

# WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

## Minutes of General Meeting No.103 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 24th May 2018

**Present (28):** Monica Burt (BAOPF); Jackie Butcher (Mosterton); Tim Christian (DCT); John Collingwood (Bridport); Maureen Dormer (Mosterton); Bob Driscoll (Symondsburry PC); Chris Everidge (BLAP / Char Valley PC); Sally Falkingham (Maiden Newton); Mike Farmer (Bridport); Sheena Fox (Beaminster); Ian Gray (WATAG); Maureen Jackson (BLAP); Julian Jones (Bridport TC); Anthony Logan (Bridport); Anna Lovell (POPP); David Marsh (Thorncombe PC); Mary Marsh (WATAG); Bernard Major (Bridport); Gavin Maxwell (Bridport); Geoff Parr (West Bexington); John Pearson (Chideock); Erica Pretty (Early Help Dorset/POPP); Pamela Reed (Mosterton); Philip Sankey (WATAG Chair/Lyme Forward); Carol Sim (First); David Smith (OP Forum); Aaron Sparks (First); Alan Williams (WATAG),.

**1. Apologies:** Andrew Ardley, Dan Bolsover, Colin Divall, John Firrell, John Green, Margaret Hayward, Sarah Herring, Neil Hurlock, Maggie Luck, Janet Proctor, Sue Pugh, Pete Ridler, William Shearer, Tony Taylor, Guz Tidy, Chris Turner, Lewis Ward.

**2. Minutes:** The minutes of the previous (102nd) meeting were agreed and signed.

**3. Matters arising not covered later:** Philip Sankey explained that the evening's meeting would again be recorded to allow the temporary secretary to prepare the minutes more accurately. There were no objections.

**4. Report from Dorset Travel:** DT had sent a written report earlier in the day. It was read to the meeting and is quoted below:

***Beaminster to Crewkerne (onward to Yeovil):*** Dorset Travel is currently working with operators to consider the options for this corridor. The detail was expected in the last week but due to other factors has not been available. As DCC will exit from the provision of large vehicles over the summer and to allow some consistency and conversations with operators to continue, DCC will continue to operate the 40 service on the current timetable until 31 August 2018.

***LGR:*** This is the final year of the Local Government arrangements in Dorset. Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Borough Councils will join to form a new authority – named Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council.

The remaining District and Borough Councils and Dorset County Council will join to form Dorset Council. Work is under way to disaggregate Christchurch BC from Dorset CC. Christchurch BC also must disaggregate their working partnership with East Dorset DC which will come into the new Dorset Council. The time resource for this will increase as we move closer to the merge.

***Tendering:*** We are starting to tender for September in the coming weeks for the school routes which will remain unchanged. This allows the operators some security with routes and staff.

The remaining Inter Urban networks will be tendered shortly subject to funding agreement from developers for their routes.

***Rail:*** South Western Railway is relaunching direct services on summer Saturdays and Bank Holidays to Dorchester and Weymouth from Sherborne, Gillingham and Salisbury. They are set to start this week following the summer timetable change.

The new timetable, which has been prepared in consultation with local authorities, communities and rail user groups, will run on Saturdays and Bank Holidays from May 26 and September 8 inclusive

Great Western Railway will also relaunch its Weymouth Wizard weekend train running between Bristol Temple Meads and Weymouth.

**Snow Day:** *During the recent bad weather, Dorset Travel took the unprecedented step of cancelling all school and adult transport the day before bad weather was due on the 1<sup>st</sup> March. This gave parents, establishments and operators certainty as well as avoiding the confusion where routes may have run in the morning but not the afternoon or vice versa. Although there were some minor hiccups, the decision was proven to be the correct one.*

**Community Transport:** *There has been an increase in Community Transport Schemes throughout the County. More villages are making use of the Community Transport Toolkit to set up schemes that meet the needs of their residents.*

*These range from sharing taxis to working directly with local CT operators to have bespoke schemes. The scheme in Southill which uses shared taxis on the same timetable as the previous bus service continues to be successful and the community has only used 25% of their grant in the previous 9 months. They were a feature of BBC Spotlight about how communities are adapting.*

**Education Transport:** *The new model for providing travel to senior schools in the County has been successful. OSOO (One School One Operator) has been in place since last September and has bedded down with fewer problems than might have been expected.*

*The team is meeting with the individual operators to see where improvements with ticketing and routing can be implemented for September 2018. There are still issues with trees but a programme has been developed to resolve for the new academic year.*

**Digital 2020:** *Dorset Travel has been identified as one of three areas to receive external support from FutureGov to digitise its functions. This will enable us to digitise our end to end processes from application through to provision and vehicle tracking.*

*For example, the process for entitlement to school transport is weeks whereas the digital entitlement will be online and decision in seconds with automatic pass issue. The vehicle would also be tracked, so the parents/child can see in real time where the vehicle is and the smartcard for travel will allow us to understand who travels and when to optimise routes and free up capacity for others.*

**Dorset Travel is growing:** *From April 1<sup>st</sup> Dorset Travel absorbed the Fleet Services team who oversee maintenance and whole life fleet function, as well as O Licence and fuel. Dorset Travel also absorbed the external DBS function and income resource.*

*Debbie Fiddik - Dorset Travel Team Manager*

Although no DT officers were present, Bob Driscoll reported that he had been in contact with Chris Hook earlier in the day. They had spoken about the Bridport/Beaminster/Yeovil corridor and Chris had given an assurance that he would attend WATAG's next General Meeting in July and is "reasonably confident" that he can give the meeting "some excellent news" about the long-term future of the route.

**5. Councillors' slot:** Philip Sankey pointed out that this item was intended as an opportunity for electors to raise concerns with their elected representatives and for County councillors to report on local plans, initiatives and developments. Unfortunately this was not possible as no County or District councillors were in attendance.

## **6. Bus Operators.**

**a). First Wessex, Dorset and South Somerset:** Aaron Sparks referred to "issues" with journey times on the B5 school service and announced that changes would be made to the route from 11<sup>th</sup> June, cutting journey times from Drimpton down to 25 minutes, with the vehicle turning round in Mosterton.

First are now operating a weekend and public holiday Park-and-Ride service in Lyme Regis from the car park at the Eastern side of the town.

The tree-cutting programme run with the Dorset County Council is ongoing on several school routes. Targetted trees have been plotted and capacity will increase as larger vehicles can be used.

First had been advised of problems arising from the breakdown of the A2 school bus. Aaron said that the matter has been investigated and the difficulty was due the “freak event” of two busses breaking down at the same time. He regretted that some children had “took it upon themselves” to leave the bus and First would be looking to parents reinforce the message that children should wait until the replacement bus arrives.

There have been “reliability issues” on the 6 Bridport/Beaminster/Yeovil service due to traffic congestion in West Allington to and from Bridport hospital. First expect to “tweak” the timetable from September to alleviate these problems. The company is in “quite positive” discussions with Dorset Police about cycle safety.

Bernard Major raised the question of overcrowding where the X53 meets the X51. Aaron said that a spare double-decker bus should be available to ease the situation in the school holidays. A single-decker bus is used in term time because of ongoing problems with overhanging trees.

Mary Marsh challenged Aaron’s assertion that children “took it upon themselves” to leave the broken-down A2 and maintained that the children were told the length of time they would have to wait and it was suggested that they contact their parents to take them to school. The Woodroffe school has since sent notices to parents advising them to tell their children to wait on the bus. Aaron admitted “that a few things went wrong on both sides.”

Philip Sankey reported an incident on 8<sup>th</sup> May when a driver on an evening X51 from Dorchester collected fares at Bridport bus station for onward destinations without realising that there was no replacement driver. Although a driver took over not long afterwards, there was a period when passengers - some hoping to catch the train at Axminster - had no idea what was happening. Philip feared that incidents of this kind undermined the public’s confidence in public transport. Aaron assured the meeting that First have enough drivers and are fully-staffed and that the problem was due to disruption on a previous journey. Bob Driscoll felt that this was a matter of communication. There is nobody officially at the bus station to pass on information. Scheduled times are shown and come and go, but real-time information is missing. Somebody, possibly even a volunteer, needs to provide the public face of this important interchange. Bob told of a passenger waiting at the Nationwide stop for a bus to catch a train in Dorchester. The X51 and the X53 to Weymouth are both scheduled to leave at 10.19. The departure times came and information on these buses was cleared from the display. At 10.30, the passenger became extremely anxious and had to take a taxi to Dorchester. Bob has since learned that both buses arrived a few minutes afterwards. The question is: what can be done when the RTI system is not working?

Connections at Bridport bus station between buses to/from Weymouth and Dorchester are “guaranteed”. There must clearly be a limit on how long a connecting bus has to wait. Aaron felt that fifteen minutes would generally be applied, but he would speak to Control on the matter. Bob suggested that in cases where there is nobody on the incoming bus who needs to make the connection, there is no need to wait, although Aaron said the driver does not know the destination of all passengers (e.g. concessionary pass holders).

Tim Christian understood that Dorset Travel are looking at “app” technologies to complement and subsequently replace real-time information displays.

Margaret Hayward of Netherbury sent a note to the meeting pointing out that her village has been without public transport for eight months and asks for buses on the Bridport/Beaminster route to stop near the turning to the village on the A3066. Netherbury residents have looked at alternatives, including the proposed Saturday service to Bridport, DCT school buses and Axe Valley and West Dorset Ring and Ride. None offer satisfactory solutions and Country Cars of Beaminster, with the support of the DCC, are proving to be an essential, very reliable and much appreciated service for essential journeys, such as medical appointments. Aaron made it clear that although double-decker buses can and do visit the village, the extra time required for scheduled services to call at Netherbury is prohibitive. First will look at the possibility of stopping on the main road if registration, safety and other requirements allow, although time constraints preclude calling at the village itself.

Philip Sankey urged First to correct notified anomalies in roadside publicity. He also referred to the Park&Ride schemes and was reassured to hear that the service to the East of the town served both the dedicated car park and the intermediate one halfway up the hill.

Bob Driscoll passed on Sarah Herring's remarks about perceived improvements on local First services and the quality of newer drivers.

Alan Williams observed that none of the new buses transferred from the South East appear on the RTI system. Aaron said that on-board equipment is being updated and the problem will be rectified shortly.

**b). Dorset Community Transport:** Tim Christian reminded the meeting that DCT is a not-for-profit organization currently running seven PlusBus services for registered members in the West Dorset area. He confirmed that the service between Litton Cheney and Bridport on alternate Saturdays will be extended through to the end of August. DCT also operate two public services thanks to support from Thorncombe Parish Council, Devon County Council and others.

The "low-key" pilot scheme through Netherbury is a response to Dorset Travel's request to open up school buses on their "dead trip" and is not an attempt to provide a regular service.

Tim also announced that he had met the patient services manager at Maiden Newton surgery that afternoon to discuss the possibility of commissioning school buses to bring patients to specific clinics in an effort to reduce costs for home visits, missed appointments and so on.

Sally Falkingham was pleased that DCT's Broadwindsor/Dorchester service was proving so popular that a larger bus was now being used.

Tim told David Marsh that fares on the Thorncombe services will be adjusted "in line with minimum fares elsewhere".

## 7. Railway News.

a) **Great Western Railway:** Lewis Ward, GWR's Regional Development Planning and Programme Manager had hoped to be at the meeting to announce that Maiden Newton Parish Councils application for a grant under their Customer and Communities Improvement Fund for lighting on the hazardous black spot between the station and the village had been approved Sally Falkingham broke the news on his behalf, reporting that the parish council was delighted, as they had been pressing for the improvement since an accident in 2010. The big change for the summer is the addition of the morning SWR train from Basingstoke to Weymouth via Pen Mill, This takes pressure off the frequently crowded GWR service arriving seven minutes later. Bob Driscoll spoke passionately about overcrowding on the Heart of Wessex line in fine weather. Children are prevented from taking a trip to the seaside on sunny holidays.

b) **South Western Railway:** Regional Development Manager, Andrew Ardley sent the following report as he was unable to attend the meeting.

*December 2018 Timetable: SWR has published its summary response to the December 2018 timetable consultation on its website. For the West of England line the main issue was the stops at Woking and Clapham Junction. SWR's proposal following the consultation feedback is that these are both retained for the off-peak services (bearing in mind that the peak services do not generally call at Clapham Junction now). Woking would remain for virtually all trains except one of the accelerated morning trains from Exeter as proposed in the consultation document. It should be noted however that the retaining of these calls will reduce the opportunities to make reductions to journey times.*

*The other changes and service enhancements shown in the consultation document are expected to remain, subject to the health warning below, with the exception of the Sunday service pattern. On Sundays mornings the Waterloo to Exeter services only call at Andover, between Basingstoke and Salisbury. However, we will also provide an hourly stopping service between Salisbury and Basingstoke which will then run non-stop to Reading, which will serve Grateley, Andover, Whitchurch and Overton to provide better connectivity.*

*More significant variations are proposed for the Waterloo - Southampton - Bournemouth - Weymouth route following the consultation. In short Weymouth and Dorchester will regain the two trains per hour to Waterloo. The clear view was that maintaining direct services and more frequent services were preferential to improved journey times. We propose to retain two direct services between London and Weymouth with one service dividing each hour at Southampton Central; this allows connectivity to be retained whilst improving end to end journey times.*

*The Portsmouth service will start and terminate at Bournemouth. More details on how this line will work in practice together with the impact on individual stations can be found in the consultation response document. It should be emphasised that the proposed revised timetable is subject to agreement from Network Rail and the Department for Transport. If this is forthcoming we should be able to provide further detail late summer / early autumn.*

***Through Tickets:** I am pleased to confirm that an agreement has been reached between SWR and First Wessex to re-establish through rail / bus tickets between rail stations and Bridport / Lyme Regis. It is anticipated that these fares will be in the system by the end of June (in time for the summer) but I will confirm the exact date nearer the time. We will look to carry out a publicity and marketing campaign in conjunction with First Wessex.*

***New Weymouth to Corfe Castle (on Swanage Railway) service starting this Saturday:** We are pleased to confirm that a new weekend through service from Weymouth to Corfe Castle will start this Saturday. More details to follow shortly. Apologies for the short notice but this has been subject to getting an agreement sorted with Swanage Railway.*

The meeting welcomed the news on through ticketing, although speakers noted that the “withdrawal” was either not announced (Bob Driscoll - in SWR’s case) or not applied (Alan Williams - in GWR’s case)

## **8. Community Initiatives**

a) **Bridport:** Bob Driscoll announced that the route for the future service has now been agreed for a six-month trial service running on Wednesdays and Saturdays. It will link the hospital, Bradpole, Jessops Avenue, Morrisons and other places on six circular trips using a “clock-face timetable” at regular intervals. The scheme is expected to be launched this summer and will be reviewed after three months. Fares have yet to be decided, although concessionary bus passes will apply. Maureen Jackson hoped that arrangements could be made with parishes around Bridport for the service to visit these villages one day a week, at some point in the future.

b) **Beaminster:** Chris Turner had sent a note to the meeting advising that a full application, comprising forms PSV350, PSV368 and PSV 350A, the proposed timetable and route and all other supplementary support information has been sent to the Office of Traffic Commissioners for assessment. The application is for a Community Bus under a S.22 permit using volunteer drivers. Four drivers are due to undergo training and assessment on Friday 25th May. The proposed route runs from Crewkerne town centre to Bridport, via Crewkerne Station, Misterton. Mosterton,, Broadwindsor, Beaminster, Netherbury, Melplash and Bradpole, with an extension to Bridport Hospital, Dottery and Salwayash.

**9. Democratic Moment:** Sally Falkingham reported that regular PlusBus passengers from Maiden Newton to Bridport on Fridays have been disappointed at the uptake of the service at Loders. Tim Christian assured her that arrangements are flexible as far as routing is concerned, but Bob Driscoll noted that with a fixed fare, the nearer you get to Bridport, the more expensive the journey. With fixed fares, a good deal from Toller Porcorum seems less so at Loders. Tim admitted that for short journeys, taxis may provide a better solution.

Mike Farmer sought encouragement for the construction of a roundabout at Bridport Town Hall to allow better traffic flows and also improve timetable reliability.

**10. Any Other Business:** The chairman reminded the meeting that the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) come into force on the day after the meeting and that WATAG had taken steps to ensure compliance.

Sally Falkingham reported that CrossCountry were keen to publicise links to local rail lines and the company has visited Maiden Newton and its station garden for a publicity film on the Heart of Wessex line which links the Bath And Jurassic Coast World Heritage sites.

Alan Williams pointed out that some villages in the area have a morning and afternoon bus service available during school term times and asked whether First would like WATAG to encourage the public to make use of those services. Aaron Sparks said that First would welcome this, although the service offered is limited to weekdays during school terms only. David Marsh was concerned about capacity issues if large numbers of passengers used these buses. Sally Falkingham raised the child protection aspect of the scheme. Ian Gray expressed intense disappointment that with the school bus arrangements having been in place for almost a year, the trees have not been cut, First cannot run the service they want and yet the situations is still deemed to be satisfactory.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.10 pm.

The next meeting (GM 104) is to be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport  
at 6.30 pm on Thursday 26th July 2018.

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