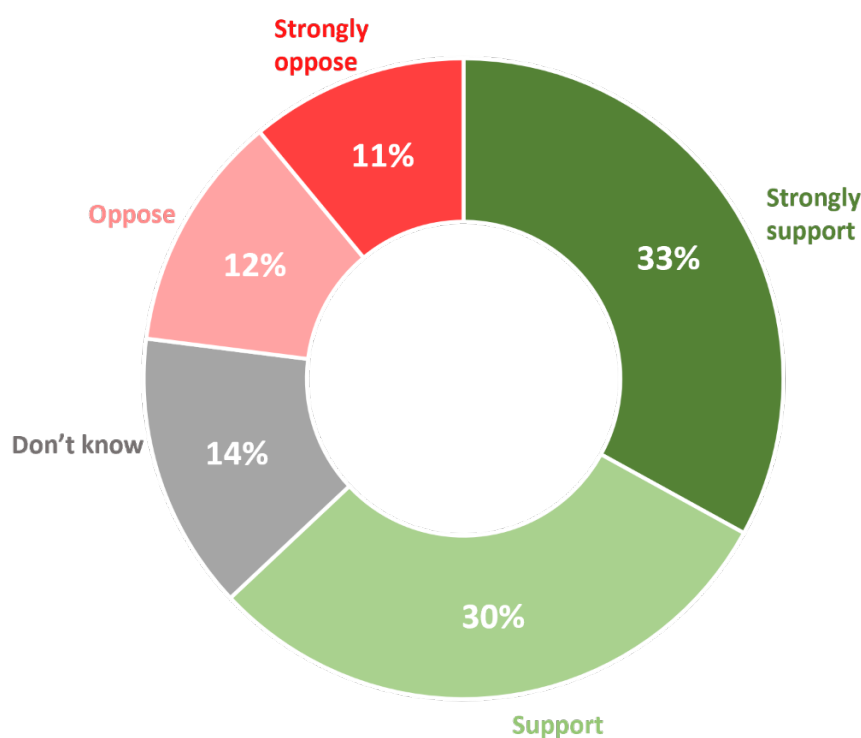
<sup>121</sup> Westminster City Council, [Statements on Oxford Street](#), 17 September 2024

the MDC is necessary, the impact on traffic congestion on nearby streets, plans to engage local residents, and whether the Mayor intended to compensate the Council for its investment to date in the area.<sup>122</sup>

A survey by polling company YouGov after the Mayor's announcement found that two-thirds of Londoners supported pedestrianising Oxford Street, with fewer than a quarter opposed (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8: YouGov survey results, September 2024<sup>123</sup>**

**Would you support or oppose making Oxford Street a pedestrians-only street?**



The Chief Executive of the New West End Company welcomed the proposals:

“New West End Company has long championed the transformation of Oxford Street, navigating various challenges and proposals over the years. We’re encouraged by the renewed commitment to bring this vision to life and support the government’s drive for economic growth. Given the history of past schemes, it is essential that we move swiftly to deliver this project.

<sup>122</sup> Westminster City Council, [Letter from Councillor Adam Hug](#), 18 September 2024

<sup>123</sup> YouGov, [Londoners back pedestrianising Oxford Street](#), 10 October 2024. YouGov surveyed a representative sample of 1,081 adults in London, between 20 and 25 September 2024. The full results are also [available via YouGov](#). Chart produced by London Assembly Research Unit. Figures do not add to 100 per cent due to rounding.

We welcome the creation of the Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) for Oxford Street. This initiative marks a significant step forward in transforming one of London's most iconic streets and highlights its crucial role in the city's growth."<sup>124</sup>

The [London Cycling Campaign](#) expressed its support for the proposals, while noting the need to improve cycle routes:

"Taking motor traffic off the 'nation's high street' is a no-brainer – we supported it in 2017 and we support it now... It looks like the plans will ban cycling on Oxford Street for most of the day in these proposals. We think that's a shame. And is it necessary? Internationally, city centre car-free streets tend to allow cycling to be part of the mix. But we're not losing sleep over it, so long as there are cycle routes parallel to Oxford Street that are truly safe, inclusive and high quality."<sup>125</sup>

The Chief Executive of Living Streets, a charity promoting walking, expressed strong support:

"Oxford Street is not currently safe for people walking and wheeling. It has an appalling road casualty and air pollution record. Pedestrianisation is the only answer to make our capital's landmark street safer and cleaner. These plans are great news for everyone who lives, works and visits Oxford Street, securing the street's future as a world-class destination."<sup>126</sup>

There have been negative responses from the [Marylebone Association](#), one of the residents' groups in the area. In a social media post, the group stated, "Oxford Street set to become less accessible, damaging economic growth."<sup>127</sup> In another post, the group has referred to the proposals as 'undemocratic' and a 'waste of public money', and suggested that Oxford Street needed more public transport rather than less.<sup>128</sup>

## Responses to previous proposals

Other groups representing bus passengers responded to Mayor Khan's 2017 proposals, but at the time of writing have not yet publicly stated views on the 2024 proposals. These statements should not be taken as the current view of the organisations cited below, but offer an indication of some of the prior concerns of these groups.

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<sup>124</sup> New West End Company, [Oxford Street Programme Update September 2024](#), 17 September 2024

<sup>125</sup> London Cycling Campaign, [Good news for Oxford Street](#), 19 September 2024

<sup>126</sup> Living Streets, [The Mayor of London and Government have announced bold plans to transform Oxford Street](#), 17 September 2024

<sup>127</sup> Marylebone Association, [Post on X](#), 17 September 2024

<sup>128</sup> Marylebone Association, [Post on X](#), 21 September 2024

London TravelWatch is the statutory transport watchdog for London.<sup>129</sup> In November 2017, in a Board paper, London TravelWatch officers set out concerns about the impact of Mayor's previous proposals on bus passengers:

“Whilst there is no in-principle objection to improving the pedestrian environment of Oxford Street, these changes should be balanced against the considerable detriment to many tens of thousands of bus passengers for whom the bus service provides access to central London and along Oxford Street.

...

TfL have considered the various interchanges and walking routes. They will be improving signing and accessibility with wider pavements, step free routes, signs etc. Nevertheless, access will be considerably worsened for those that have particular mobility issues because of the interchanges and walking distances introduced. Some passengers will find these changes very inconvenient and/or unpleasant. Some will no longer be able to undertake their journey because of the walking distances involved. Some will stop travelling or find another public transport route or mode. Some may well switch mode to taxi or PHV causing greater congestion in the area.”<sup>130</sup>

In January 2018, [Transport for All](#), an organisation representing disabled transport users, set out its concerns that the Mayor's previous proposals may have negative implications for accessibility:

“Buses are currently one of the most accessible forms of transport in London, and are relied on by many Disabled transport users to travel through the West End. They are also heavily used for short range transport on Oxford Street itself. The plans to remove, reroute and relocate buses in the Oxford Street West area will therefore have a significant impact on Disabled and older people who either live and/or travel to/from/through Oxford Street.

Whilst the arrival of the Elizabeth Line will mean step-free access for Bond Street and Tottenham Court road stations, these are stations at either end of Oxford Street leaving a potential ‘no man's land’ in the middle section of the street for those Disabled people who have sensory, mobility and other impairments.

The removal of taxis will also further restrict and/or prevent meaningful access to Oxford Street for shopping, business or entertainment.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> London TravelWatch, [Introduction to London TravelWatch](#), accessed 28 October 2024. London TravelWatch is sponsored by the London Assembly, which appoints the London TravelWatch Board.

<sup>130</sup> London TravelWatch, [Secretariat memorandum: Oxford Street bus changes associated with pedestrianisation](#), 28 November 2017

<sup>131</sup> Transport for All, [Transport for All's responses to the Oxford Street transformation consultation – January 2018](#), 3 January 2018

## Other formats and languages

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### Greek

*Εάν επιθυμείτε περίληψη αυτού του κειμένου στην γλώσσα σας, παρακαλώ καλέστε τον αριθμό ή επικοινωνήστε μαζί μας στην ανωτέρω ταχυδρομική ή την ηλεκτρονική διεύθυνση.*

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### Arabic

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فجاء الاتصال برقم الهاتف أو الاتصال على  
العنوان البريدي العادي أو عنوان البريدي  
الالكتروني أعلاه.

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