

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.101 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 25th January 2018

Present (20): Peter Body (Beaminster TC); Donald Broadley (Bridport); John Collingwood (Bridport); Bob Driscoll (Symondsburry PC); Sally Falkingham (Maiden Newton); Sheena Fox (Beaminster); Ian Gray (WATAG); Maureen Jackson (BLAP); Charlotte Kinghorn (LB&KR PC); Anna Lovell (POPP), David Marsh (Thorncombe PC); Mary Marsh (WATAG); Gavin Maxwell (Bridport); Geoff Parr (West Bexington); Erica Pretty (POPP); Philip Sankey (WATAG Chair/Lyme Forward); Carol Sim (First); Aaron Sparks (First); Robin Stapleton (Walditch); Guz Tidy (Loders PC),.

1. Apologies: Tim Christian, Colin Divall, Phil Dominey, John Firrell, Margaret Hayward, Sarah Herring; Chris Hook, Ros Kayes, Adam Keen, Janet Proctor, Peter Ridler, Daryl Turner, Susan Ward-Rice, Alan Williams, Robert Williams,

2. Minutes: Three errors were identified in the minutes of the previous (100th) meeting. Donald Broadley's name was misspelt, the question on DCT in section 9 was attributed to Elizabeth Kingston rather than Charlotte Kinghorn, and Tim Christian's comments in section 8 ("pilot scheme in Greenford, where "blocked" appointments are picked up by empty school transport") should have read "pilot scheme in Greenford, Middlesex where "blocked" appointments are served by a dedicated PlusBus-for-Health service commissioned by the local CCG." A motion to amend the minutes was proposed by Guz Tidy, seconded by Mary Marsh and approved unanimously.

3. Matters arising not covered later: none.

4. Dorset Travel: Dorset County Council Officer Report. Dorset Travel sent a written report which was read to the meeting and is quoted below:

Public Transport: *Dorset County Council will continue to run service 40, Beaminster to Yeovil, to the current timetable until the end of the current college year. This allows assurance for the users and DCC continues to work with education providers on solutions to their students travel needs.*

Community Led Initiatives: *The Community Transport Grant is still available to support the establishment of new community transport services or to expand existing schemes to meet the need of local communities.*

The 50% matched funding requirement has been suspended and total project costs will be covered up to maximum allowance. £2,000 is available for revenue costs such as IT systems, training, marketing and revenue support, and you can request up to £5,000 for capital expenditure i.e. vehicle purchase.

Please note that the scheme will not pay for expenditure incurred before approval of the grant.

Full details are included in the application form which is available at dorsetforyou.gov.uk/article/424073/Community-Transport-Grant

Dorsetforyou.gov.uk has been updated to include more detail on the PlusBus as operated by Dorset Community Transport, including maps which indicate the corridor of operation

<https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/travel-dorset/bus/community-transport/community-transport-maps>

Older Persons Concessionary Bus Pass: *Many concessionary bus passes in the West Dorset area are due to expire at the end of March 2018. Older Persons Concessionary Bus Passes are automatically renewed and will be posted direct to the pass holder before the expiry date. If anyone still hasn't received their new pass 1 week before its expiry, the Dorset Bus Pass Information Line (Tel: 0300 330 1201) can help resolve any issues.*

Rail: *The ramp between Platform 2 and Williams Avenue is still on the agenda, unfortunately with no defined start date. Network Rail's processes need to be satisfied before the work can be completed.*

It has been confirmed that the 40 service will continue to be operated by Dorset County Council's in-house fleet until Friday 27 July. Concessionary Bus Passes for "Older Persons" will be replaced automatically by the end of March, other passes are valid for up to five years. Anna Lovell added that people who have moved since their pass was issued will need to re-apply as they are sent out 'Do not forward – if undelivered, return to sender'. No officers attended the meeting, so it was not possible to discuss changes to funding for community-led funding initiatives and other matters raised in the report.

5. Councillors' slot: an opportunity for our elected representatives to give their thoughts and take questions. Although several parish councillors were present, no DCC or WDDC councillor attended the meeting. Despite a note from DCC's Democratic Service Officer on 21 June 2017 advising that "Dorset County Councils' Cabinet has appointed Cllr Daryl Turner to WATAG", Daryl had notified WATAG that he can no longer attend. Maureen Jackson pointed out that the probable change to an Unitary Authority for Dorset had meant that many decisions are "on hold, as everything is up for change." Philip Sankey said that both David Redgewell of Bus User's UK and TravelWatch SouthWest feared that if local government in Dorset is split between rural areas and the "conurbation" to the East, the rural authority would lose revenue from densely-populated like Christchurch and Wimborne and services could prove more expensive to provide. More pressure should be applied to town councils to ensure proper funding. David Marsh also voiced anxiety that the parish voice will be heard less clearly in a county-wide authority. Maureen noted that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government's decision is expected in mid-February.

6. Bus Operators.

a). First Wessex, Dorset and South Somerset: Aaron Sparks spoke of the summer timetables which will come into effect from 26th March. Sunday services will be re-instated on the X51 and X53 routes with a two-hourly service between Bridport and Dorchester and Weymouth and an hourly service between Bridport and Axminster. There will be three extra X53's on weekdays and some other adjustments to fill gaps in Dorchester. An additional X53 will operate between Weymouth and Bridport during July and August (Mondays to Saturdays), leaving Weymouth at 20.10 and returning from Bridport at 21.13". Times on the 6 Bridport/Beaminster will also be amended to improve the service at Colfox Academy. Philip signalled the fact that Weymouth will be the place to claim universal credit and that it is presently not possible to book a through ticket to the town from Beaminster. Aaron assured him that the matter will be addressed. However, he was unable to give Sally Falkingham any firm undertaking about the use of buses passing empty through Maiden Newton after school runs. Bob Driscoll thanked First for starting the summer timetables before Easter this year. He was concerned that roadside publicity does not mention connections or through ticketing on the X51/53 routes. Aaron told the meeting that the information is now on drivers' duty cards. Bob welcomed this but said that this information is needed at places like Dorchester South station. Aaron announced that a new Publicity Officer is now in place, with responsibility for keeping bus-stop information up-to-date. Bob said that WATAG could help by reviewing information from a passenger's perspective before it was issued by First. Anna Lovell was assured that information shown on X53 stops at Farm Gate, Swyre and the caravan park will be updated.

b) Dorset Community Transport: Tim Christian was unable to attend but sent a report stating that DCT are set to carry on operating local bus services 14 & 688 throughout 2018 and will continue to offer seven PlusBus services in the WATAG area. This deployment accounts for over a third of the eighteen PlusBus services provided across the county. DCT are also responding to passenger feedback and trialling a fortnightly Saturday PlusBus service on their Bridport C (which resembles the route of the former 210). Bob reported that eleven passengers were on the first Saturday service and Charlotte Kinghorn hoped that the agreed extension to Long Bredy should boost traffic on this route. DCT will be reviewing patronage across the Bridport C services at the end of February before finalising future amendments, and the end of the trial period is likely to see the fare revised to £5 in-line with all other established PlusBus services. Robin Stapleton cited the case of an elderly couple who preferred to pay £4.50 each way for a taxi from Walditch to Bridport - a minor saving and greater flexibility. David Marsh stated as a result of discussions very early on in the development of the PlusBus concept, with DCT, it was concluded that the £5.00 flat-fare, although not ideal, was on balance the best way forward at the time. Sally spoke of the Thursday Bradford Peverell / Yeovil service which is well used and costs £5 return. The DCT report highlighted the charity's proactive effort to help respond to potential needs in Netherbury. They have been in contact with the Parish Clerk there and more recently with Dorset Travel regarding one of their "closed-contract" school services which passes through the village on a return journey with DCC employed passenger assistants on-board. They will need to liaise with Axe Valley and West Dorset Ring and Ride to avoid jeopardising the viability of their existing weekly services and get a clear understanding as to why the remnant timetabled bus service and local community car schemes are unable to meet any identified needs. Information on all DCT's community transport services are detailed on their website (link: [DCT](#)).

c) Dorset County Council: The absence of any Dorset Travel representatives was regretted by several of those present at the meeting. The 40 / 6 bus service along the Bridport / Yeovil route is still a major cause for concern. Bob Driscoll maintained that "on paper" the situation now looks good. There are theoretically five services between the two towns every weekday. However, this relies on passengers changing at Beaminster where connections are not guaranteed. Missed connections mean waiting for at least two hours mid-route. An e-mail from DT's Chris Hook claimed that "if the 40 did wait to connect with the 6, then its operation would then be delayed across the length of the corridor with no mechanism to advise passengers. There is also no mechanism for either driver to know if the other service was on time or late, so they could wait for nothing." This point was put to Aaron Sparks who agreed that the situation was disappointing but said that the radio systems used by drivers did not have enough range to ensure proper coordination. He said he would talk with DT about the matter. Sheena Fox had seen some improvement since the latest phase of the roadworks on the cycleway on Sea Road North, Bridport had been completed. Bob Driscoll suggested that the ideal solution would be to run the 40 on three round trips between Bridport and Yeovil, Six months remain to come up with a viable solution, but he feared that DCC do not want to be involved with buses and are only concerned with meeting their statutory obligations. "It could work though" he said "Damory managed it!" Sheena told the meeting that the 40 bus drivers were unhelpful and did not seem to want to make the service work.

d) Others: Damory are no longer very active in the WATAG area and no longer send a representative to meetings,

7. Railway News.

a) Great Western Railway: Robin Stapleton confirmed that his discussions with Catherine Phillips of the Heart of Wessex Rail Partnership on his suggestion to amending timetables to show scheduled connecting trains times from Bristol Temple Meads to Gloucester for trains terminating at Temple Meads had been successful and had been included into the current 2018 timetable booklet. There are also now four, rather than two services between Weymouth and Gloucester each day. Geoff Parr raised the problem of replacement coaches put on when trains are cancelled being too large to fit into stations between Weymouth and Yeovil. Sally Falkingham had been told that passengers from Maiden Newton should catch a public bus, despite the fact that virtually all public buses have been withdrawn.

b) South Western Railway: WATAG has submitted a response to SWR's consultation. The group prefers to keep both Woking and Clapham Junction to ensure reasonable connections to Heathrow Airport, the South Coast etc., and would also like to maintain two direct services an hour between Weymouth and Waterloo. Philip Sankey hoped that there would be better coordination and connectivity between bus and rail services as First are the operators for both. Guz Tidy had raised a complaint with the company as booked mobility assistance for her at Waterloo station failed to materialise.

8. Bridport and District Community Bus.

Although no-one from Bridport Town Council attended the meeting, Maureen Jackson, a member of the project group, said that consultations were under way with the parishes which could be involved and that a new meeting would be held soon..

9. Democratic Moment: Mary Marsh announced that Thorncombe PC has now received the second half of the matched funded £2000 DCC Community Transport Grant. Thorncombe's bus services are therefore set to continue. David explained that the TESCO's "Bags of Help" scheme is open to Parish Councils, provided that the PC's standing order details are given as an attachment to the application.

10. Any Other Business: Colin Divall will represent WATAG at DCC's Integrated Transport Review at County Hall on 26th February. Others present at the meeting also hope to attend.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.10 pm.

The next meeting (GM 102) is to be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport at 6.30 pm on Thursday 22nd March 2018.

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