

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.85 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 28th May 2015

Present: Peter Body (Beaminster Town Council), Monica Burt (BAOPF), Cllr Ron Coatsworth (DCC), John Collingwood (BAG-WD), Brian Cox (Bridport), Bob Driscoll (Symondsburry Parish Council), Debbie Fiddik (DCC), Alan Glenn (Askerswell), Ignacio Gomez (BAG-WD), John Green (CPRE), Freda Hennessy (Corscombe, Halstock & District Group Parish Council), Petra Hughes (Bridport), Liz Jackson (Bridport News), Julian Jones (BTC), Trevor Jones (WATAG), Adam E. Keen (Damory), Dominic Knorpel (Dorset POPP), Chris Loder (South West Trains), Mike Nicks (West Bay Community Forum), Geoff Parr (West Bexington), Andy Pennington (BAG-WD), Peter Smith (Chair WATAG), Valerie Smith (Bridport), John Snow (Yarn Barton, Beaminster), Tony Taylor (Puncknowle and Swyre Group Parish Council), Carol Tritton (Bridport) Phil Tritton (Charmouth Parish Council), Cllr Daryl Turner (DCC), Richard Webster (Bridport), Lottie Welch (View from..), Alan Williams (WATAG), Mark Williams (First).

Apologies: Sue Herman, Cllr Ros Kayes, Anna Lovell, Erica Pretty, Peter Ridler, Philip Sankey and Elinor Scott

1. Minutes: The minutes of the previous (84th) meeting were agreed.

2. Matters Arising: none.

3 News from Bus Operators:

a) First.

Mark Williams confirmed that the summer timetables were running satisfactorily although there were still some issues on delays in Bridport on the X53 (with the cumulative effect from delays along the route). The timings on the X31 had been optimized to ensure train connections at both Dorchester South and Axminster. The evening services on the X31 will have to be diverted through Portesham when the A35 closes for repairs. Mike Nicks asked about the impact of the re-opening of the pinch point at West Bay and urged First to adopt a “culture” of recognizing the pedestrian crossing point by St John’s Church. The summer timetable leaflets have been issued but Petra Hughes expressed concern about the distribution to B&Bs She was assured that “thousands” had been distributed locally. Valerie Smith expressed concern about the long wait at Dorchester South between the arrival of the train and departure of the X31 bus; Mark noted this but emphasised the need to allow extra time in the schedule. Bob Driscoll highlighted concerns about Sunday services next winter. Mark Williams indicated that winter evening services have yet to be finalized and First would welcome comments from interested parties. The Chair mentioned Alan Williams’ suggestion for a winter Sunday X31 running to Weymouth via the coast road.

b) Damory

Adam Keen told the meeting that services remained unchanged and that the 40 Bridport/Beaminster/Yeovil service was seeing improved punctuality and passenger numbers. The ongoing subsidy from the DCC has made the route “safe” for a further year. From 2016, the route may only survive with subsidy from Yeovil College and Somerset CC. Sunday services cannot be run economically. Mr Keen noted Peter Body’s comment that although the new buses were more comfortable, they were disappointingly dusty and dirty inside. The problem of parked vehicles at Gerrard’s Green is getting worse and the route may have to be amended as a result. Any changes could be put into effect quickly as timetables are produced locally.

4 Information from the Dorset County Council

Debbie Fiddik stressed that the route 40 subsidy is three-way (DCC, SCC and Yeovil College). Timetable books have been issued to TICs; transport maps are being printed and will be available within 3 to 4 weeks. A new list of services on which concessionary passes may be used before 9.30 on weekdays can be accessed in a PDF file on the DCC webpage (<https://www.dorsetforyou.com/travel-dorset/bus/national-bus-pass-concessionary-travel>).

Restructuring of the DCC's transport organization is in progress. The new DDA-compliant vehicles on the 44 Bridport/Bothenhampton route are still grounding at Chestnut Road and there seems to be no alternative but to cut that portion of the route. The shelter outside the Co-op store in Lyme Regis has been removed temporarily following accident damage. The 73 route now has smaller, newer vehicles.

5. Railways: Latest Information

Chris Loder outlined a number of new proposals to enhance services in the region from December 2015, including a half-hourly service from Yeovil to London between 12.20 and 19.20, the first rail link between Yeovil's Junction and Pen Mill stations for many years and the opportunity to travel from Weymouth to Exeter via Yeovil. The three-hour service gap on the Heart of Wessex line north of Yeovil would be reduced to 90 minutes. It is also planned to add extra evening trains from Exeter Central to Honiton. Chris stressed that these and other plans were proposals only and await approval from the regulator on track access. Further news is expected in September. The Network Rail Route Study is examining long-term improvements to the rail infrastructure over the next 25 years, including a half-hourly service between Exeter and Axminster from 2018, although the single-line sections will remain a major constraint. Mr Loder told John Snow that construction of Cranbrook station has been delayed due to flooding problems, and that Devon CC is holding discussions on an airport shuttle service.

6. "Real-Time" and "On-Bus" information

Mark Williams confirmed that the on-board audio system has been back in operation on First X31/53 routes for a few days. There are a number of "niggles", including excessive volume and inaccurate information. Pronunciation is also an issue (e.g. "Annoying Road" for Anning Rd. in Lyme Regis and "Winterbourne Abyss"). Damory's RTI system is "halfway through its upgrade" and ticket machines are ready. Adam Keen expected the system to be up and running on Damory services by end June. Alan Williams pointed out that timetables are still incorporated in the real-time displays and passengers are bewildered by information on buses vanishing from displays when the scheduled time of arrival passes – regardless of where the vehicle may be, and "phantom" busses are shown on Bank Holidays.

7. Concessionary Bus Pass Use

Alan Williams cited Dorset CC sources demonstrating that as the number of concessionary journeys increases year on year, the calculated reimbursement rate for commercial operators declines. On current trends, it could reach just 25p within five years. For "generated journeys" (travel because the journey is free), only marginal costs are paid. However, for a profitable commercial service, some journeys may be unprofitable as there are not enough passengers to cover primary costs, and if a concessionary passenger travels on such a journey, they cannot travel at marginal cost. The bus company is forgoing the fare they would have received if the scheme did not exist and are therefore subsidising the concessionary journey. This is contrary to the principle behind the scheme which is that the bus company should 'neither gain nor lose' from operating the mandatory scheme. Since revenue forgone is part of the rate calculation, the bus companies need to take this question up with the local authority as a matter of urgency.

8. Democratic moment

Bob Driscoll passed on a report from Anna Lovell stating that NEPTS criteria had been tightened and were being applied rigorously. Fewer patients are deemed to be eligible for hospital transport. The DCC representative was unaware of this situation or of the Integrated Transport Review. It was also claimed that doctors have been overruled by operators on eligibility. Peter Body told the meeting he was told that cataract operations no longer qualify and that he had to abandon his treatment for lack of affordable transport. It was agreed to give this issue proper consideration at the next GM.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 8.15.

The next meeting is on 23rd July 2015 at 6.30pm in the WI Hall North St Bridport

Secretary:

John Collingwood
213 St Andrews Rd
Bridport DT6 3BT
tel:07867848891
email: john@cjctrad.co.uk

Chair and Treasurer:

Peter Smith
Watton House Farm,
Watton, Bridport. DT6 5JZ
tel: 01308 424646
email: peter@smithwat204.fsnet.co.uk