

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.92 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 28th July 2016

Present (25): Graham Bailey (Stagecoach South West); Lynton Burse (Bridport); Jackie Butcher (Mosterton); John Collingwood (Bridport); Maureen Dormer (Mosterton); Bob Driscoll (Symondsburry Parish Council); Sally Falkingham (Maiden Newton PC); Mike Farmer (Bridport); Richard Freer (Vision 2030); Derek Gifford (Damory); Katy Graham (Bridport TC); Ian Gray (Dorset); Dominic Knorpel (POPP); David Marsh (Thorncombe PC); Mary Marsh (Thorncombe bus users); Geoff Parr (West Bexington); Lee Peters (Damory); Pamela Reed (Mosterton); Peter Ridler (Lower Walditch); Philip Sankey (Lyme Forward); Peter Smith (Chair WATAG); Mark Van de Weyer (Marshwood); Richard Webster (Bridport); Alan Williams (WATAG); June Williams (Salwayash/Broadwindsor PlusBus users)

Apologies: Peter Body, Tim Christian, Bob Crutchfield, Ian Gardner, John G Green, Freda Hennessey, Trevor Jones, Ros Kayes, Adam Keen, Anna Lovell, David Morgan, Simon Newport, Erica Pretty, Helen Reed, Carol Sim, Daryl Turner.

1. Minutes: The minutes of the previous (91st) meeting were agreed and signed.

2. Matters arising not covered later: Philip Sankey reported that he had attended the previous evening's Lyme Regis Town Council town management and highways sub-committee which discussed a suggestion to impose a height restriction in Bridge St/Church St following the breakage of a window by a double-decker bus. He had spoken on the need for public transport for residents of and visitors to Lyme Regis and pointed out that the length of vehicles is as important as their height, and that diverting buses away from the east side of town could drive operators away, leaving the public totally cut off.

3. Rural Bus Service Review Consultation Response (Weekly Village Services) – WATAG's view. Alan Williams noted that only seven of the concessionary pass holders responding to the consultation would be happy to contribute to the cost of the bus service. He referred to WATAG's repeated attempts to inject more money into subsidised services by allowing some payment. These services were a lifeline, particularly for the elderly. Respondents main concerns related to isolation and access to shops, leisure/social activities and healthcare although it is unclear how far these views were taken into account as most of the services which have now been withdrawn were de-registered before the DCC's decision was made. David Marsh questioned the accuracy of the results, as although the report indicated that less than 30 responses had come from Thorncombe, over fifty forms were completed in the village¹.

4. 2017 Public and Schools Transport Review of Remaining Subsidised Services (ended Friday 22nd July). The closing date for submissions to the review has closed, and it was regrettable that no County Council councillors or officers were present. Ian Gray expressed disappointment that there was nobody to hear the feelings of the meeting. He pointed to the "vast overcapacity available due to poor management." The problem will come into sharp relief when contracts expire at the end of July next year. Peter Smith welcomed the fact that the decision will be less rushed this time and that stakeholders will have a greater opportunity to lobby decision-makers.

5. Information from Dorset Travel. No officers attended the meeting, but Community Engagement Officer, Amanda Evans submitted a report which was read to those present and is included at the end of these minutes. The report on the new shelter at Mosterton was welcomed but drew hollow laughter when residents told the meeting that they would be without a bus service for a full month. Alan Williams pointed out that the kerb height at the stop by the George Hotel in West Bay must allow easy entry onto the bus. Bob Driscoll express surprise that the Officer Report made no mention of the current dispute affecting First's services and asked what Dorset Travel is doing to maintain core routes.

¹ Thorncombe Parish Council will approach the DCC about identified discrepancies.

6. Councillors' Slot – Although apologies had been received, the meeting deplored the absence of any elected representatives. Sally Falkingham referred to a meeting where she asked for the list of pre-09.30 concession holders' exemptions and said that the DCC had assured her that the matter would be remedied "soon." Dominic Knorpel spoke of the inclusion of transport in the Local Area Plan and stressed the importance of lobbying councillors to recognise the importance of provision of public and community transport for the most fundamental public health outcomes, as stated in the integrated Dorset Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2016-2019 [draft attached]. This places a clear statutory and moral duty upon our local authorities to ensure people who have no access to private transport, are able to access essential services and amenities, at very least on a weekly basis².

7. Bus Operators News

- i. First Bus -Winter service. Simon Newport, General Manager of First Wessex, had sent an e-mail explaining that he was unable to attend the meeting as "we have people working all hours trying to keep the service going". He added that the services will be much the same on the X51/X53 this winter although the X52 (Lyme Regis / Exeter) route "is still being discussed." WATAG has had sight of the provisional winter timetables, but could not discuss them in detail at the meeting. Bob Driscoll wondered what WATAG could do or say about major trunk routes impacted by strike action over the past 5-weeks and for an indefinite time in the future. Dominic spoke of "huge disruption to commuter routes" and Alan deplored the lack of up-to-date information on the strike at bus stops. Ian Gray wondered whether the traffic commissioner was aware of this instance of non-performance ("failure to operate").
- ii. Damory - Update on service provision. The Damory representatives said that the company provides what it can but doesn't know what will happen next year. The 40 service will continue to run for five days a week during the road works but will not call at Mosterton area. The meeting heard attendees from Mosterton and beyond pointing to the damage caused by the 5-week interruption to the service. Children will be unable to visit friends, appointments will be missed, isolation will increase. Philip wondered whether the traffic commissioners considered it reasonable to deprive Mosterton of a registered service for five weeks. Ian Gray pointed out that cross-boundary services often "fall off the radar" as councils don't talk to each other (e.g. Dorset/Somerset CCs). Damory was asked to report back. It was suggested that Cllr Rebecca Knox should be asked to arrange to use DCC vehicles as shuttles during the suspension of the service. Expressions of outrage came from several speakers.
- iii. South West Coaches – Service 73. From 2nd September, the service will run between Bridport and Powerstock only and will no longer call at stops up to and including Maiden Newton. WATAG understands that the service costs the DCC £69,000 annually. The decision to truncate the route to support "scholar flows" will bring a saving of just £22k. The clear inference is that DCC will still have to pay £47k. Bob classed the change as very short-sighted and wondered where the vehicle would be based. Sally Falkingham said that she was talking to DCT.
- iv. Dorset Community Transport. The meeting paid tribute to the contribution made by Ian Gray who has now retired. The new services are well-subscribed but there is still some availability.
- v. Stagecoach South West. Graham Bailey told the meeting that the 9A Lyme Regis / Exeter service had started on 2nd May. The public response has been favourable and there are no plans to make any changes at present.
- vi. NORDCAT. Helen Reed sent a brief update confirming that NORDCAT is now running dial-a-ride services to Dorchester and Yeovil on Wednesdays and Fridays from South Perrott, Corscombe, Beaminster, Cheddington and the Halstock area. The services are getting busy but there is still room (Nordcat office: 01258 473154).

² The draft version of the strategy, used for the consultation ended 25 July, is attached

8. Bridport Bus Station. The current dilapidated state of the bus station was brought to the attention of BTC's Project Manager and Community Initiatives Officer, Katy Graham, who will contact WDDC.

9. Railway News. The meeting heard that much-vaunted "summer special" Saturday service from Waterloo to Weymouth (via Yeovil) has carried its first passenger from London to Maiden Newton direct. The Weymouth/Bristol summer Sunday morning service will continue this winter, for the first time for many years.

10. Bus Users' UK. The organization may become a registered charity. Bus Users UK has submitted a detailed response to the DCC's Rural Bus Service Review [see attached].

11. Democratic Moment & AOB. The entire meeting called for action to be taken on the dangerous Mile Cross junction on the A35. The 'SLOW DOWN' sign (for the junction) is at the point where the limit rises from 40 to 50mph and is confusing for drivers.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 8.20 pm.

The next meeting is to be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport at 6.30pm on Thursday 22nd September 2016.

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Dorset County Council Officer Report WATAG – 28th July 2016

Public Transport

Service 9 (Stagecoach)

We have heard very little about the operation of this recently registered service but what we have heard has been favourable.

Service 40 (Damory)

The Bridport to Yeovil service will continue to operate with the existing timetable for a further year with subsidy from Dorset and Somerset County Councils. However, there are still problems with vehicle parking in Gerrard's Green Beaminster. If the problems cannot be resolved, it is possible that the bus company will seek to withdraw from this area.

Service 73 (South West Coaches)

This service has been re-registered by South West Coaches and will serve the Southern half of the route from Powerstock to Bridport. The service will run from Mondays to Fridays except Public Holidays and offers three return journeys in to Bridport.

There has been a road resurfacing programme in West Dorset – the contractors seek to allow buses through wherever possible but in some cases routes have been or will have to be diverted although these occasions are kept to a minimum.

Public and School Transport Review

The closing date for the Public and School Transport Review consultation ended on 22nd July and there has been 2,500 responses. The consultation report will be available at dorsetforyou.com on 10th August.

The results of the consultation carried out in January of this year are available on

<https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/travel-dorset/bus-services-review> - scroll to the end of the page and follow the link.

Bus Shelters and Infrastructure

- Bus shelter improvements at The George, West Bay – Disabled access required to bus shelter. The shelter is currently on a raised platform on the pavement and there is no dropped kerb on the pavement. Work has been scheduled to raise the pavement up to the shelter and install a dropped kerb
- New bus shelter to be installed at the Post Office, A3066, Mosterton - Mosterton Parish Council have sourced a shelter which will be installed at the stop. The parish council has signed an agreement with Dorset County Council to take on ownership and maintenance of the shelter once it has been installed
- New bus stops for First X53 service – new stops have been installed on West Road (West Allington), Chickerell Hill (near Courage Way), in West Street (Abbotsbury Hill) to serve the Sub-Tropical Gardens and near the Toll Gate estate in Wool.
- RTPI – Thank you for WATAG's report on the Dorset RTPI system. We are currently in discussion with operators and our RTPI provider on how we can bring the system up to 100% real-time with a reduced budget
- Bridport coach station RTPI issues – Lacey Goodwin will provide a separate response to the queries over the RTPI screen not working at Bridport Coach Station as she is awaiting further details from VIX.

Guidance and Toolkit for Community Transport

The Guidance and Toolkit for setting up a community transport scheme in Dorset has now been produced and distributed to all libraries and parish and town councils. An online version of the Guide can be found online at dorsetforyou.com/community-transport-toolkit.

Your Dorset

A 2-page feature on Community Transport has appeared in the July edition of Dorset County Council's newspaper 'Your Dorset'. This includes information on the Toolkit and case studies on community transport schemes in the County.