

SDS Scoping Engagement
Movement and Connectivity Discussion Paper

The movement and connectivity question this engagement is asking you to help us with:

What strategic approach to movement and connectivity should Gloucestershire take to support sustainable growth and ensure people, places and businesses are well connected over the long term?

Gloucestershire COUNTY COUNCIL

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This discussion paper explores the relationship between land use, accessibility and transport, and how these can work together to support sustainable development. It does not select growth locations or establish detailed policies. It seeks views on the strategic issues, evidence and outcomes that should inform the future Spatial Development Strategy (SDS).

Readers should also note that Gloucestershire County Council is currently updating its Local Transport Plan, and more information can be found here: Gloucestershire LTP | Gloucestershire County Council

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Executive Summary

Movement and connectivity are cross-boundary issues that shape how Gloucestershire functions and grows. Transport connects people to jobs, education, healthcare, services and leisure, supports business productivity and investment, and links communities within the county and beyond. However, Gloucestershire faces challenges including congestion, variable access to public transport, rural connectivity, inequalities in access to opportunities and the need to reduce transport-related carbon emissions while supporting sustainable growth.

Decisions about where future homes, jobs and services are located will influence how people travel, the infrastructure required and whether walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport are realistic alternatives to private car use. The Spatial Development Strategy provides an opportunity to align growth with transport and infrastructure investment, strengthen strategic and cross-boundary connections, improve access to opportunities, support healthier and more inclusive communities, and create a lower-carbon and climate-resilient transport network.

Movement and Connectivity matters of strategic importance

- MC1 Integrating growth, transport and infrastructure to create sustainable and well-connected places.
- MC2 Improving access to jobs, education, healthcare, services and opportunities to reduce inequalities and improve social inclusion.
- MC3 Delivering a more sustainable, integrated and attractive public transport network that is reliable and accessible, presenting an alternative to the private car.
- MC4 Enabling a shift towards active and healthy travel through the creation of safe, attractive and connected networks that improve health and wellbeing, increase travel choice and contribute to more sustainable communities and places.
- MC5 Supporting net zero, climate resilience and improved environmental outcomes through transport, increasing transport resilience to climate change and ensuring that future movement and connectivity solutions support Gloucestershire's wider environmental and climate ambitions.
- MC6 Strengthening strategic connectivity, freight movement and cross-boundary links, supporting the efficient movement of people and goods and enabling economic growth through better regional, national and international connectivity.

Introduction

Movement and connectivity play a fundamental role in shaping how Gloucestershire functions and grows. The transport network enables people to access employment, education, healthcare, services and leisure opportunities, supports business productivity and investment, and connects communities within the county and to neighbouring areas. At the same time, transport is a significant contributor to carbon emissions and can influence health, wellbeing, social inclusion and the quality of places. The choices made about the location of future growth and infrastructure will therefore have a major influence on how people and goods move around Gloucestershire over the coming decades.

Gloucestershire benefits from a strategic location between the South West and the Midlands, with nationally important transport corridors including the M5, A40, A46, A417 and key rail connections linking the county to Bristol, Birmingham, Cardiff, London and the Midlands. However, evidence

highlights several challenges, including increasing travel demand, congestion on parts of the network, variable public transport accessibility, rural connectivity issues, inequalities in access to services and opportunities, and the need to decarbonise transport while supporting economic growth. The county's transport evidence also shows that most transport emissions are generated by private vehicles and that long-distance commuting, business travel and freight movements are important contributors to the county's carbon footprint.

National policy increasingly promotes integrated land use and transport planning, vision-led place-making, sustainable travel and connected transport systems that support healthy, inclusive communities. As transport issues cross local authority boundaries, coordinated strategic planning is particularly important for Gloucestershire's links with neighbouring counties, city regions and major transport corridors.

Gloucestershire is reviewing its Local Transport Plan to ensure it reflects the latest national policy, emerging transport priorities and the county's long-term ambitions for growth, climate action and improved connectivity. The review specifically recognises the importance of aligning transport planning with the emerging Spatial Development Strategy so that decisions about homes, jobs, infrastructure and services are planned together rather than in isolation.

The future SDS presents an opportunity to consider movement and connectivity beyond the county-wide scale and to explore how future development, transport infrastructure and investment can work together to create sustainable, attractive and accessible places. It provides a forum to consider the long-term role of public transport, active travel, rail, highways, freight, digital connectivity and cross-boundary transport links in supporting Gloucestershire's economic, environmental and social ambitions.

Policy and Legislation

- National Planning Policy Framework Aug 2026 National_Planning_Policy_Framework.pdf
- Better Connected: A Strategy for Integrated Transport https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/better-connected-a-strategy-for-integrated-transport
- Department for Transport Local Transport Plan Guidance https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-transport-plans/local-transport-plans

Key Gloucestershire sources

- Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan (LTP) 2020-2041 https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/media/p5melmok/ltp-policy-document-final-v132-2.pdf
- Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan (emerging)
- Gloucestershire Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) 2024 10969-gcc_bus-service-improvement-plan-2024.pdf
- Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan Carbon Evidence Base gloucestershire-ltp-draft-carbon-evidence-base.pdf
- Gloucestershire Active Travel Strategy (emerging) Active Travel Strategy | Gloucestershire County Council
- Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans Cycling and walking infrastructure plans | Gloucestershire County Council
- Rail strategy for Gloucestershire (emerging) Draft Rail Strategy | Gloucestershire County Council

Matters of Strategic Importance - Context

MC1 Integrating growth, transport and infrastructure to create sustainable and well-connected places.

Where new homes, jobs and services are built will affect how people travel and what infrastructure is needed. Planning development and transport together can make everyday services easier to reach, improve public transport and reduce pressure on roads. Gloucestershire's evidence, and national policy, both show that this joined-up approach to planning should begin at the outset, so that new developments create accessible, well-connected places and reduce reliance on cars.

Gloucestershire will need to deliver more homes and jobs in the coming decades. This will require investment in transport, utilities, digital connections, health, education, green infrastructure and community services. Many transport and infrastructure issues cross council boundaries, and major routes such as the M5, A46, A40, A417 and the rail network connect the county with nearby cities and markets. A county-wide approach is therefore needed to align development, infrastructure investment and transport planning with Gloucestershire's long-term economic, social and environmental goals.

Future growth must also support climate resilience, public health, social inclusion and a strong economy. Transport is a major source of Gloucestershire's carbon emissions, particularly from commuting, business travel and freight. Reducing unnecessary journeys, improving access to services and making sustainable travel easier will help meet the county's climate and environmental goals. The SDS can bring these decisions together and provide a long-term plan for connected, resilient and sustainable places across Gloucestershire.

MC 2 Improving access to jobs, education, healthcare, services and opportunities to reduce inequalities and improve social inclusion.

Access to jobs, education, healthcare, shops, community facilities and other everyday services plays an important role in determining people's quality of life, health, wellbeing and life chances. Transport networks and the location of development influence how easily people can reach these opportunities and whether they can do so in a safe, affordable and sustainable way. However, levels of accessibility vary across Gloucestershire, particularly between urban and rural areas, and not everyone has access to a private car. Improving connectivity to key destinations is therefore important for reducing barriers to opportunity and supporting more inclusive communities.

Gloucestershire's economy depends on people being able to access employment, training and education opportunities across the county and beyond. At the same time, residents need reliable access to healthcare facilities, town centres, community services and leisure opportunities. The county's market towns, rural communities and urban areas all have different accessibility challenges, while future population growth is likely to increase demand on transport networks and public services. Strategic planning can help ensure that future development is located in places where people can access services and opportunities more easily and where investment in transport infrastructure can improve connectivity for existing and future communities.

Improving accessibility is also closely linked to wider objectives around social inclusion, health, economic prosperity and sustainable growth. People who cannot easily access employment, education, healthcare or essential services can experience greater disadvantage and social isolation. Creating places where daily needs can be met through shorter journeys and where public transport, walking and cycling provide realistic travel choices can help reduce inequalities, support

healthier lifestyles and improve overall quality of life. The SDS provides an opportunity to consider these issues at a county-wide scale and explore how future growth, infrastructure investment and service provision can work together to improve access to opportunities for all communities across Gloucestershire.

MC 3 Delivering a more sustainable, integrated and attractive public transport network that is reliable and accessible, presenting an alternative to the private car.

Public transport plays a vital role in connecting people to jobs, education, healthcare, services and leisure opportunities. It helps support local economies, enables independent travel for those without access to a car, and can reduce congestion and environmental impacts associated with private vehicle use. Across Gloucestershire, bus and rail services provide important links between the county's towns, rural communities and neighbouring areas. However, levels of accessibility, service frequency and connectivity vary across the county, meaning that public transport is not always a practical option for all journeys. Evidence from the Gloucestershire Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) 2024 and the Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan highlights the importance of improving the attractiveness, reliability and coverage of public transport to support sustainable growth and accessibility.

As Gloucestershire continues to grow, the ability of the transport network to accommodate additional travel demand will become increasingly important. Reliance on private car travel can contribute to congestion, carbon emissions and pressure on infrastructure, particularly along key transport corridors and around major settlements. Creating places that are well served by public transport and ensuring that new development supports viable bus and rail services can help provide greater travel choice and reduce dependence on the car. Strategic planning has an important role in aligning future development with transport investment so that communities are connected by high-quality public transport from the outset.

Improving public transport is also closely linked to wider objectives relating to social inclusion, economic opportunity, health and climate change. A well-connected and integrated network can improve access to employment, education and services, particularly for young people, older people, lower-income households and rural communities. It can also support the transition to lower-carbon travel and help create more sustainable and resilient places. Through the SDS, there is an opportunity to explore how future growth, infrastructure investment and public transport provision can work together to support a more connected, accessible and sustainable Gloucestershire.

MC 4 Enabling a shift towards active and healthy travel through the creation of safe, attractive and connected networks that improve health and wellbeing, increase travel choice and contribute to more sustainable communities and places.

Walking, wheeling and cycling are important forms of everyday travel that can help people access jobs, schools, shops, services and leisure opportunities while supporting healthier lifestyles. Active travel can improve physical and mental wellbeing, reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality and contribute to more vibrant and attractive places. Evidence from the Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan highlights increasing use of active travel across the county and recognises the important role that walking and cycling networks play in creating sustainable communities and supporting wider transport objectives.

The way that homes, jobs, services and community facilities are planned can have a major influence on whether people are able to make more journeys on foot, by wheelchair, mobility scooter or by bicycle. Where development is located close to everyday destinations and supported by safe, direct and attractive walking and cycling routes, active travel becomes a realistic choice for more people. However, barriers such as busy roads, disconnected routes, poor accessibility and concerns about safety can discourage active travel and increase dependence on private vehicles. Strategic planning provides an opportunity to consider how future growth can support connected networks that make active travel easier and more appealing.

Supporting a shift towards active and healthy travel can also help Gloucestershire meet wider ambitions relating to climate change, social inclusion and sustainable growth. Providing people with more travel choices can help reduce transport-related carbon emissions, improve access to opportunities and create places that are healthier, greener and more resilient. Active travel also complements public transport by helping people reach bus stops, railway stations and local centres without relying on a car. Through the SDS, there is an opportunity to explore how future development, infrastructure investment and place-making can work together to create communities where walking, wheeling and cycling are safe, attractive and convenient options for everyday journeys.

MC 5 Supporting net zero, climate resilience and improved environmental outcomes through transport, increasing transport resilience to climate change and ensuring that future movement and connectivity solutions support Gloucestershire's wider environmental and climate ambitions.

Transport has an important role to play in helping Gloucestershire respond to climate change and achieve its environmental ambitions. The Gloucestershire Local Transport Plan Carbon Evidence Base shows that transport remains a significant source of carbon emissions within the county, with private vehicle use, commuting, business travel and freight movements accounting for a large proportion of transport-related emissions. As Gloucestershire continues to grow, there is an opportunity to consider how future patterns of development, investment and movement can help reduce emissions while still supporting economic prosperity and access to opportunities.

Climate change also presents increasing challenges for the transport network itself. More frequent extreme weather events, including flooding, heatwaves and severe storms, can disrupt transport infrastructure, affect reliability and impact the movement of people and goods. Building resilience into transport networks will therefore be important to ensure that communities, businesses and essential services remain connected in the future. This is particularly relevant in Gloucestershire, where parts of the transport network are vulnerable to flooding and where maintaining reliable connections is essential for residents, businesses and visitors.

Supporting net zero and improving environmental outcomes is closely linked to wider objectives around sustainable growth, public health, nature recovery and quality of life. Decisions about where development takes place, how people travel and how infrastructure is delivered can influence carbon emissions, air quality, resource use and impacts on the natural environment. Through the SDS, there is an opportunity to explore how transport, land use and infrastructure planning can work together to support lower-carbon travel, improve resilience to climate change, protect and enhance environmental assets, and help deliver Gloucestershire's long-term climate and sustainability ambitions.

MC 6 Strengthening strategic connectivity, freight movement and cross-boundary links, supporting the efficient movement of people and goods and enabling economic growth through better regional, national and international connectivity.

Gloucestershire benefits from a strategically important location at the heart of several regional and national transport corridors. The county is connected by key road and rail routes, including the M5, A40, A46, A417 and the national rail network, linking communities and businesses to neighbouring areas such as Bristol, the South West of England, South Wales, the Midlands, Oxfordshire and London. These road and rail connections play a critical role in supporting daily travel, economic activity, inward investment and access to wider markets. They also help connect residents to employment, education, healthcare and leisure opportunities beyond the county boundary.

Strategic connectivity is also essential to Gloucestershire's economy. Businesses rely on efficient transport networks to move goods, access suppliers and customers, and support workforce mobility. Evidence prepared through the transport planning process highlights the importance of freight movements and longer-distance business travel to the county's economy, particularly along strategic transport corridors. As Gloucestershire continues to grow, maintaining and improving the movement of people and goods will be important to supporting economic competitiveness, attracting investment and ensuring that infrastructure capacity keeps pace with growth.

Many of these connectivity challenges and opportunities extend beyond individual local authority boundaries and require a coordinated strategic response. Travel-to-work patterns, freight movements, infrastructure investment and economic relationships often operate across wider functional geographies. The SDS provides an opportunity to consider Gloucestershire's role within these wider networks and explore how future growth, transport investment and cross-boundary collaboration can strengthen regional, national and international connectivity while supporting sustainable development, resilient communities and a prosperous economy.

Matters of Strategic Importance – Key Strategic Priorities

MC1 Integrating growth, transport and infrastructure to create sustainable and well-connected places.

Key strategic priorities

1. Direct the majority of future growth to locations where homes, jobs, services and infrastructure can be planned and delivered together, reducing the need to travel and supporting sustainable travel choices.
2. Ensure that strategic infrastructure investment is aligned with future development so that communities are supported by the transport, utilities, digital connectivity, social infrastructure and green infrastructure needed to thrive.

MC2 Improving access to jobs, education, healthcare, services and opportunities to reduce inequalities and improve social inclusion.

Key strategic priorities

1. Improve access to employment, education, healthcare and essential services so that all communities can benefit from growth and opportunity, regardless of where they live.
2. Reduce transport and accessibility inequalities by ensuring that residents can reach key destinations safely, affordably and sustainably.

MC3 Delivering a more sustainable, integrated and attractive public transport network that is reliable and accessible, presenting an alternative to the private car.

Key strategic priorities

1. Increase the proportion of journeys made by public transport and active travel through the delivery of reliable, accessible and well-integrated bus, rail, cycle, wheeling and shared transport networks.
2. Support growth in locations where high-quality public transport services can provide a realistic and attractive alternative to private car travel.

MC4 Enabling a shift towards active and healthy travel through the creation of safe, attractive and connected networks that improve health and wellbeing, increase travel choice and contribute to more sustainable communities and places.

Key strategic priorities

1. Create communities where walking, wheeling and cycling are safe, convenient and attractive choices for everyday journeys.
2. Improve health, wellbeing and quality of life by providing connected active travel networks that link homes, jobs, schools, services, green spaces and public transport hubs.

MC5 Supporting net zero, climate resilience and improved environmental outcomes through transport, increasing transport resilience to climate change and ensuring that future movement and connectivity solutions support Gloucestershire's wider environmental and climate ambitions.

Key strategic priorities

1. Reduce transport-related carbon emissions by encouraging more sustainable travel patterns and supporting the transition to a low-carbon transport system.
2. Develop a resilient transport network that can adapt to the impacts of climate change while protecting and enhancing Gloucestershire's environmental assets.

MC6 Strengthening strategic connectivity, freight movement and cross-boundary links, supporting the efficient movement of people and goods and enabling economic growth through better regional, national and international connectivity.

Key strategic priorities

1. Improve strategic connectivity within Gloucestershire and with neighbouring areas to support economic growth, labour market access and sustainable movement of people and goods.
2. Support efficient and resilient regional, national and international transport and freight networks that strengthen Gloucestershire's role within wider economic and transport corridors.



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