

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.84 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 26th March 2015

Present: John Collingwood (BAG-WD), Bob Driscoll (Bridport), Maria Ferrero (BAG-WD), Alan Glenn (Askerswell), Ignacio Gomez (BAG-WD), Sue Herman (POPP), Freda Hennessy (Corscombe, Halstock & District Group Parish Council), Adam E. Keen (Go South Coast), Dominic Knorpel (Dorset POPP), Anna Lovell (WATAG & POPP), Peter Ridler (Dottery), Sally Samuel (Beaminster Town Council), Philip Sankey (Lyme Forward), Peter Smith (Chair WATAG), Daryl Turner (DCC/WDDC), Alan Williams (WATAG), James Williams (Colfox parents), Mark Williams (First).

Apologies: Debbie Fiddik, Sandy Goldsmith, John G Green, Mike Nicks, Mary and David Marsh, Erica Pretty and John Snow.

1. Minutes: The minutes of the previous (83rd) meeting were agreed.

2. Matters Arising: none.

3 News from Bus Operators:

a) First.

Mark Williams announced that there would now be no “shoulder” period and that the full summer timetable for the X53/X31 will run from Sunday 3rd May to Saturday 26th September. The X31 route will have longer running times to reflect difficulties in moving through Bridport and Lyme Regis in holiday periods and to ensure more reliable train connections in Axminster and Dorchester. It will also include services later in the evenings. The X53 will run an hourly service between Weymouth and Lyme Regis (from 08.05 and 09.10 respectively). Sunday services will run on both First routes during the summer, although there is a real possibility that there will be no Sunday buses at all in the winter. The changes have been registered and the timetables are expected shortly. Staff are being recruited in Weymouth and Bridport. Mark announced that a Saturday service will be run on both routes on Good Friday and Easter Monday this year. Bob Driscoll encouraged First to publicise this “excellent news” widely. Mark acknowledged the input from WATAG into the summer timetables.

b) Damory

Adam Keen told the meeting that Damory have taken over operation of the 204 weekly service between Yeovil and Thorncombe, as the vehicle used by SW Coaches did not have a low-floor and was therefore not DDA-compliant. Damory’s new fleet has been deployed in the area and the company is hoping to purchase more new British-built vehicles shortly. Fares are to be revised in May (“some up, some down”). Road works will close the 40 route at Misterton for nine weeks at the end of April; the narrow roads on the diversion will present challenges to drivers. Although funding for the 40 service ceases in June, Adam expressed confidence that the popular service would continue. New vehicles on the 44 route are lower, but are consequently grounding easily. The problem is under review. Adam Keen assured Beaminster residents that improvements would be made to the Fire Station bus stop.

Philip Sankey had attended the Go South Coast Stakeholders Meeting on our behalf in Southampton

c)South West Coaches

No representative was present.

4 School transport South of the A35

James Williams addressed the meeting on behalf of Colfox School parents, pointing to “irregularities” in the operation of this route. The bus involved in the accident on 12th December 2014 had 30 passengers on board, yet only 26 seats were front-facing. 3 pupils were injured and one still has difficulty in writing. A larger,

newer bus now replaces the 1999 “S-registered” vehicle involved in the incident. Mr Williams pointed to the “notoriously dangerous” traffic conditions on the A35. The statement was welcomed but could not be discussed as the matter is still under review.

5. Young Persons’ Fares (16-18 years)

Damory offer concessionary fares for young people aged up to 18, whereas First only grant this to passengers aged up to 16. The matter is looked at annually and, although some assistance can be given with specific journeys, it cannot be extended to general travel. Dominic Knorpel reminded the meeting that availability of transport affects life-time choices for 16-18 year olds and that private cars are too often the only solution to hand.

6. Other information from DCC

Debbie Fiddik submitted a written report. Spring timetable books are due from the Spring, with a possible further issue later in the year. A new Dorset-wide travel map is under preparation. New bus stops will be put in place in Bridport along St Swithins Rd/Court Orchard. Road works are due to begin in Broadwindsor on 30th March and amendments are being made to the timetables of the 42 and 76 buses. A new staffing structure in the public transport section will be in place for July 1 and further details will be given at the May meeting.

7. Further updates on “Real-Time Information” and “On Bus” information

We have met with DCC First and Damory to assist the improvement of the quality of this information. Ticket machines are being updated and should be ready in April. South West Coaches’ 73 is now tracked. Alan Williams stressed that passengers need “arrival predictions” rather than re-hashed timetable data.

8. Concessionary Bus Pass Use

The meeting was asked to explain the percentage reimbursement rates cited in the minutes of the previous meeting (Somerset 55%, Hampshire and Devon around 45% and Dorset 36%). This rate is based on the “average fare”, a figure known to both First and Damory.

9. Trains: Update on proposals for new SWT services

South West Trains are proposing to run extra services from Waterloo to Yeovil some via Westbury from December and they have they have been invited to come to the next WATAG meeting. There were fears over the future of the half-hourly bus service between Yeovil Town and PenMill stations when the new links come into service. Construction of the new Cranbrook station is now virtually complete, although drainage problems remain. The station will be unstaffed. Work is in progress on improvements to the station concourse at Dorchester South, but there was still no progress to report on disabled access at Dorchester West. Timetables for the ‘Heart of Wessex’ line taking account of the works scheduled for July should be ready for the next WATAG meeting.

10. Democratic Moment

There were several comments about the increasing isolation of rural communities and the challenges faced in an area like West Dorset. The Bus Action Group (WD) has produced a 7-page manifesto which has been read and endorsed by WATAG (see attached)

There being no other business the meeting closed at 8.15.

The next meeting is on 28th May 2015 at 6.30pm in the WI Hall North St Bridport

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