

The Oxford – Cambridge Expressway – some questions and answers¹

The Government is planning to build an expressway to link Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge. The road would form part of a new ‘Oxford to Cambridge Development Arc’ that could include the construction of a million new homes.

1. Why are you opposed to the Expressway?

- It will not solve transport problems in the region. The road is likely to increase traffic and congestion particularly around towns and cities such as Oxford and Cambridge.
- It will devastate our countryside. The RSPB, BBOWT and the Council for the Protection of Rural England have said many vitally important wildlife sites could be destroyed including ancient woodlands, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- It will increase air pollution in a region where some areas already breach official air quality limits.
- It will fuel climate change. The global scientific community has warned we have just 12 years to end our dependency on fossil fuels if we are going to prevent catastrophic climate change. Transport causes 27% of the UK’s carbon emissions so the government should be investing in clean green transport systems – not more roads.
- It’s a waste of money. The road will cost over £4 billion – money that would be far better spent on affordable and social housing where it is needed, and on cheap efficient public transport that would make it easier and cheaper for people to leave their car at home.

2. Where will the Expressway go?

The exact route has yet to be decided but government has said it will be broadly aligned with the proposed **East-West rail route** that will run from south of Oxford to Milton Keynes via Winslow. The route could pass west or east of Oxford.

3. Travel between Oxford and Cambridge is slow – don’t we need this new road?

¹ This set of questions and answers has been based on a version prepared by the No Expressway Alliance see:- <https://www.noexpresswayalliance.org/>

The East- West Rail Line, a new direct rail line linking Oxford, Milton Keynes, Cambridge and communities in-between is due to open within a few years. This will solve many many of the 'connectivity' problems. The government should assess the impact of this new rail link is before taking any decision on building a new road.

4. Won't the new road help relieve congestion on the existing road network?

Over 30 years of evidence show that new roads actually create more traffic and increase congestion – particularly around employment centres such as Oxford and Milton Keynes. Extra traffic will also be generated from by the 1 million new houses the government wants to build along the route of the Expressway, and all of this will add to traffic and congestion on local roads. There is no adequate funding to maintain these local roads, let alone upgrade them. It is very hard to see how creating these problems offers benefit to motorists.

5. Won't the new road and development be good for business and bring jobs to the area?

The Expressway development will benefit the shareholders of technology and construction companies and a relatively small number of highly skilled highly paid workers – it will not bring affordable homes or jobs to the majority of ordinary people in the region. The £4 billion plus earmarked for this project would be better invested in jobs, affordable and social housing, and better public transport links for all. The new Oxford – Cambridge train link will help solve the connectivity issues facing businesses in the region – for less money and at less cost to our health, countryside and climate.

6. Will local people have a chance to have their say on the road?

Local people have had no say on whether or not this major development should go ahead despite the fact it will have a huge impact on their lives and the lives of their children. A public consultation in the autumn will only focus on which route the Expressway should take. The UK government – with the help of unelected officials at the National Infrastructure Commission and Highways England – are trying to force through the project in the face of local opposition including Oxford City Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of White Horse District Council, local MP's Layla Moran and Anneliese Dodds and 40+ local groups who form the No Expressway Alliance.

7. Isn't this a done deal? The road has got the go-ahead from government already?

Proposed road schemes have been cancelled many times. Between 1995 and 1998 the number of road schemes under development were cut from 150 to 37 – and recently schemes such as the Chichester bypass and the £1.4bn motorway through the Gwent Levels in south Wales have been abandoned.

8. Don't we need the new houses this development will bring?

Yes we need more homes, BUT at the right prices, in the right places and in response to actual housing need..

We should look to build clusters of community-led homes in every neighbourhood and village that can demonstrate housing need...using every available site and especially making use of public and charitable-owned land: homes that are people-centred, built for and by local people, with local connections; zero carbon AND with most, if not all, permanently affordable. This CAN be done, but only if we decide it's the right thing to do and make sure that our strategic decisions reflect that.

The current plans to build a huge road and large numbers of homes on greenbelt, destroys any pretence of carbon emission reduction to make the city, the county and beyond truly sustainable.

9. Isn't this just anti-development NIMBY-ism?

We aren't against an Expressway 'in our back yard' – we are against the Expressway full stop. We aren't anti-development – we are anti bad development. The Expressway corridor will increase congestion, destroy irreplaceable nature sites and landscapes, fuel climate change and increase air pollution, and waste £4 billion plus that could be better spent on providing homes that are needed where people want to live, and a cheaper, more efficient and sustainable transport system which is fit for the 21st century.

10. How do you suggest we address housing, transport and economic development without a new road?

We want to see development of a transport system that meets our current needs, and helps create genuinely sustainable communities in the future, rather than car dependent housing developments where residents will have no option but to drive to access facilities. A new electrified Oxford to Cambridge rail link, with associated bus links and cycle routes, will solve many of the connectivity issues between Oxford and Cambridge. Investing in cheaper and more efficient public transport and more support for cycling and walking will do more to make it easier and cheaper for everyone to get around.