

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.86 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 23rd July 2015

Present: Peter Body (Beaminster Town Council), Monica Burt (BAOPF), Cllr Ron Coatsworth (DCC), John Collingwood (BAG-WD), Maisie Coombes (44 route, Bridport), Bob Crutchfield (Damory), Liz Dawe (44 route, Bridport), Bob Driscoll (Symondsburry Parish Council), Debbie Fiddik (DCC), Richard Edwards (WATAG webmaster), Jean and Maurice Fuller (44 route Bridport), Alan Glenn (Askerswell), Ian Gray (Dorset Community Transport), Freda Hennessy (Corscombe, Halstock & District Group Parish Council), Trevor Jones (WATAG), Ros Kayes (DCC), Dominic Knorpel (Dorset POPP), Gavin Maxwell (Bridport), Geoff Parr (West Bexington), Erica Pretty (POPP), Peter Ridler (Dottery), Philip Sankey (Lyme Forward), Peter Smith (Chair WATAG), Valerie Smith (Bridport), John Snow (Yarn Barton, Beaminster), Tony Taylor (Puncknowle and Swyre Group Parish Council), Lottie Welch (View from..), Betty Whitefield (44 route, Bridport), Alan Williams (WATAG).

Apologies: John Green, Sue Herman, Neil Hurlock, Adam Keen, Anna Lovell, Simon Newport, Andy Pennington, Sally Samuels, Mark Williams.

1. Minutes: The minutes of the previous (85th) meeting were agreed.

2. Matters Arising: none.

3. News from Bus Operators:

a) First.

No representative was able to attend the meeting. Peter Smith expressed disappointment, as the meeting was keen to hear news on this winter's timetables. Alan Williams gave a brief report on on-bus and real-time information systems. Progress is gradually being made in improving the re-activated audio systems. Announcements such as "the next stop, the next stop" have been corrected. There has been no news on predicted departure time systems, partly due to changes in personnel at the DCC.

b) Damory

Bob Crutchfield confirmed that Damory are now running the X43 summer service between Swanage, Wool, Dorchester and Weymouth. The 44 has had to be re-routed out of Chestnut Road as the new DDA¹-compliant vehicles cannot navigate this portion of the route without grounding or being driven on the wrong side of the road. The Valley Road residents' group expressed concern for elderly passengers who can now no longer use the route to visit Bridport. The DCC is to provide an additional community bus service on Mondays and Fridays from July 27th with fares of £3.00 per booking. Bob Driscoll pointed out that the route change had been made very suddenly and time-tables have not yet been updated. Debbie Fiddik stressed that the DCC cannot condone poor driving practice and that there is no budget available to make the road improvements required. Alan Williams raised questions about the DDA claiming that the new system would mean that able-bodied people will have three buses a day for five days a week but disabled passengers will be left with only three buses a week. Debbie Fiddik replied that she did not think that the DCC is under any obligation to treat able-bodied and disabled people equally.

Damory confirmed that the 40 Bridport/Beaminster/Yeovil service is running satisfactorily, although problems persist with parked vehicles at Gerrard's Green. John Snow pointed to timetable display problems in Beaminster (times obscured at the Red Lion stop and no timetable at the fire station).

¹ Disability Discrimination Act

c) Dorset Community Transport

Ian Gray pointed out that, unlike commercial operators, DCT is a “not-for-profit” organisation. Adjustments can be made to “tweak” existing services on the 16-seater buses to suit passenger requirements.

Debbie Fiddik was pleased to hear that there is room for manoeuvre and encouraged DCT to conduct dialogue with parish councils so that existing resources can be used as effectively as possible. Mr Gray was invited to report back to WATAG at the next general meeting.

4 Information from the Dorset County Council

The DCC looks to town councils to manage parked vehicles causing obstruction in Beaminster and Court Orchard, Bridport.

Debbie Fiddik spoke of the restructuring of the DCC’s transport services and the award of £180,000 under the government’s Total Transport Pilot Fund. Research is to be conducted into combining different types of transport provision (school, public, hospital and commercial). The new organisation chart will show a new Service Manager (Andy Shaw) and a new Operations Manager (Chris Hook). There will also be a “Community Engagement Officer” with the role of working with organisations such as POPPS, country cars and similar schemes.

The Holistic Transport Review board is considering the local transport plan as part of the 11-year draft strategy to 2026. An initial report is expected by the end of July prior to consultation with stakeholders (including WATAG). Ros Kayes highlighted the need for a viable network giving better connectivity, with an increased part played by community transport in filling gaps in the system.

5 Hospital Transport

Community transport vehicles will have free parking at hospitals across Dorset. Erica Pretty went on to assure the meeting that, despite reports on the “belligerent” approach used in the application of the NEPTS (Non-Emergency-Patient-Transport) eligibility criteria, the process is strictly based on well-established guidelines. Relevant documentation is available on the WATAG website: watag.org.uk (a pdf of the leaflet, a flow chart with eligibility criteria, guidance for assessing eligibility and a flow-chart for the booking process). Access can be on-line to hospitals, via GPs or by telephone.

6. Railways news

Electrification work in the Bath area will impact the Heart of Wessex line for 4/6 weeks from early August. Passengers between Weymouth and Bristol will have to take a bus from Westbury or Trowbridge. There will be a direct service from Bristol to Weymouth on Saturdays, but the train will pass through Swindon, Chippenham and Trowbridge on the way.

7. Democratic moment

Speakers were mainly concerned with progress on community transport schemes. Erica Pretty reported that community transport was being mapped at parish level. Funding of up to £2,000 may be available, together with a practice guide and examples of existing schemes. Dominic Knorpel expressed concern about the practicalities of these schemes and mentioned that Beaminster Country Cars were struggling to recruit suitable drivers.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 7.50.

The next meeting is on 24th September 2015 at 6.30pm in the WI Hall North St Bridport

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