

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.98 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 27th July 2017

Present (45): J. D .Barrett (Loders); Rosemary Beeny (BAVLAP); Peter Body (Beaminster); Donald Broadley (Bridport); Mary Brown (Bridport); Lynton Burse (Bridport); John Collingwood (Bridport); Maureen Dormer (Mosterton); Bob Driscoll (Symondsburry PC); Jean Dunseith (DCC councillor); Sally Falkingham (Maiden Newton PC); Mike Farmer (Bridport); John Firrell (Litton Cheney PC); , Sheena Fox (Beaminster); Alan Glenn (Askerswell); Jill Glenn (Askerswell); Jean Gosney (Bridport); Ian Gray (WATAG); Lois Gribble (Uploders); Liz Haines (Bridport); Sarah Herring (Bridport); Chris Hook (Dorset Travel); Alan Kinghorn (Long Bredy); Charlotte Kinghorn (Long Bredy); Elizabeth Kingston (Litton Cheney); Anna Lovell (POPP), Audrey Marsh (Bridport); David Marsh (Thorncombe PC); Mary Marsh (Thorncombe Bus Users); Gavin Maxwell (Bridport); Bill Orchard (Litton Cheney PC); Valerie Payne (Bridport); Erica Pretty (POPP); Janet Proctor (Burton Bradstock); David Redgewell (Bus Users UK); Pamela Reed (Mosterton); Peter Ridler (Lower Walditch), Philip Sankey (WATAG Chair/Lyme Forward); Bryan Scammell (Uploders); Catherine Smith (DCT Blandford); Gordon Sneddon (Dorset Travel); Robin Stapleton (Walditch); Daryl Turner (DCC councillor/cabinet); Dickie Webster (Bridport); Alan Williams (WATAG).

1. Apologies: Tim Christian, Colin Divall, Phil Dominey, John Green, Ros Kayes, Craig Leaper, Simon Newport, Tony Taylor, Guz Tidy, Susan Ward-Rice.

2. Minutes: The minutes of the previous (97th) meeting were agreed and signed.

3. Matters arising not covered later: none.

4. Dorset Travel / Dorset TAG leaders meeting with DCC on 21st July: Dorset Travel Team Service Manager, Chris Hook, immediately addressed the general concern about the 40 Yeovil/Crewkerne/Beaminster/Bridport bus route and the “seamless transition” into DCC operation. Faced with a barrage of protests about unhelpful drivers, late buses, missed stops and confusion during the first four days’ service, he admitted that “we let you down”. He assured the meeting that these difficulties are only temporary and that this “core route” will continue. Talks are ongoing with stakeholders and WATAG will be kept informed. David Redgewell pointed out that while neighbouring County Councils are having to reduce transport funding, the level of DCC’s cuts are the deepest in the South West. The 40 is a key route and the council’s “knit-it-yourself” attitude will not do. The service must be run properly: drivers must know their route and the route number and destination must be clearly displayed - not just on a piece of paper on the windscreen. Locals and visitors deserve better: bus passengers bring money into the local economy. The message seems to be “Don’t come to Dorset”. David promised that Bus Users (UK) will pursue the matter. Chris Hook asked for patience as DCC is looking at the longer term. Philip Sankey reported that Matthew Piles, DCC’s Head of Economy, had told TAG Leaders on the 21st July that since 2015, the County Council’s transport strategy has been to support a core Monday – Friday bus network. Weekends must be either ‘community’ or ‘commercial’. Philip also spoke of the Lyme Flyer “alternative” to the 71 Lyme Regis town bus. He had spent a full day travelling on the 23-seater bus. At times he was alone and there were 12 other passengers when the bus was at its fullest. The service is invaluable for individuals but it needs to be run on a more flexible basis “thrashed out locally.” Chris Hook made it clear that grants are available and that the “DCC wants to spend.” David Marsh asked Chris Hook why there are certain grants given out that are not match-funded, whereas the three Rural Bus services from Thorncombe to Bridport, Axminster and Chard obtained a match-funded grant. Chris explained that this match-funding does not apply to the ex-40 Saturday service. Mary Marsh was keen to scotch gossip that Thorncombe’s relative success had anything to do with the local MP! No type of support, written or otherwise, has been received from Sir Oliver Letwin. Bob Driscoll was adamant that although DCC had given advance information about the withdrawal of subsidies for the 73 (Powerstock stump of Maiden Newton/Bridport rail replacement), the 210 (Litton Cheney/Bridport) and 44 Bridport circular service, nothing had been said and the public had not been consulted about the cessation of the Saturday 40 service until the announcement on 3rd July.

The crowded meeting continued to discuss Dorset Travel's performance and proposals. Peter Body feared that WATAG was "backing the council" and challenged the assertion that 54% of respondents to DCC's questionnaire approved of the cutsⁱ, Maureen Dorner stressed that Mosterton needs a Saturday service and bus stops must be put back, adding that patients are having to spend £15 on trips to surgery in Maiden Newton, Chris Hook spoke of the role of dolmus-type "shared taxis" and mentioned that the DCC and Somerset CC were both talking to Yeovil College about maintaining buses to Bridport and Crewkerne. David Redgewell stressed that the route is crucial for workers, students, shoppers and families.

5. Dorset Community Transport: Chris Hook thanked DCT for their swift action in maintaining some sort of a lifeline following the end of the 210, 44, 73 and other services. Janet Proctor referred to difficulties in booking journeys as the DCT phone desk is closed before 9.30 and after 2.30. Passengers do not know whether they are fit to travel the next day or what the weather will bring, and Janet asked if there is a way users can let DCT know if they are unable to travel. Chris Hook said that the council is working with the charity on communications. He also said that Powerstock School is working with the Parish Council to run a community bus. Chris felt that the transport network will be "much more responsive" if there is a broad mix. Sally Falkingham welcomed a dial-a-ride service in the holidays - but what will happen in September? Dorset Travel is still working on a solution and will make an announcement in the "next couple of weeks." Robin Stapleton asked why the 210 (Litton Cheney, Puncknowle, Swyre, Burton Bradstock, Shipton Gorge and Walditch) service has been cut if it is so popular. Catherine Smith replied that services will develop in response to demand and may well expand, as and where necessary. The Kinghorns asked for the "Bridport C" (ex-210) to be extended to Little Bredy. David Marsh asked why there were different fares for some of the new PlusBus services. DCT's General Manager, Tim Christian had sent an e-mail to WATAG explaining they had opted to maintain a flat fare on each of their PlusBus services rather than staged fares. Amongst other considerations, this was for ease of operation and publicity. The charity has maintained a flat fare on the new trial Bridport C albeit, less than others in the area. He asked for passengers with concerns to contact DCT directly. Bookings and enquiries for the PlusBus services can be made by phone to Kari on 01258 287980 (between 09.30 and 2.30 Monday-Friday) or by e-mail on dorset@ectcharity.co.uk. Details of the services can be found on the Dorset link on their website (www.ectcharity.co.uk)

6. Bus Operators. Simon Newport of First was unable to attend the meeting, but he had met Alan Williams the day before to review winter timetables. Alan told the meeting that changes will come on 3rd September for a four-week period, with 2-hourly daily services on the X51/53 from Axminster to Weymouth or Dorchester, with some additional morning runs. Some buses will head East through Bridport at the same time and Alan urged passengers to check numbers carefully. From the end of September, services will run from Mondays to Saturdays. On Sundays, there will just be a two-hourly service between Axminster and Weymouth (X53), although the county town can still be accessed by taking the 10 from Weymouth. David Redgewell pointed out that First's new rail franchise will include bus/train integration. Alan has written a note on First Wessex Bus Fare Zones (attached). Damory's exit from the area gave Bob Driscoll a "touch of déjà vu". The company had done a good job when the 2011 contracts had settled down, but it all fell to bits when they lost the school runs. Philip Sankey told the meeting that Matthew Piles had informed the TAG leaders' meeting that arrangements had been made this way "to ensure competition." The WI hall echoed to general applause for Damory's service. Ian Gray pointed out that Damory employed a number of sub-contractors and that the new model would use fewer operators. Anna Lovell berated the council, insisting that too much was being said about "the money" - What about district nurse trips, trips to hospital and the range of additional expenditure brought about as a result of supposedly cost-cutting measures?

7. **Railway News.** The new railway franchise comes into effect on 20th August, just days after half the platforms at Waterloo are closed for works on 4th August. Philip told the meeting that the new franchise promised to speed up journeys to the capital by up to 15 minutes, by running fast from Basingstoke to Waterloo without stopping at Woking or Clapham Junction. Alan allayed immediate fears about access to Gatwick, Heathrow and western suburbs, as no change is likely before December 2018, but WATAG needs to have other people's views to feed into the public consultation. Sally Falkingham reported that the punctuality record for the Heart of Wessex Weymouth/Bristol line had been the worst for ten years. This has been due to improvement works and the "Department of Transport people had been down to have a look."

8. **Councillors' Slot:** Two Dorset County Councillors attended the meeting. The Council's Democratic Services Manager has informed WATAG that the "DCC's Cabinet has appointed Cllr Daryl Turner to WATAG". Daryl is a regular and welcome presence at WATAG meetings and, in this new role, he went through the background to the current school and public transport situation from the Dorset County Council's perspective. He recalled the public consultation held last year in response to the requirement to cut £1.85 million of combined budgets for mainstream school and public transport from 2017/18ⁱⁱ and confirmed that Dorset Travel will continue to engage with local communities and with existing transport schemes seeking to further develop services and prioritise those areas with unmet needs. He emphasised that this is an ongoing process. The full text of Daryl's statement is attached.

9. **WATAG Bus Timetables.** Alan is hoping to produce winter timetables when First's plans are finalized. Time is running out.

10. **Democratic Moment** - The meeting had been frank, exhaustive and exhausting, so the Chair moved on the next item

11. **Any Other Business.** Anna Lovell asked why bus flags had not been installed at the bottom of Hospital Lane, Bridport. Chris Hook said that the council welcomes comments on flags and will follow up on complaints/suggestions. Janet Proctor asked how First would move double-deckers up Shipton Lane. She also wanted to know whether drivers of sub-contracted school services would have Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. Answers: first question - we'll see, second question: yes. Mike Farmer raised the question of traffic congestion through Bridport and asked for a watching brief on the Town Hall traffic lights. He also drew the meetings attention to the proposal to make Bridport a "no idler" town to reduce exhaust emissions.

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

The next meeting (99) - is to be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport at 6.30 pm
on Thursday 28th September 2017.

Chair:

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BACKGROUND REPORT

A comprehensive consultation was undertaken from 27 May to 22 July 2016. The consultation described the need to reduce the combined budgets for mainstream school and public transport by £1.85million from 2017/18. The consultation generated 2,605 responses: 54 per cent of respondents agreed with this approach compared with 27 per cent who did not agree.

Subsidised public services account for only nine per cent of passenger journeys in Dorset. The majority of urban and some inter-urban public services, particularly in the south of the county, are fully commercial requiring no financial support from the council.

The council currently provides transport for around 6,400 mainstream school children on 150 contracted routes.

A reduction in budget of £1.5m was to be achieved by 2017/18. This was part of the £18.3m savings required to balance the County Council's budget in 2017/18.

In 2016/17, the council saved £500,000 by reducing subsidies for rural bus services. To tackle isolation in rural communities, the council is supporting community-led transport options, such as dial-a-ride and neighbourhood car schemes, with grants and advice.

The Decision not to subsidize Saturday Services was made in December 2015.

The replacement contract for schools and public transport seeks to mitigate the reduction of public transport subsidy by implementing open schools routes, in-fill services and increasing community transport coverage. Dorset Travel will continue to engage with local communities and with existing community transport schemes seeking to further develop services and to prioritise those areas with unmet needs

I will emphasise that this is an ongoing process with the situation changing weekly & in some instances daily!

At the same time, we will continue to help rural communities develop their own, more flexible options to keep people connected, which is resulting in a diverse and expanding community transport network.

This work with our communities continue with over 20 routes and 3 new community schemes having started since April 2016 under community leadership.

6 community groups have received grants towards schemes and we would welcome more requests. Community transport has been included in the previous 7 "Your Dorset editions", DCC have held 60 public events in 14 months and social media channels have been used to promote the opportunities.

Finally my Personal experiences in the Marshwood Vale Division

My Division was one of the first, last year, to go through what many of you are now experiencing.

I have to mention Thorncombe Parish Council, a small rural village, who through the grants DCC gave them & the hard work of Parish Councillors have now got:

A Community car Scheme of 12 cars, run by the Parish Council with a Councillor running the office & Dorset Community Transport (DCT) who have provided a service to Market Towns after Consultation with the residents.

I really don't want this to become a Political football, I would hope all Councillors are working with your Communities, using the toolkit & grants available from DCC to help produce Community solutions.

Cllr. Daryl W Turner
Cabinet Member for The Natural & Built Environment
Marshwood Vale Division
Dorset County Council

First Wessex Bus Fares - How they work and how to use them to the best effect.

First operate a zone fare system. This means that each route is split into a number of zones and the fare you pay depends on how many zones you enter on your journey. The Bridport zone is bounded by Chideock Bridge, Shipton Gorge turn and Burton Bradstock (Hive Beach). A journey between any two stops within that area costs the same amount (£2).

A single bus ticket entitles you to one journey within the zone. A return, for an extra £1.50, is a Day Ticket, entitling you to unlimited journeys within the zone. Tickets can also be purchased that cover multiple zones, including a change of bus (show ticket to driver). If you purchase separate tickets on each bus you travel on, it will cost £2 more per bus than buying a multi-zone ticket on the first bus you join. Always buy a multi-zone ticket between the furthest points you intent to travel to on the day. You do not need to start from either point. For example, a Lyme Regis to Weymouth return ticket would be purchased in Bridport, used in Lyme Regis and then for a journey to Weymouth, either via Dorchester or via the coast route. It could also be used on any First bus in the Dorchester to Weymouth zones (this does no include Portland)

Other tickets are available which give travel for one day over a wider area (e.g. a ticket covering all First Wessex services in Dorset and South Somerset for £12, available from the driver).

Alan Williams
WATAG 12/07/17

ⁱ Responses listed on page 7 of Individuals Response Report to Public & Schools Transport Review. Questions: To make the required savings, the Council is proposing to focus on maintaining core bus routes that serve the most people (interurban services) whilst opening up school buses and supporting community transport in rural areas that may lose their bus. To what extent do you agree with this approach? Strongly agree 457 (18.3%) Agree 916 (36.6%).

ⁱⁱ https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/media/216055/PSTR---Individuals-consultation-response-report---Revision-A/pdf/2016_08_16_-_P_STR_-_Individuals_Consultation_Response_Report_-_REV_A.PDF