

London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) response to the Oxford Street Transformation Consultation

May 2025

Summary

The London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the proposals for the pedestrianisation and transformation of Oxford Street. In principle, we reaffirm our support for pedestrianisation in recognition of the opportunity it presents for the regeneration of one of London's most iconic retail destinations. However, to harness its full potential, it is essential that the project is underpinned by strong and continuous business engagement, a clear transport and delivery strategy and a focus on inclusive access.

Oxford Street is a vital economic, social and reputational asset for London and the UK. Its successful transformation can support post-Covid economic recovery and boost London's hospitality, leisure and culture offering. However, to strengthen its competitiveness on the international stage and support London's global city status, SMEs need to be supported in any transition to manage accessibility and operational impacts. LCCI stands ready to work with the Mayor of London and related authorities to ensure these proposals deliver benefits for businesses, visitors and Londoners alike.

The consultation response

The London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) is the capital's largest independent business advocacy organisation, representing the interests of over 10,000 businesses. As a champion of London's global status as a premier destination for trade, investment, and business growth, LCCI works tirelessly to address the key challenges facing businesses. Through proactive engagement with policymakers, stakeholders and local communities we aim to ensure that London's businesses and, by extension, the UK economy thrive. Our participation in this consultation reflects our commitment to engaging with key issues that affect London and advocating for a climate that enables London's businesses to thrive.

The strategic importance of Oxford Street

Oxford Street is not simply a retail corridor; it is a feature of London's global identity and a key part of its economic vitality. As one of the world's most famous streets, it is a vital economic engine, a social space for recreation and a cultural landmark.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Oxford Street attracted around 200 million visits annually, while the wider West End contributed £10 billion to London's economy. As a major shopping, leisure and visitor destination, its success has a direct and indirect impact on businesses, workers, Londoners and the wider UK economy.

Socially, Oxford Street offers more than the sale of goods and services. The retail experience provides a unique environment for leisure, tourism and community interaction. London's reputation as a global, dynamic city where culture and commerce thrive is also influenced by its vibrancy.

Given its significance, it is both appropriate and necessary that the future design, accessibility and function of Oxford Street are kept under continual review, with the ambition of maximising its potential for Londoners and visitors alike.

LCCI previously welcomed the Mayor of London's proposals for pedestrianisation and expressed disappointment at their abandonment in 2018. Since then, significant global and local developments, evolving consumer behaviours and changes in mobility patterns have compelled renewed attention to how London's highstreets function and thrive.

The Mayor of London's renewed intention to "turbocharge" the regeneration of Oxford Street by creating an exciting, green and thriving destination is welcomed by LCCI, subject to careful planning and business engagement.

2. Economic recovery and footfall

A pedestrian-first Oxford Street could potentially catalyse post-Covid recovery in Central London, as part of a wider programme to revitalise high streets across London.

The pandemic's impact on London's Central Activities Zone (CAZ) has been acutely evident, with a reduction in footfall compared to pre-pandemic levels. This sustained reduction has profoundly impacted businesses, employment and economic activity across the West End.

Oxford Street has seen a dramatic increase in vacant retail space and empty storefronts highlighting its steady commercial decline in recent years. The ripple effect of this has been catastrophic for the wider economy. The exploration and adoption of proposals that have the potential to reverse this trend and bring greater economic prosperity for London businesses is supported by LCCI.

From our work on the London Recovery Board to the support we have for Central London Alliance's campaigns that promote the safe return of visitors to the city, LCCI has been a consistent champion of initiatives that can boost footfall, improve visitor experience and reaffirm Oxford Street as a premier tourist destination.

A successful pedestrianisation scheme should:

- Encourage prolonged visits and higher consumer spending across retail, hospitality and cultural sectors.
- Enhance the aesthetic and environmental quality of the street, and its attractiveness to domestic and international visitors.
- Signal that London is open for business and investment to create a sustainable city that meets tomorrow's needs.

3. Strengthening London's global competitiveness

Oxford Street's transformation must also be seen through the lens of London's ongoing global competition with cities such as Paris, New York and Milan.

Through its previous role as secretariat for the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for London as a Global City, LCCI consistently heard from stakeholders about the necessity of maintaining and enhancing London's international attractiveness.

New York's pedestrianisation of Times Square, Paris' investment in green boulevards and Milan's creation of pedestrian-friendly piazzas highlight a trend in creating big urban spaces that attract tourists and investment.

For London to remain competitive, similar investment in destinations that combine world-class retail, culture and accessibility is vital. Oxford Street is central to this movement, building on its brand recognition.

A renewed Oxford Street would:

- Support the attraction of international visitors and help to boost London's tourism and hospitality sectors.
- Bolster London's reputation for innovation, sustainability and creativity.
- Boost London's competitive advantage against other global cities in attracting international footfall and investment.

The adoption of a wider narrative that embeds Oxford Street within London's global investment appeal will be crucial. LCCI encourages the mayor and stakeholders to position this regeneration within the context of promoting "Global London."

4. Environmental and safety benefits

LCCI welcomes the environmental and safety benefits anticipated from the pedestrianisation proposals. Oxford Street has historically suffered from poor air quality. Reducing vehicular traffic offers the opportunity to:

- Improve air quality and public health outcomes.
- Put safety and inclusion, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists, at the heart of a truly public space.
- Enhance the overall aesthetic and sustainability of the area through the delivery of green infrastructure improvements.

These outcomes would align with our European neighbours, where investment in car-free zones and the creation of attractive, vibrant urban centres is becoming the norm. Therefore, the development of London's new Oxford Street must be guided by robust evidence on the impact of emissions and balance air quality improvements with other aims. This includes modelling and mitigation measures to address congestion and pollution displacement to surrounding areas if pedestrianisation plans are approved.

5. Addressing risks and limitations

While LCCI supports the overall direction of travel, it emphasises the need for greater clarity and safeguards in several key areas:

Impact on SMEs

- A significant portion of London's business ecosystem is woven into the city's economic and social fabric, with Oxford Street's regeneration poised to have far-reaching implications for SMEs.
- There is a real risk that anchor retailers may disproportionately benefit by having a larger presence, unless proactive measures are taken to support smaller businesses.
- SMEs could face reduced visibility, disrupted footfall patterns and increased costs associated with freight and deliveries across the area and its surroundings.

Freight and servicing logistics

- Service access, waste removal and just-in-time deliveries are crucial for many businesses. In the absence of a comprehensive freight strategy within the consultation proposals, a clear plan for consolidation hubs, timed access windows, or support for the transition to electric freight vehicles is lacking. It is important to address these logistical issues to prevent an increase in operational costs for businesses, especially SMEs.

Accessibility

- Accessibility and inclusivity must be placed at the heart of the regeneration plans for Oxford Street. Considerations about travel into the area, connectivity routes and the reduction of congestion must be prioritised. The potentially disproportionate effect of restrictions on taxis, private hire vehicles (PHVs) and bus routes on the elderly, disabled and less mobile users must also be carefully considered.
- LCCI also notes the essential role of taxis for late-night travel, tourism and high-value clients.

Lack of operational detail

- LCCI welcomes the flexibility the consultation offers in its current state but notes that in the absence of detailed information on key aspects such as phasing, delivery mechanisms, funding and the potential displacement impacts on neighbouring districts, it is limited in the extent of its feedback. It also notes the importance of certainty, transparency and advance notice for businesses that will need to build changes into their contingency and business plans.

6. Recommendations

To maximise the potential of the pedestrianisation project and address the concerns outlined, LCCI makes the following recommendations:

1. Publish a detailed implementation plan

- Outline a phased timeline, with regular stakeholder feedback points and dedicated funding streams.
- Embed transparency and accountability within project management.

2. Develop an integrated freight and logistics strategy

- Collaborate with key stakeholders to develop and deliver a strategy that minimises disruption through the establishment of freight consolidation hubs, enables off-peak delivery and promotes the adoption of electric freight vehicles.

3. Guarantee inclusive transport access

- Retain or reconfigure essential bus routes.
- Provide accessible shuttle services, new drop-off points and dedicated taxi ranks to maintain accessibility.

4. Protect and support SMEs

- Offer financial and advisory support for businesses adapting to the new environment.
- Include SMEs prominently in marketing, signage and public events to ensure visibility and viability.

5. Benchmark against global competitors

- Learn from successful international pedestrianisation projects such as Milan's piazzas, New York's Times Square and Barcelona's superblocks.
- Embed Oxford Street's transformation within the broader context of London as a leading destination for global investment and tourism.

Conclusion

The pedestrianisation of Oxford Street represents a strategic opportunity to establish a world-class urban destination that catalyses economic recovery, reinforces London's global competitiveness, advances environmental sustainability and generates inclusive social impact.

LCCI supports this vision, but success will depend on careful, detailed planning and close engagement with businesses, particularly SMEs. LCCI urges the Mayor of London and partners to ensure that transport, accessibility and logistics strategies are clearly set out and that businesses are fully supported throughout the transformation.

LCCI stands ready to work collaboratively to ensure Oxford Street continues to be a premier destination for Londoners, visitors and the businesses that call it home.