

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.105 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 27th September 2018

Present (32): Andrew Ardley (SWR); Will Austin (Bridport TC); Lynton Burse (Bridport); Monica Burt (Bridport Area 50+ Forum); John Collingwood (Bridport); Colin Divall (Bridport); Bob Driscoll (Symondsburry PC); Chris Everidge (BLAP / Char Valley PC); Debbie Fiddik (DCC); Sheena Fox (Beaminster); Ian Gray (WATAG); Mary Hart (Lyme Regis); Chris Hook (Dorset Travel); Maureen Jackson (BLAP); Anthony Logan (Bridport); Anna Lovell (POPP); David Marsh (Thorncombe PC); Mary Marsh (WATAG); Gavin Maxwell (Bridport); Geoff Parr (West Bexington); John Pearson (Chideock); Erica Pretty (Early Help Dorset/POPP); Ann Salter (Broadwindsor). Anne Sankey (Lyme Regis); Philip Sankey (WATAG Chair); Dave Siviour (Leeds); Aaron Sparks (First); Tony Taylor (PSWB PC); Guz Tidy (Loders PC); Chris Turner (Beaminster TC); R Webster (Bridport); Alan Williams (WATAG).

1. **Apologies:** Andrew Bradley, Sandra Brown, Jackie Butcher, Tim Christian, Maureen Dormer, Sally Falkingham, Margaret Hayward, Ros Kayes, Janet Proctor, David Redgewell, Helen Reed, Pam Reed, Sally Welford,.

2. **Minutes:** The minutes of the previous (104th) meeting were agreed and signed.

3. **Matters arising not covered later:** Philip Sankey confirmed that WATAG has lodged a written submission to the Parliamentary Transport Committee's inquiry into the health of the bus market.

4. **Dorset Travel.** Chris Hook, Dorset Travel Service Manager, told the meeting that Dorset Travel is undergoing further restructuring in preparation for the Dorset Council Unitary Authority which comes into being in six months' time. Joseph Rose is leaving Dorset Travel, Debbie Fiddik takes charge of public transport and Amanda Evans will be responsible for community initiatives.

Chris spoke of the success of the "one school, one operator" school transport system. Double-decker services are still experiencing restrictions due to overhanging trees and Dorset Travel are working with landowners to clear the routes. Colin Divall pointed out that the problem has persisted for over a year. Chris assured him that the matter was being handled at a high level within DCC (Rebecca Knox) and First (Mark Reddy). Chris Everidge asked if parishioners needing to trim trees could get help from DCC. Chris assured her that the Council may not have the money but often has the expertise: "It's about bringing people together as a collective." He told David Marsh that obstructing trees have been plotted and the data can be shared with Parish Councils on the routes concerned.

Mary Marsh asked for guidance on the use of school buses by the general public. While hoping that a definite position will be forthcoming by the end of October to resolve the "legal/moral options", Chris asked potential users to "leave space for the students to go to education ... and use community transport options for now."

DCC is maintaining funding for the Axe Valley and West Dorset Ring and Ride service at about 90% of levels in previous years, although grants will only definitely be maintained for one year following local government organisation. Recent schemes receiving grants on application will continue to be funded. Chris congratulated Beaminster and Bridport councils for the CB3 and 7 services and pointed to the continuing success of NORDCAT and DCT PlusBus routes. He then summarised the DCC officer's report (attached). The new authority will do everything possible to access central government grants such as the CCIF mentioned in the report.

Philip Sankey asked about DCC's role in providing real-time information: "Buses run and information is given. There is real-time information (RTI), there is Traveline and there is the operator." How can the "non-joined-up thinking" be resolved? Chris explained that DCC part-funds public transport information via Poole Borough Council which takes operator information and passes it into the Traveline system which in turn passes the data on to DCC's RTI service-provider who then plugs it into the display screens. Unfortunately, the new ticketing machines on First buses cannot "talk" to the RTI displays. Alan Williams pointed out that far from achieving the 100% real-time information which Chris was looking for several months ago, all First services are now non-real time due to the operator missing the update deadline for the 23rd September change. Passengers cannot be certain if/when the bus is coming. Alan also asked if the now inactive audio systems could be brought in before the statutory deadline of 2020. Chris, a bus user himself, assured the meeting that these issues are being addressed and regretted the considerable expenditure made to little avail.

Chris confirmed that from 27th October all of DCC's "big buses" will have been sold and all services stopped. DCC's operations on the Yeovil/Bridport corridor cost £640 per day - sometimes for a daily income of less than £10, he claimed. "There is a service between Bridport and Beaminster and another between Crewkerne and Yeovil and DCC have made arrangements to fill the "missing link." The timetable has not yet been issued, but Chris told the meeting that there will be no service before 9 am. He said that there will be good connectivity between the three legs of the journey between Yeovil and Bridport. The operator of the new service will be Buses of Somerset (a First subsidiary) and Chris expected to finalize connectivity and through-ticketing issues with First Wessex (operators of the 6 Bridport/Beaminster route) during the coming month. He pointed to the low passenger numbers on the early service (20 on college days, five or six at other times). Options for commuters and others using the route are being examined - car share, community buses or existing school bus between Colfox Academy Beaminster School and Yeovil College. Bob Driscoll reminded Chris that DCC's Economy Service Director Matthew Piles had assured WATAG, the media and the public in June 2017 that the 40 (Yeovil/Bridport) service was a strategic inter-urban route. The transition from operation by Damory to operation by another operator would be seamless. Events proved otherwise. Whilst apologising for what happened, Chris spoke of the reality of austerity and further pressure on DT's budget. The key driver forward consists of local solutions, he maintained. Cash payment by concessionary pass holders may also provide funding and Hampshire's consultation on this point is being followed with interest.

Tony Logan, a Bridport resident working in Crewkerne, said the withdrawal of the early and late runs meant that he now had under a month to find a new home and a new job. Chris suggesting some sort of car share arrangement and offered "signposting." Ann Salter told Chris that the 22-seater early and late buses are full when they pass through Broadwindsor and so she cannot understand why the services are being cut. Chris spoke of previous joint funding by Yeovil College, Somerset County Council and DCC and when the other partners withdrew, DCC was left with the burden. Ann said that the link buses between Beaminster School, Colfox Academy and Yeovil College do not offer an alternative as they arrived in Yeovil after 10 am, missing a sizeable chunk of the college day. Chris has advised Yeovil College of the situation.

Chris Turner reported that college students did not think of offering their seats to elderly or less mobile passengers and wondered whether the driver could intervene. Bob Driscoll replied that the point was valid but would soon cease to be so when the service was withdrawn. Maureen Jackson felt that this was an issue for the schools - not the bus driver and that schools should include a social curriculum.

Chris Hook advised that further information on the Bridport /Beaminster/Crewkerne/Yeovil route will be shown on the Dorset Travel website.

5. Councillors' slot:

Once again, no County or District councillors were in attendance.

6. Bus Operators.

a) . **First Wessex, Dorset and South Somerset:** Aaron Sparks reminded the meeting that winter timetables were now in force and that there would be no Sunday service on the X51/53/54 routes.

Alan Williams asked whether First was satisfied with the punctuality of buses on the X51/53 routes from Axminster since the winter timetable started. Aaron admitted that there were initial difficulties and assured the meeting that the situation was under review. Bob Driscoll stated that WATAG had carried out checks at Bridport bus station over the previous three days to see whether the incoming 10.12 X53 from Axminster connected with the outgoing 10.14 X51 to Dorchester. Passengers (tourists from the Midlands and Australia) were left stranded on both Tuesday and Wednesday. Aaron felt that although the connection is not now guaranteed, buses should normally wait for up to ten minutes in this instance.

Mary Hart complained about the state of the buses. She said that she had noticed the smell of diesel on several occasions, but she had been reluctant to worry the driver, Aaron confirmed that passengers should inform the driver immediately if they felt unsafe and that all First vehicles are regularly serviced and maintained.

Dave Spooner of Chickerell sent a note to the meeting asking why First has discontinued Sunday services in the winter after the local manager agreed to review this situation with Chickerell Town Council. Aaron maintained that provision of a Sunday service is not financially viable. Will Austin thought it would be better if First spoke to the town councils affected before shutting down services, and stated that Bridport Town Council would welcome the opportunity to engage with operators to see what can be done to mitigate problems. He then referred to the condition of the tarmac surfaces on bays 1 and 2 at Bridport bus station where falls had led to a broken rib, black eyes and other injuries. Will had been told by WDDC that this was First's responsibility. Philip Sankey pointed out that First were only responsible for their own depot, and Chris Hook undertook to raise the matter with WDDC. Guz Tidy had also tripped over the ridged "dried lava" surface two days before the meeting.

Colin Divall asked whether First intended to publicise the recently re-introduced through bus/rail tickets. Aaron said that as soon as full information and samples have been obtained from all parties, First look forward to making formal announcements. Alan Williams assured the meeting that through tickets are available and that he uses them himself.

John Pearson wondered why the only bus now running on Sundays served Poundbury. The bus in question (10) does stop at Dorset County Hospital. Gavin Maxwell pointed out that the people who are kept in hospital at weekends tend to be the most sick, and weekends are the times when visitors find it easiest to see them. There is a clinical integration here which does not seem to be taken into account when services are cut off. Aaron repeated that First is a business and that there are not enough passengers to make Sunday services financially worthwhile.

b). **Dorset Community Transport:** Mary Marsh reported that numbers on the PlusBuses in the Thorncombe area are being boosted by reduced services on other local routes.

7. Railway News.

a) **Great Western Railway:** Sally Falkingham had attended the Heart of Wessex Community Rail Working party chaired by Dan Okey at Trowbridge on 3 September, when advance notice was given of the closure of Westbury Station from 15 December to 3 January for major engineering works including replacement of all the points and platform extensions.

B) **South Western Railway:** Andrew Ardley confirmed that the 9-day blockade between Exeter and Crewkerne station is over, although timing changes and bus replacements persist - particularly on services from Waterloo in the Templecombe area. The closure of Crewkerne station car-park was not well publicised and SWR will work more closely with local radio stations to pass on this kind of information on traffic bulletins in future. The company will also make the public aware of through ticketing to Bridport and Lyme Regis. Refurbished rolling stock is gradually being introduced on the West of England line and on the Weymouth route.

An independent review of South Western Railway's performance (the Holden Report) is available on SWR's website:

<https://www.southwesternrailway.com/other/about-us/independent-performance-review>.

The summer Saturday Maiden Newton to Corfe Castle service had proved very successful, although strike action had disrupted performance.

Alan Williams asked whether the toilets at Axminster station could be kept open when the station is closed on Saturday afternoons and Sundays for use by bus passengers.

John Pearson drew attention to the lack of a lift for disabled passengers at Dorchester South station. SWR plan to submit a bid for government funding for this installation.

8. Community Initiatives

a) **Bridport and District:** The Bridport circular service (no. 7) came into service on 22nd August. Will Austin reported that feedback has been positive. Passenger numbers are increasing although there is still room for plenty more. Bridport Town Council is busy promoting the service on several platforms. The working group is meeting in early November to review the route, pricing and future governance.

b) **Beaminster:** The CB3 Saturday service has now been running for fourteen weeks and has covered around 2,500 miles and handled 1,157 passenger movements between Bridport and Crewkerne. Chris Turner noted that 59% of passenger numbers use concessionary passes. The bus has carried passengers in wheel-chairs and a mobility scooter. Chris gave special thanks to the volunteers who keep the bus going. The service is under constant review and future changes may well include removing Salwayash from the route as no passengers use this challenging section of the route. Chris was asked whether the vehicle could be used to bring passengers back to Bridport and Beaminster from Weymouth and Dorchester on Saturday evenings and/or meet at least two trains at Dorchester station on Sundays. The bus is only used one day a week, but on the other hand it depends entirely on volunteers. Will Austin noted that the possibility of Bridport Town Council stepping in to cover some the gap left by the removal of Sunday services had been discussed at a recent BTC meeting.

9. Democratic Moment:

Erica Pretty reported that preliminary discussions had been held on starting a volunteer car scheme based in Lyme Regis. Colin Divall and Maureen Jackson both stressed the need to build and deploy strategies to engage with the new Dorset Council which will become the local transport authority in six months' time.

10. Any Other Business:

WATAG's chairman Philip Sankey confirmed that he, WATAG's treasurer Janet Proctor and the group's temporary secretary will all be standing down at the annual general meeting in January 2019. Candidates for these positions are welcome to attend WATAG Advisory Group Meetings to learn more about WATAG's work.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.30 pm.

The next meeting (GM 106) is to be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport at 6.30 pm on Thursday 29th November 2018.

Chair:

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Dorset County Council Officer Report: WATAG – 27th September 2018

Sustainable Transport

Riverside Gardens Cycleway – completed.

East Street Roundabout Cycleway Safety Improvements – Construction is now expected to start week beginning 01/11/18

Old Railway line (Burton Road to Meadowlands) – vegetation clearance and resurfacing expected January 2019

Burton Road Cycleway – Construction is still anticipated to start on 21/01/19

Rail

Our Sustainable Transport Officer Kelly Flynn has issued the following statement-

Great Western Railway have released an invitation to apply for Customer and Communities Improvement funding which applies to the Weymouth – Bristol Line

The statement from GWR is as follows-

'We are delighted that GWR is now in a position to be able to invite bids for a further round of Customer and Communities Improvement Fund (CCIF) allocations. This will be for projects that can be delivered between April 2019 and March 2020 and bring community benefits and address areas of social need across GWR's network. We anticipate that, subject to suitable approvals, GWR will have over £750k available for allocation to eligible schemes.

We have had three successful years of CCIF funding, supporting schemes and projects identified by the communities we serve. We want to keep delivering innovative and exciting schemes that support our customers and their local communities. To do that we need your ideas and your bids, and I do hope that you will look at the simple application form and guidance on www.GWR.com/CCIF.

All the proposals will be presented to our Executive, and to a Steering Group made up of customer representatives from our Stakeholder Advisory Board and Customer Panels. Their final recommendations will then be put to the Department for Transport (DfT) for approval.

We want to encourage a variety of bids for projects of all shapes and sizes in the communities served by GWR. They must however relate to the railway in some way. It would be great if the fund could help close the gap on projects where some existing funding has already been secured or could be available from other sources.

Our bid guidance document encourages bids relating to education, outreach, railway history and heritage, station enhancements, cycling, provision of information, research, walking and transport integration. In the past we have supported schemes that have included station and car park infrastructure, information including connections to other public transport, outreach and help to support customers, destination marketing, training for employment, accessibility and diversity initiatives. We really want to see a wide range of ideas and have tried to make the process as easy as possible.

Schemes do need to be delivered within the twelve-month window of the 2019/20 financial year.

So that we can start the schemes in April 2019, we are asking for proposals for this first round of bids by 17:00 31st October 2018. This will give us time to review and seek DfT approval.

For more information and to discuss any ideas you have ahead of submission please contact Lewis Ward on lewis.ward2@gwr.com He will be happy to talk about any suggestions and to clarify the process.

In previous years we have had annual bids totalling over £8 million for a pot of annual funding of c.£750k. We can't therefore guarantee success, but the more bids we have the more we can work to improve services to meet your aspirations. So please don't hold back, we have kept the form deliberately simple to help and we want to hear from you. We are very proud of the improvements that CCIF has delivered so far and looking forward to seeing what this year's bid might include.'