

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.99 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 28th September 2017

Present (65): Rosemary Beeny (BAVLAP); Peter Body (Beaminster TC); Jan Briggs (Stoke Abbott); Lynton Burse (Bridport); Jackie Butcher (Mosterton); John Collingwood (Bridport); Brian Cox (Bridport); Colin Divall (Bridport); Maureen Dormer (Mosterton); Bob Driscoll (Symondsburry PC); Carolyn Emmett (Bridport); Chris Everidge (Char Valley PC/BLAP) Nigel Ewens (Jurassic Coast Railway); June Fox (Burton Bradstock); Sheena Fox (Beaminster); Ian Gray (WATAG); John Green (CPRE); Chris Hook (Dorset Travel); Sue Hounsell (retired); Terry Harrison (Bridport TC); Sarah Herring (West Bay); Debbie Hobbs; Maureen Jackson (BLAP); B R Jones (40 user); Julian Jones (Bridport TC); Ros Kayes (DCC/Bridport TC); Adam Keen (Damory); J L Leen; Rob Lindsay (X51 passenger); Tony Logan (40 passenger); Stephanie Longridge (Beaminster); Anna Lovell (POPP), David Marsh (Thorncombe PC); Mary Marsh (Thorncombe Bus Users); Gavin Maxwell (Bridport); Karen Millen (Beaminster); B Newhouse; Simon Newport (First); Bill Orchard (Litton Cheney PC); S Palfrey; Geoff Parr (West Bexington); Caroline Pearce (Netherbury PC); Erica Pretty (POPP); Steven Prior (Bridport); Janet Proctor (Burton Bradstock); David Redgewell (Bus Users UK); Pamela Reed (Mosterton); Sal Robinson (Chideock Parish Clerk/Bridport); Ann Salter (Broadwindsor); Philip Sankey (WATAG Chair/Lyme Forward); Aaron Sparks (First); Robin Stapleton (Walditch); Tony Taylor (PSWB PC); Guz Tidy (Loders PC); Dawn Ward (Bridport); Frank Ward (Bridport); Susan Ward-Rice (WDDC); Dickie Webster (Bridport); Ian Welch (Swyre); Lottie Welch (View from); M Wheadon (Bridport); Alan Williams (WATAG); Emma Williams (Bridport); Helen Williams (Bridport); Simon Williams (Bridport).

1. Apologies: Tim Christian, Sally Falkingham, Mike Farmer, Ashley O'Beirne, Peter Ridler, Catherine Smith, Jessica Teasdale, Daryl Turner, Sally Welford,

2. Minutes: The minutes of the previous (98th) meeting were agreed and signed.

3. Matters arising not covered later: Philip Sankey told the meeting that, although WATAG is "still in the business of disseminating information", it had been decided not to produce a winter timetable leaflet this year due to unforeseen circumstances and because First had published their Wessex bus times leaflet on time.

4. Dorset Travel: latest information on the new schools contracts and Dorset County Council Officer report: In the absence of a written report, Service Manager, Chris Hook, gave an overview of Dorset Travel Team's efforts to replace the schools transport system over the summer: "a lot of work with a reduced budget" with "some good stuff, some bad stuff." He admitted that there had been "bedding-in issues" and some minor timing problems. There had been a lot of work behind the scenes on initiatives such as shared taxis on fixed routes, with the council "hand-holding" in the early stages. Community Engagement and Infrastructure officer, Amanda Evans, now has a "young person" acting as support officer to help bridge the gaps. Philip Sankey bemoaned the lack of communication with DCC. Lyme Regis Town Council knew that the 71 town service would be discontinued and, although timing was difficult as the operator lacked information due to the repeated application of "purdah", new systems and the unavailability of data, the council was able to work with Damory to provide a successful solution for the town. The transition was not 'seamless' as Damory needed to know their primary school contracts first.

Guz Tidy spoke of the disruption to schools transport in Loders, as power line and tree-cutting works make access difficult.

David Redgewell maintained that the public were not being informed about the services available. There are empty cases at bus stops for registered services and travellers have no information at bus and rail stations. He had checked and established that the County Council is legally required to provide information. The situation is worse than in many third-world countries, he said. Passengers are better treated in India! Philip Sankey said that WATAG were trying to fill the gap and make visitors aware of connections available. Sarah Herring had photographic evidence that the information provided at a West Bay bus stop differs from that given on the Dorset Travel website. She missed her bus as a result of incorrect information and had to resort to hitch-hiking.

Chris Hook announced that two pallets of new bus flags and timetable cases are about to be deployed, and photographs of every bus stop will appear on line. DCC is looking at ways to produce information locally and some funding is available for this. Despite expressions of exasperation at his repeated suggestion that the answer lies on-line via apps, hand-held devices and what have you, Chris insisted that paper must be saved. Philip Sankey asked the council to ensure that correct information is displayed when school transport is “tweaked” from 8th October.

Janet Proctor and others felt that the Real-Time Information (RTI) systems seem to be unable to cope with the task of keeping passengers informed. Chris announced that the contract with the current RTI provider ends in April and improvements will ensue. Representatives from Damory and First Wessex said that their systems “go live” in late October and December/January respectively. Emma Williams complained that it’s all very confusing if you’re not local and confusing if you are! Sarah Herring said that trains and buses are “totally disjointed” Chris pointed to the displays showing onward bus and other transport connections on stations on the Heart of Wessex line. It was hoped that South Western Railway would do the same. Philip called First’s customer service a “black hole.”

5. Councillors’ slot: an opportunity for our elected representatives to give their thoughts and take questions: DCC’s cabinet appointee, Daryl Chambers, was unable to attend the meeting. Ros Kayes listened to Chris Hook’s initial comments on the 40 Yeovil/Bridport route. He said that First Wessex’s offer to take on a part of the service was “not quite what we expected,” but useful talks were close to completion on the future of the service. First were considering running an hourly service between Beaminster and Bridport Hospital, with no buses running on Saturdays or north of Beaminster apart from “college flows.” Chris said that DCC are looking at the possibility of European funding to take forward community ownership/leadership. Ros expressed concern about a “community solution” being in place after Christmas and said that EU funding is hardly a long-term solution as the UK moves towards Brexit.” She maintained that DCC were stepping back from their duty to maintain this strategic route. People are prevented from using Crewkerne station and visitors cannot come to Bridport. What is in place is “not fit for purpose” and the public needs a solution for the next five years. Stop-gaps are no good.

6. Bus Operators.

a). First Wessex: WATAG had received a number of verbal and written accounts regarding the 40 route before the evening’s proceedings, including reports of stranded passengers, abandoned students, unruly pupils, nervous parents, suspension of Bridport hospital service, lack of response from DCC and First and isolation of rural communities. Packed parish council meetings had been held along the route. General discussion of the 40 service waited until Simon Newport of First Wessex arrived. The WI hall was full and feelings were mounting as he arrived after travelling straight to Bridport, in his own time, from an earlier meeting in Southampton. He immediately confirmed that First are not obliged to do anything about Service 40. There was no tender and there is no contract. The company runs schools buses along a section of the route and has opened them up to the public where possible. Comments suggesting that First are not taking advantage of this opportunity are misplaced and misleading, he claimed.

Many of the complaints from the floor were addressed to the contracting authority rather than the operator, and at one point Simon was subjected to extreme discourtesy in a harangue lambasting a commercial service for not running at a loss.

Tony Logan told the meeting that he was one of two passengers on the 6.20 bus from Bridport to Crewkerne. The previous Damory service was at a more reasonable time for workers and therefore had more on board. He now has to leave work early to get home and may have to look for employment elsewhere. He cannot drive for medical reasons and the times of the morning bus to Axminster rule out Exeter as a place of employment. No advance warning had been given that the 07.30 service was being withdrawn.

This was Maureen Jackson's first WATAG meeting and, although she was aware of financial constraints and the fact that SW Dorset is not London, she said she was "horrified" at the way the current situation had been allowed to develop. The problem is a management issue. Schools don't wait until summer to determine their winter intake - why should the council? Planning should be made a year in advance. The area is not being served.

David Redgewell contrasted the case of Somerset where the Council seeks to facilitate public transport. He challenged DCC to guarantee a meeting between Daryl Turner and his opposite number before Christmas this year to ensure continuation of the Bridport/Yeovil strategic route. "Beaminster is not the end of the world". Gavin Maxwell reminded the meeting that the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has decided to share maternity and paediatric services in the West of the county between Dorchester and Yeovil hospitals. Simon Williams claimed that Councils have a statutory obligation to provide hospital transport although Chris Hook denied this. He announced that Joseph Rose of Dorset Travel is to work on hospital; transport with the CCG "from tomorrow."

Helen Williams wondered why buses can be deemed to be unnecessary if they are crammed full. "Too many concessionaries" replied Chris Hook. He then advised that Saturday services between Beaminster and Bridport (CB3) are to stop from after 21st October, leading Colin Divall to ask whether Dorset is a five-day-a-week economy? Peter Body professed to be "disgusted by the whole fiasco" and spoke of council idiocy, tree-cutting nonsense and a public disgrace. Ann Salter asked why the decision had been taken to cut out Broadwindsor. Simon explained that students head the list. First was awarded the schools contract and had some spare time between runs. The company offered to utilize this spare capacity. "We were just trying to help." The company has no duty to provide a service on the 40 route. There was no tender process. Chris Hook said that the current situation will continue until 31 December.

Philip Sankey stressed the need for connectivity. If a passenger cannot make a journey on a single bus, each bus on the route needs to connect without undue delay. The system is a network.

Carolyn Emmett referred to the 3.50 pm Sir John Colfox Academy / Beaminster run. If this is lost, children will have to change school, she asserted. Simon replied that timings would be revised when things settle down. First is doing what it can with not enough money, numbers are dropping and commercial companies have to balance their books.

Operation of the X51 Dorchester/Bridport/Axminster route was criticized by Robert Lindsay who claimed that 99% of buses are over 20 minutes late. He works in a busy café in Dorchester which he cannot now reach on Sundays. He is losing £100 a week and will have to claim benefits.

Dawn Ward's claim for compensation for failure to deliver the service promised on her monthly advance ticket has not received a reply.

When asked why the X51 leaves Bridport at around 7.30 am, delivering pupils to Thomas Hardye School early, Simon Newport explained that Weymouth College pays First and Hardye's doesn't.

b). Dorset Community Transport: Tim Christian was unable to attend but he sent a note which was read to the meeting. DCT was pleased to report that following DCC's re-tendering of home-to-school contracted services in August, DCT has been able to maintain a very similar operating presence in the area. Although the company no longer serves Marshwood school, it remains committed to providing various community transport services in that area. DCT is pleased to have come through what was a period of uncertainty and potential significant change.

“We are also providing a specific service for pupils travelling to the Sir John Colfox Academy.” DCT has helped bridge the gap with the Lyme Flyer from July through to the reinstatement of town service 71.

We are looking to move forward with the trial period of the additional Plus Service from the Bride Valley (re. former 210). News of the identified transport needs for the region would help us develop services, as is currently the case with representatives from Broadwindsor.” Louise Greenham of Powerstock school contacted WATAG to say that the DCT route is working very well in the absence of the 73. Local people are keen to know details of the possibility of opening this service to the wider community.

c) Bluebird Coaches: Philip Sankey reported that parishes in the Bride Valley were looking to make use of its school vehicles in the Bride Valley.

d) Stagecoach South West: The company mentioned changes to stops at Exeter Bus Station under the re-development plan.

e) Damory: The 71 Lyme Regis town bus is now Damory’s only route in the area and is doing well. Adam Keen thanked the large number of users of the 40 Bridport/Yeovil route who had thanked the company for the efforts they had made provide their passengers with a friendly, dependable service.

7. Railway News. A report from Phil Dominey, Stakeholder Manager for South Western Railway, was read out. The new franchise has been operating for just over a month. The major works at Waterloo went reasonably well and there was just a 4 hour over-run at the end. The meeting heard that South Western Railway will be putting their proposals for changes to the timetable from December 2018 on their website (<https://www.southwesternrailway.com/contact-and-help/timetable-consultation>) on Friday 29th September. Interested parties have twelve weeks to respond to the consultation. Simon Newport raised the issue of a relaunch of the through bus/ rail ticketing facility to Lyme Regis and Bridport. Although the product had been in existence for many years, it wasn’t widely known, and unfortunately can only be bought at a rail station or by telephone. Simon is exploring the possibility of offering the facility of purchasing the through bus/ rail ticket on the bus itself, which would benefit those people starting their journey from Bridport or Lyme Regis. Now that First Group operate all trains in the area AND majority of the buses, there should be more attention paid to ‘integrated travel’.

A question was asked about the likelihood of the Salisbury to Exeter rail route being doubled, and it was suggested that SERUG (Salisbury –Exeter Rail Users Group) be approached; WATAG is a member. Another speaker referred to the Heart of Wessex route and the fact that connecting trains north of Bristol are not shown. The questioner was directed to Catherine Phillips, as the officer responsible for the timetable leaflet.

8. Community Transport: Ros Kayes reported that “things are starting to move” on the Bridport Community Bus project. Many of the parishes potentially affected have shown interest. The most likely outcome will be a regular circular town route with spokes to villages on certain days. From a legal aspect, the scheme can be run as a club. This would mean that concessionary bus pass holders would have to pay fares and it is hoped that the project will be financially sustainable. It is hoped that plans will progress by the end of the year.

9. Role of Public Transport in local and /or regional Healthcare Delivery Systems. Gavin Maxwell, newly-appointed Governor of Dorset County Hospital and PEG member of Dorset’s Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP), had been invited to present a paper entitled “Integrated Transport Systems and the delivery of Healthcare Services”. Unfortunately the time spent on matters higher on the agenda did not allow sufficient space to do justice to the presentation. It will be deferred until meeting 100 in November.

10. **WATAG General Meetings in 2018** - There was no support for any change to the times, dates or venue of 2018 meetings.

11. **Democratic moment.** The meeting heard that October is International Walk to School Month with more than 40 countries worldwide celebrating the benefits of walking to school (source: DCC Travel and Transport News - 27 September).

Lord Julian Fellowes is supporting Dorset Police as they launch a campaign to keep elderly drivers safe. "The moment we should consider retiring from driving comes to all of us and it must be reassuring to learn that there are so many alternative methods of transport," he said. The nearest launch event is in Owermoigne on October 5th.

12. **Any Other Business** none

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.40 pm.

The next meeting (100) - is to be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport at 6.30 pm on Thursday 23rd November 2017.

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