

# Proposed Third Reading Bridge

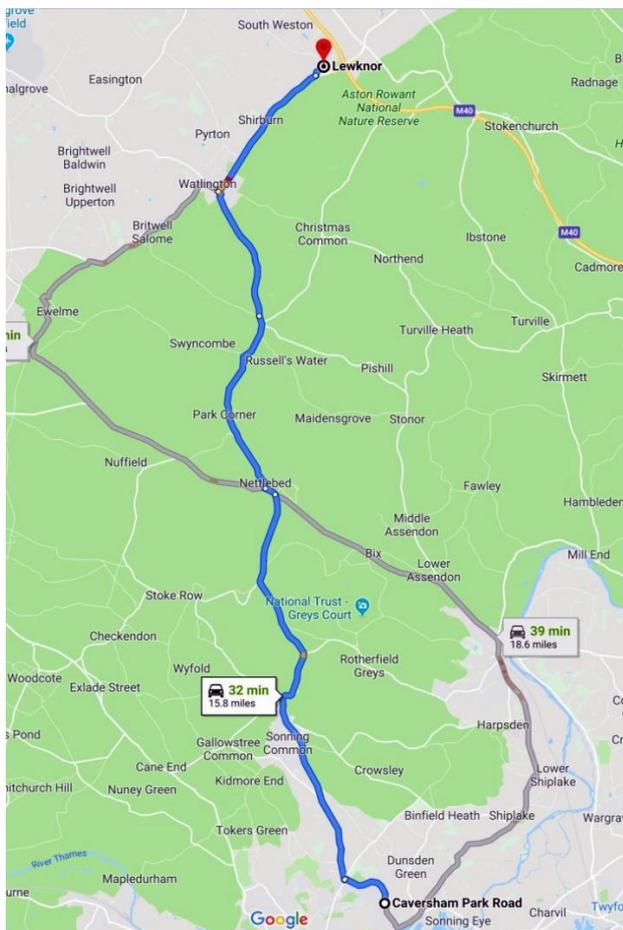
It's been a year since I last wrote on this subject for *Peppard News* and the large volume of enquiries I get about it suggests readers would welcome an update on the proposed mile-long bridge. Before I do this, I will re-cap on the background for the benefit of those who may have recently moved into the area.

**Location and traffic route:** on the Berk-shire side, the bridge would be connected to Reading's Inner Distribution Road (IDR) and the M4 via the A3290 & A329 (M). On the Oxfordshire side, the bridge would land on the A4155 opposite Caversham Park Road.

Historically, bridge supporters have stated this will get 55,000 cars a day out of the centre of Reading. HGVs and cars arriving on the Oxfordshire side would have two main onward options and two secondary ones:

1. Along the A4155 through Shiplake into Reading Road/Duke Street in Henley.
2. Along the B481 through Sonning Common, Rotherfield Peppard, Highmoor, Nettlebed and Watlington.
3. Along the A4155 into Prospect Street, Reading.
4. Various 'rat-running' routes through local areas to join the A4074 at Cane End.

A parish councillor jokingly, but perhaps with some prescience, commented to me that the proposal could effectively turn the B481 into the A481(M) as it would become the de facto link between the M4 and the M40 (see map).



**Recent project history:** in 2015, Oxfordshire and Berkshire parties agreed to undertake a traffic modelling study to understand the traffic impact of the proposed bridge. With no political input from Oxfordshire, the traffic modelling study was morphed into a Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC) by the Berkshire parties, of which the traffic modelling study was merely a subsidiary part. Even before the SOBC was completed, Berkshire applied to central government for funding to take the project to the next stage (Outline Business Case). The bid was unsuccessful at that time.

The SOBC was completed in May 2017. Its findings were welcomed by Berkshire proponents but attracted limited challenge from Oxfordshire councils, which had little interest in the project at that time. The cost of building the bridge was then estimated at £110m (but is now likely to be in excess of £150m). Critically, this excluded the cost of mitigation measures in South Oxfordshire. The project stalled in early 2018 when the proponents were unable to identify funding

of £750,000 to develop the Outline Business Case.

In the autumn of 2019, I successfully moved a motion at both Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) objecting to the bridge.

**Latest developments:** the proposal has gained significant new momentum over the last year and the situation can be summed-up as follows:

- A new bid for funding for an Outline Business Case has been submitted by the Berkshire authorities. OCC and SODC are participating in order to ‘have a seat at the table’.
- Reading BC confirmed in its Transport Strategy Consultation, published earlier this summer, that the bridge remains one of its top transport priorities.
- A government organisation called Transport for the South East (TfSE) has applied to become a statutory body with its own budget; it shares the ambition with Reading to create the crossing.
- Reading BC has come up with a new concept called the ‘North Reading Orbital’ in recognition of the flaws in its earlier proposal (no specified mitigation measures for traffic arriving in Oxfordshire) – but the solution may just add to the problems.

**The ‘North Reading Orbital’:** despite its name, would be entirely in Oxfordshire. It would start where the bridge lands at Caversham Park Road, then sweep around Emmer Green, pass near Kidmore End, then join the A4074 at Cane End. There would be three ‘Park & Ride’ sites along the way taking people into Reading. An ‘orbital’ road of this scale carving its way through rural South Oxfordshire is causing widespread concern.

**What’s happening now:** at the time of writing, OCC and SODC are preparing their responses to the Reading Transport Consultation. These responses will have been submitted by the time this article is published. I will update this article again when there is more news.

**Cllr David Bartholomew**

Oxfordshire County Councillor for Sonning Common Division and District Councillor for Sonning Common Ward, comprising: Binfield Heath, Eye & Dunsden, Harpsden, Shiplake and Sonning Common

### **Motion by Cllr David Bartholomew passed by Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire District Council, Autumn 2019**

Reading Borough Council is proposing to build a vast new bridge to alleviate Reading’s traffic problems. It is included in their Draft Local Plan as a top priority. The bridge would take off at the Thames Valley Business Park near Reading and land near Playhatch in Oxfordshire. The only onwards option for traffic would be through the congested streets of Henley or along the narrow B481 country road through Oxfordshire villages.

Reading and the other Berkshire councils supporting the scheme are focusing almost entirely on the costs of building the bridge and the benefits it will bring to Reading. They recognise that the bridge would have a substantial impact on the Oxfordshire road network, but blithely state this will be dealt with by unspecified and uncoded ‘mitigation’ measures.

This council calls on the Leader to write to council leaders at Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell, plus MPs John Howell, John Redwood, Matt Rodda and Theresa May, stating that:

- a) In the context of the Climate Emergency a car-based solution to a car-based problem that would pour thousands of cars and HGVs into Oxfordshire is totally

inappropriate and should a new bridge be built it should be restricted to public transport, cyclists and pedestrians;

- b) Notwithstanding the above, if a car-based solution is pursued, the bridge and necessary mitigation measures, i.e. improvements to the Oxfordshire road net-work, must not be considered as two separate projects, but as one project so that the benefits, disadvantages and costs of the scheme can be holistically assessed.