

Western (Dorset) Area Transport Group (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting 68

Thursday September 27th 2012 18.30

WI Hall, North Street, Bridport

Present: Peter Smith (WATAG Chairman); Philip Sankey (WATAG & Lyme Forward); David Smith (BA 50+); Mick Adams (South West Coaches); Alan Williams (WATAG); Sue Herman (POPP); Valerie Baldwin (Beaminster TC); John Snow (Yam Baston, Beaminster); Amanda Wallwork (West Bay); Richard Webster (Bridport); Brian Cox (Bridport); Monica Burt (BA 50+); Dominic Knorpel (POPP); Kelvin McNulty; Simon Newport (Damory Coaches); Terry Spracklen (Dorset CC); Bob Driscoll (WATAG); John Collingwood (Bridport); Mark Williams (First Buses); Ron Coatsworth (DCC); Janet Proctor (Burton Bradstock); Ann Brandt (Burton Bradstock); Ros Kayes (BTC); Joy Michaud (WATAG Secretary)

Apologies: Peter Ridler, Freda Hennessy, John Hunt, Frances Hunt, Erica Pretty, Neil Hurlock, Tessa Greenaway, Paul Bowditch, Catherine Phillips, Phil Dominey, Tony James, Anna Lovell, John Green, Anne Sankey, Mike Farmer, Yvonne Norman

AGENDA

1. Minutes of previous General Meeting number 67 were reviewed and corrections made.

Reviewed and corrections made

2. Matters Arising (those not covered later)

All points to be covered in itemised agenda topics

3. Appointment of a new Secretary

The meeting was told that Joy Michaud intends to resign as WATAG Secretary at the AGM in January. The chair asked if there was a some one who would like to take over. No one volunteered.

4. WATAG website.

The chair asked if anyone would like to set up and manage the WATAG website. As no one volunteered Joy Michaud said that she would do it.

5. Revision of bus no. 31 timetable

Speaker: Mark Williams, First Buses

Mark reported the new timetable has been worked out, but there is still time to make changes. However, the early morning and late evening buses will be stopped as these have been running empty. Although, the number of day-time morning buses will be increased. In addition, the timetable will be tweaked to accommodate the needs of Woodroffe School. There will no longer be two buses running together for the morning work/school run, instead they will be split to see if that works better. Other issues to consider is arrival time at Axminster: Alan Williams emphasised the importance of making changes to improve the connection with trains at Axminster. Mark said that this has been noted. It was agreed that WATAG should again approach SWT to agree the wording of a leaflet for display on the 31, advising passengers that they may purchase tickets on the train in the event of late running of the bus.

Simon Newport (Damory Coaches) pointed out that to keep the timetable running another bus is needed. Mark pointed out if too much time is given to a schedule when traffic is quiet buses will have to wait at bus stops as they must not run ahead of their times. "Real time information" will give First actual information of bus travel times, helping produce a realistic timetable.

Ros Kayes asked Mark about First's policy of allowing personnel oxygen tanks on the bus. She referred to a time a patient carrying an oxygen supply was not allowed on the bus. Mark hadn't heard about this and said he would look into it.

Bob Driscoll mentioned the current timetable has the bus leaving Weymouth just two minutes before the train arrives. Janet Proctor pointed out that the X53 and 31 do not connect either way – she has to wait an hour in both directions.

6. Dorset Passenger Transport: an update

Speaker: Terry Spraklen, DCC

Updating timetables at bus stops: Terry explained that DCC is responsible for the timetables at the bus stops at Nationwide and Frosts in Bridport. The bus companies are responsible for all the others. John Collingwood requested that DCC would put a notice in the bus stops explaining the bus changes. He referred to last year when the DCC complained about “fly posting” that had been put up *in lieu* of there being nothing posted by DCC.

Dial a bus service for Bothenhampton: The trial service has come to an end. As the bus has not had any passengers since June the service will not be renewed.

Electric buses: Mike Farrar-Hockley was concerned that electric buses are so quiet they don't sound like buses and people with poor sight find them difficult to use. Terry explained that David Coates had looked at the problem and was content there is sufficient noise so passengers can hear them approaching. In addition, the drivers are well trained.

Timetable: The winter timetable is scheduled to come out in November. The Chair raised the issue of errors in the timetable. Alan Williams and our Chairman representing WATAG, had met with DCC about errors. Terry said that Ben Hart had accepted the changes suggested.

7. Future of bus service no. X53

Terry reported that the X53 will not have a Sunday service in the winter. DCC had hoped to work with Devon on the matter, but several deregistrations elsewhere in the county had meant Devon had to divert their funding. Dorset has no spare money to fund a service, although in November there will be an Environment Overview and Dorset may get more money. Philip Sankey pointed out the timetable is up to Easter, Devon had left it so that it is possible to have a Sunday service after Easter, which is good as by March numbers picking up. Terry mentioned that the loadings last year were not good, but Bob Driscoll pointed out there was no publicity for the service last year. Terry agreed but commented that if they got funding in November and ended up making a last minute decision to there would be poor publicity again. However, he emphasised that they are expecting budget cuts. Both Janet Proctor and Valerie Baldwin talked of how isolated Burton Bradstock and West Bay residents will be on Sundays. Terry continued, the X53 is out for tender and DCC will be putting forward a range of options, and is working with operators to redesign the service to make best use of the buses. Terry felt Dorset has been fortunate compared to Devon, but still needs to make savings. Ron Coatsworth was concerned that DCC had not consulted anyone about the service, the first he had heard about the decision was after it had been made. He also wanted to know where the money had gone as last year there was sufficient funding. Terry explained that other services elsewhere in the county that had needed supporting had higher priority. Ron suggested keeping the day service running, and cutting the evening runs, which often run virtually empty. Amanda Warwick asked why when the buses are always full the hourly service was stopped. In reply Mark Williams of First Buses explained the hourly service was a commercial venture that was profitable because it was using buses that in term time do school and college runs. So when the autumn term started the service had to stop. Bob Driscoll wanted to know how withdrawing bus services fits into the Local Transport Plan (LTP), but Terry replied DCC can only provide what it can afford.

The Chair emphasised the importance of the X53 to West Dorset. Valerie Baldwin continued that to push tourism in the area a bus service is essential.

8. Bus and Rail matters

Speaker: Mark Williams, First Buses

With no tunnel at Beaminster the Yeovil service is going to be retimed. With more traffic using the Broadwindsor Road buses are taking longer – John Snow said it is about 10 minutes longer. First Buses now have new ticket machines that are smart card enabled; there have been some glitches, but these are being sorted. Philip Sankey reported that the passes work through a plastic wallet.

John Collingwood told Mark that he had hit his head when going upstairs on double decker buses. He has also seen other people do this. Mark thanked him for reporting this.

Speaker: Simon Newport, Damory Coaches

Simon explained that most Damory services are under contract to DCC. A question from the floor was about bus no. 253 that goes through West Bay, but it seems, very few people know about it. Mark said First used to have this service in conjunction with a school run, but they lost the contract. Terry Spracklen of DCC said it is Damory's role to publicise the service, so Valerie Baldwin asked "after 12 months when are you going to put your timetables up?" Simon explained that Damory does not have anyone employed to do roadside publicity. As the contract requires fare revenue to be paid to the County, Damory gains no financial benefit from additional passengers and publicity is an 'overhead'. Alan Williams pointed out it is not clear whether Damory buses were using South Street or Sea Road South in Bridport during the roadworks.

Valerie Baldwin reported how she tried to contact Damory; she got a recorded message with five options, she tried all five options and they all said "Sorry no one is here, goodbye." She then asked about the no. 40 bus – to run hourly it no longer goes via several of the small villages, so people who used to use the bus are now using cars. Ros Keyes raised the case of Court Orchard passengers; as the bus does a circuit that goes in one direction to get to the hospital by bus they have to go via Beaminster. Ros also raised the issue of Burton Bradstock – she felt that the situation is critical. And even if they can take the X53 bus, they aren't as it gets so full they don't know if they can get back.

Speaker: Mick Adams, SW Coaches

Bus no. 73 is still doing well. It now has a ticket machine that can read smart cards. This will record fares. John Snow asked if SW Coaches could look at the scheduling between Beaminster and Maiden Newton so passengers could catch the train; at the moment a shared taxi service is being organised to get passengers to the train station, but a bus service would be better. Mick said that he would look into it.

Rail Matters

No representative from the trains was at the meeting. Bob Driscoll had two rail related announcements to make. Firstly, the Bristol to Weymouth timetable has been changed. Secondly, Axminster train station has won the national award for the best medium sized station of the year.

9. Possible revision of WATAG meetings from 6 to 4 per year

The Chair asked if members had any opinion on whether WATAG should keep meeting six times a year or change to four times a year, which had been suggested last year. All comments from the floor was to keep it as it is. Mark Williams explained that currently WATAG is well attended, but if someone has to miss a meeting it is not long until the next meeting. If there were only four meetings a year it would be a six month wait. The Chair agreed to keep the frequency of WATAG General Meetings to six a year. The WI Hall will be booked accordingly.

10. Democratic Moment

Monica Burt wanted to know what will happen to the buses when the gas works start in Bridport. Mark said that they hope to run a one way system, but was not sure in which direction it will go. He expressed concern that enough space will be allowed for the buses to pass. Monica requested that details are posted very clearly at the bus station.

Alan Williams told the meeting the period allowing travel at any time with concessionary pass will end in March. What will happen then? No answer was given, but Ros Keyes asked the question that if the choice had to be made between funding the anytime travel or another bus for the hospital what would people choose?

Next Meeting: Thursday 22nd November 2012 at 18.30 at WI Hall, North Street, Bridport

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