

# WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

## Minutes of General Meeting No.96 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 23rd March 2017

**Present (25):** Donald Broadley (Bridport); Peter Body (Beaminster Town Council); Mary Boughton (Shipton Gorge PC); Lynton Burse (Bridport); John Collingwood (Bridport); Maureen Dormer (Mosterton); Bob Driscoll (Symondsbury Parish Council); Mike Farmer (Bridport); Derek Gifford (Damory); Alan Glenn (Askerswell); Gill Glenn (Askerswell); Ian Gray (WATAG); Chris Hook (DCC); Janine Johnson (DCC); Mike Keepax (Bridport); Gavin Maxwell (Bridport); Simon Newport (First); Lee Peters (Damory); Janet Proctor (Burton Bradstock); Pamela Reed (Mosterton); Philip Sankey (Lyme Forward); Peter Smith (Chair WATAG); Daryl Turner (DCC); Elizabeth Welch (Bothenhampton & Walditch PC); Lottie Welch (View from..); Alan Williams (WATAG)

**1. Apologies:** Colin Divall, Sally Falkingham, John Green, Freda Hennessey, Neil Hurlock, Adam Keen, Anna Lovell, David Marsh, Mary Marsh, Erica Pretty; Peter Ridler, Anne Sankey, Susan Ward-Rice, Dickie Webster.

**2. Minutes:** The minutes of the previous (95th) meeting were agreed and signed.

**3. Matters arising not covered later:** none.

**4. Retirement of Chair / Treasurer:** Peter Smith confirmed that he will be standing down from these two posts as he is moving out of the area.

**5. Nominations for and appointment of Chair:** No nominations had been received before the meeting. Philip Sankey offered to act as Chair during meetings on a temporary basis, leaving the campaigning aspects of the position to the Vice-Chair. Philip's appointment was proposed by Alan Glenn and seconded by Janet Proctor.

**6. Nominations for and appointment of Vice-Chairperson:** The revised constitution approved at the EGM provides for the inclusion of a Vice-Chairperson on the Committee. No nominations for this position were received before or during the meeting, and it was hoped that a candidate would be found before the next General Meeting.

**7. Nominations for and appointment of Treasurer:** Janet Proctor kindly volunteered to act as interim treasurer. Her appointment was proposed by Bob Driscoll and seconded by Mike Farmer.

**8. September 2017 School (and July Public) Transport Contract.** Chris Hook, Dorset County Council Travel Operations Manager, was keen to stress the important role played by TAGs. Local information from local people assisted DCC in forming "true partnerships" with communities. He confirmed that the tender process for transport contracts closes on 10 April and that results of the Council's evaluation will be published in mid-May. The number of bus routes supported by the Council has fallen from 72 to 7 in recent years. Chris was anxious to promote community participation in rail travel as well, and reported that the "Friends of Chetnole Halt" group has been formed to help improve this small station north of Maiden Newton on the Heart of Wessex line, which has among the lowest usage numbers in the country. He also reported progress on community transport initiatives, citing the hard work put in by David and Mary Marsh in Thorncombe and the 'joined-up thinking' applied to transport by local groups in Weymouth. Chris underlined that DCC is keen to prioritize improvements in the infrastructure and is developing a county-wide review to identify areas for improvement. Links with the community should help to integrate services.

Peter Smith pointed out that bus timetables at stops were confusing: operators displayed information in frames on poles while details of subsidised services are posted inside shelters - a “them and us” situation. Peter Body said that timetables at the “Nationwide” stop in West Street, Bridport were too high and the flag still mentioned the 47 which has not run for some years. He also told the meeting, once again, that there are no timetables at the fire-station stop in Beaminster.

Janet Proctor felt that the first priority is to have an available service rather than adding cosmetic improvements. A note from Sally Falkingham was read to the meeting, expressing concern about the future of the 212 Maiden Newton to Dorchester and Yeovil route which takes pupils from the Frampton area to the Thomas Hardy and middle schools in the county town. Chris Hook replied that a trial was being conducted on the 212 by putting more school children on to help support the route - a case of the council’s statutory obligations, rather than subsidy driving improvement. He felt that now is the time to “get the next generation used to buses for life” and pointed to a 75% drop in driving licence applications by young people. Chris also announced that long-awaited improvements for disabled access at Dorchester West station are due “this year”. The siting of two bus stops 112 metres apart at Dorchester County Hospital is working reasonably well, although bus access to the hospital is expected to improve under DCH’s plans to provide a better welcome for patients.

Reports that DCC funding for the Axe Valley & West Dorset Ring & Ride service has been withdrawn without warning while assistance from Devon County Council continues are not as clear-cut as they may seem. DCC had made it clear in October 2016 that they wanted the service to become more sustainable and “business-like”.

Mary Boughton said out that Shipton Gorge is the last village before Bridport on the 210 route. The bus is often full in summer months, but people working in town need transport year-round and may move out if the route is axed. Even one or two buses a week would help the carless. Chris assured Mary that DCC is “acutely aware” of the possible impact of the withdrawal of subsidies on rural isolation, but it was felt that the solution lies within the community. Alan Williams discussed maximising use of existing journeys with particular reference to the 42 from Broadwindsor. Chris agreed that there was further scope in taking passengers on manoeuvring and infill movements.

Peter Smith asked Chris to standardize youth fares across the services up for tender. He drew the meeting’s attention to the fact that First charge full fares to passengers aged sixteen and above, whereas Damory wait until they are eighteen.

**9. Information from Dorset Travel.** Chris Hook’s wide-ranging review of DCC’s initiatives in travel in the WATAG area covered most of the points mentioned in the officer report sent by Community Engagement Officer, Amanda Evans. The report is attached to these minutes.

**10 Councillors’ Slot:** Daryl Turner confirmed Lyme Regis TC will be providing financial support for the 71 Lyme Regis Town Service. He also pointed to the support DCC can offer to communities which want to set up their own transport schemes. Ian Gray stated that these initiatives must be professionally managed, adding that organisations like DCT can only operate on the back of school work and it is by no means certain that they will be awarded school contracts. Chris Hook maintained that there is scope for using transport provided for special-needs pupils.

## **11. Bus Operators’ News**

i. First Bus. The meeting was shown First’s new bus stop flag, designed to improve quality. The summer timetable is to be launched on 9<sup>th</sup> April and will broadly follow the same pattern as in previous years. There will be no Sunday, bank holiday or late service on the X52. The new First booklet is expected to be issued on 1<sup>st</sup> April. An “app” is to be produced to give passengers information on the “Jurassic Coaster” route. A new tourist bus will start running three services a day along the coast from 27<sup>th</sup> May, providing stops at viewpoints and Abbotsbury Gardens. The buses will not be open-top vehicles.

Simon Newport recognised the part late buses could play in promoting social inclusion for younger people: providing access to employment and social activities. Funding may be available from the Coastal Communities Fund and other sources.

Simon then confirmed rumours that First will stop using the bus shelters at Bridport bus station and that the X51/52/53 will halt outside the Gents toilets in Tannery Road. He told the shocked audience that the company had given WDDC notice that they would no longer pay for the use of the station in July. Several speakers insisted that the matter could and must be speedily resolved to avoid unnecessary disruption to passengers, road users and bus drivers..

ii. Damory. Current contracts are running reasonably well and the new link back from Beaminster was welcomed. Drivers on the 40 have been asked to look out for potential passengers to Bridport Hospital on both sides of the road at the Hospital Lane bus stop location.

iii. South West Coaches and Stagecoach South West. No representatives from these companies attended the meeting, but Stagecoach South West were thanked for checking the new WATAG summer timetables. After much hard work, these are now available to the public at 20p a copy from Bridport and Lyme Regis Tourist Information Offices.

**12. Railway News:** The “summer special” Saturday service from Waterloo to Weymouth (via Yeovil) will not be running this year.

A report from Sally Falkingham was read to the meeting, explaining the impact of the modernisation of Bath Spa Station on the Heart of Wessex Line. The work is scheduled to run from 8<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> April and will entail the closure of the station at weekends (including Good Friday and Easter Monday) and a number of bus replacement services.

**13. Bridport and District Local Bus:** The public consultations for both bus passengers and residents who rarely or never use busses continue. Peter Smith felt that a public bus service must be run by a commercial operator to meet disability-compliance, reliability, safety and other passenger issues.

#### **14. Democratic Moment and Any Other Business**

Mike Farmer felt that WATAG should also cover walking: the low-impact, carbon-neutral, healthy transport option for the able-bodied. Recent changes to footpaths had shown scant regard for walkers.

Bob Driscoll paid tribute to Peter Smith for his dedicated service as Chair of WATAG for six turbulent years. Under his stewardship, the action group has moved from a very difficult relationship with DCC, to something close to a working relationship. All present thanked Peter and wished him well in his new home. He will be missed.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.15 pm.

The next meeting (97) - is to be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport at 6.30pm  
on Thursday 25th May 2017.

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## **Dorset County Council Officer Report** **WATAG – 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2017**

### **New Contract Model**

The tender period for public and mainstream home to school transport is underway and the tender period was recently extended. Dorset Travel expect to formally award these contracts on 12 May. We previously expected to award the contracts in April.

### **Public Transport**

There have been no changes to the subsidised services operating in the WATAG area since the January meeting. It is important to note that there will be significant changes to the supported public transport network in July this year. Dorset Travel will have a better understanding of changes to the public transport network following the award of contracts in May. We will communicate the changes to all stakeholders, including WATAG, in mid-May.

### **Rail**

Heart of Wessex Line – DCC is working with Great Western Trains to carry out some improvements to Maiden Newton, Yetminster, and Dorchester West Stations with a view to improving cycle parking and to improve access to Platform 1 at Maiden Newton Station in the form of a short ramp to replace the steps. GW are expected to commence the works in late Spring and for all the works to be completed by late Summer.

From 5th to 28th August, platforms 1-9 at London Waterloo will be closed so work can start to extend the platforms for longer trains. During this time, SWT will not be able to run as many trains as usual and there will be significant reductions in services for many stations and a small number of others will be closed. To help everyone plan ahead, SWT has published detailed service information, including travel advice for each station and an 'at a glance' service map. This information can be found at [www.southwesttrains.co.uk/plan-your-journey/planned-improvements/wswupgrade](http://www.southwesttrains.co.uk/plan-your-journey/planned-improvements/wswupgrade)

### **Dorset County Council Community Transport Grant**

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 Community Transport Grant will fund costs associated with starting up a community transport scheme including IT software that supports effective operation, marketing and training of staff and volunteers (up to £2,000). Up to £5,000 can be requested for capital expenditure i.e. vehicle purchase. Applications will need 50% matched funding of the total cost of the project.

Successful applicants would have to agree to terms and conditions, such as providing reports on expenditure and outcomes. Full details are included in the application form which can be requested from Amanda Evans (e-mail: [a.j.evans@dorsetcc.gov.uk](mailto:a.j.evans@dorsetcc.gov.uk)).

### **Cycling**

DCC is still awaiting news from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on their decision to fund the West Bay cycle route. It was hoped that a decision would be made by late February but we may not receive news now until the end of March at the earliest.