

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.107 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 24th January 2019

Present (24): Will Austin (Bridport TC); Jim Basker (W&B PC), Jackie Butcher (Mosterton), Tim Christian (DCT); John Collingwood (Bridport); Maureen Dormer (Mosterton), Bob Driscoll (WATAG Chair); Chris Everidge (BLAP / Char Valley PC); Louise Ferguson (Bridport); Ian Gray (WATAG), Maureen Jackson (BLAP); Karen Manning (Bridport); Peter Manning (Bridport); Gavin Maxwell (Bridport); Barbara Nicholls (Bridport); David Redgewell (Bus Users UK); Pamela Reed (Mosterton), Philip Sankey (Lyme Forward); Billy Shearer (Bridport); Aaron Sparks (First), Beryl Stork (Bridport), Guz Tidy (Loders PC); Chris Turner (Beaminster TC), Alan Williams (WATAG).

1. **Apologies:** Andrew Ardley, Rosemary Beeny, Ed Boothroyd, Colin Divall, Sally Falkingham, Sheena Fox, Ros Kayes, Anna Lovell, David Marsh, Mary Marsh, Dan Okey, Geoff Parr, Janet Proctor, Jacqui Sewell, Carol Sim, Robin Stapleton, Tony Taylor.

2. **Minutes:** The minutes of the previous (106th) meeting were agreed and signed.

3. **Matters arising not covered later:** Erica Pretty had notified alternative contacts. For Early Help, contact Jude Shepherd - email; j.shepherd@dorsetcc.gov.uk; to enquire about setting up a new volunteer car scheme - email Russell Saunders: russell.s.saunders@dorsetcc.gov.uk; for information about the Community Transport Directory - email Amanda Evans: a.j.evans@dorsetcc.gov.uk; for any enquiries about Volunteer Driver Hospital Parking Permits contact the CCG - email: erefferals@dorsetccg.nhs.uk.

4. **Dorset Travel.** No DT officers attended the meeting. A short report was read out and is attached hereto.

5. **Councillors' slot:** No County nor District Councillors attended the meeting. WATAG looks forward to closer engagement when the new Unitary Authority is in place.

6. **Developments on the Dorset to Yeovil corridor:** Problems persist with connections at Beaminster and through ticketing between the 6 to/from Bridport (First Wessex) and the 40 Beaminster/Crewkerne service (Buses of Somerset). Both operators belong to the First Group. David Redgewell contrasted the situation in Dorset with that in Somerset where the portion of the 96 Chard/Yeovil service operated by South West Coaches under contract to Somerset County Council connects effectively with the Buses of Somerset 40. David urged First Wessex to show connections to the 40 and Buses of Somerset's 30 service between Axminster and Taunton in their Jurassic coast and Dorset booklets. Aaron Sparks said that this would be done and pointed out that the current booklets were printed before Buses of Somerset took over operation of the 40 from Dorset County Council. Bob Driscoll expressed "total abhorrence of the current dog's breakfast" and offered WATAG's assistance with timetables. The two First companies do not appear to communicate and passengers are suffering as a result. An unreliable service deters both existing and potential customers.

Karen Manning lives in Bridport and works in Crewkerne three days a week. The recent changes have forced her to change her shift patterns and she now leaves Bridport two hours before she starts work - waiting in Beaminster for 40 minutes. Her return journey is shorter, but the bus is very late - she had to wait for one hour on the evening of the meeting and 45 minutes the day before. Aaron Sparks told the meeting that the bus had been vandalised on an earlier school run the previous day and that evening the bus had broken down. Bob maintained that there must be a way to prevent any passengers from becoming stranded. At present, there is no procedure in place to advise bus users if there is a problem. Aaron said that First are trying to put service updates on Twitter, but pointed out that Customer Service shuts at 7pm and not all passengers are twitter-enabled.

Maureen Jackson was worried about suggestions to give/accept lifts as this could be dangerous and involves practical health and safety issues. Philip Sankey asked First to look sympathetically at passengers impacted by the company's failure to operate the 6 service as advertised on New Year's Eve; they deserve generous compensation. David Redgewell suggested that stranded passengers complain, take a taxi and lodge a claim for compensation.

Residents of Mosterton noted that a bus stop flag has been put up on a pole previously used for a traffic-calming speed indicator some 50 yards from the designated bus stop at Mosterton Cross, where there is a pole and a bench - but no flag. Bus drivers have been uncooperative with confused passengers. WATAG can assist and will follow up on the matter.

7. Other Bus Operator News

a) First Wessex: Aaron Sparks reported that the 2019 summer timetables for the X51/53 routes are being finalised and will be similar to those for 2018. He also mentioned that First Wessex and Buses of Somerset are holding discussions to examine the possibility of alternating operation of through routes between Bridport and Crewkerne - swap rather than connect. Aaron apologised for First's failure to run the 6 (Bridport/Beaminster) service on 31st December as announced. He blamed an "administrative error" and offered to deal with all claims personally. All claims should be sent to firstwessex@firstgroup.com, marked for the attention of Aaron Sparks. Aaron also advised that customers can call 01305 783 645 (Monday-Friday 0930-1630) for travel information or general enquiries. Maureen Jackson felt that if the buses fail to connect, public confidence evaporates and the service becomes untenable.

Billy Shearer pointed to the confusion caused by RTI systems which give inaccurate or misleading information. He also lamented the tightness of the train/bus connections at Dorchester South station. Guz Tidy spoke of a passenger who was not let on the X51 with his two and a half year old son as he did not have the correct change for the fares. He was willing to pay and tendered a £10 note. David Redgewell recommended use of the "change ticket" system used successfully by other operators in the First Group.

b) Dorset Community Transport: Tim Christian told the meeting that apart from dropping the second return journey on the 14 (Thorncombe/Chard) route from March, year-round service will continue. Bob Driscoll asked whether DCT had been approached about the group of 12 Colfox Academy students who had lost their school bus in the afternoon. Tim was aware of the problem, but the charity had not been asked to assist.

8. Community Initiatives

a) Bridport and District Community Bus: Will Austin advised that although the bus is valued by those who use it, passenger numbers need to improve if the service is to demonstrate sufficient community benefit. The working group has developed a revised route and timetable, aimed at providing more regular visits to the town centre and Morrisons supermarket, shorter journey times to the town centre, addition of Bridport Community Hospital to the route and removal of parts of the route that are not well used or are difficult for the bus to negotiate. The route no longer includes West Bay, as it appears to be adequately served by the existing X53 bus service. The route and timetable have been submitted to the Traffic Commissioner and the changes are planned to take effect from 6 March. Will thanked WATAG for their input, with special mention for Alan Williams' extraordinary knowledge, expertise and "absolutely mind-blowing eye for detail".

b) Beaminster Saturday Service: Chris Turner reported that the service seems to be running successfully. The organisers had been pleased to cover for First's "Saturday service" on 27th and 28th December - and could have done the same on 31st December. He stressed that the emergency registration process had taken just 5 days. A meeting will be held shortly to discuss the route, in particular routing to Netherbury and Salway Ash. Volunteer driver numbers are holding up, although more "clippies" are needed. He thanked Bridport Town Council and WATAG for their contributions to the post-Christmas services.

9. **Railways.** Both operators sent their apologies - but no reports. David Redgewell mentioned plans for more turbos later in the year and for refurbishment of carriages with wi-fi, hot drinks and charging facilities.

10. **Democratic Moment.** While regretting the absence of any representatives from Dorset Travel or DCC, David Redgewell pointed out that next year's budget will be set by the "Shadow Authority", The cabinet is due to meet on 11th February. Ian Gray was appalled that the old issues kept coming back again and again, and despite promises of action on outstanding problems such as RTI, disabled access at Dorchester South, and connectivity no concrete action has been taken

11. **Any Other Business:** none

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.28 pm.

The next meeting (GM108) is to be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport
at 6.30 pm on Thursday 28th March 2019.

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Dorset County Council Officer Report

Bridport – Beaminster – Crewkerne Connections

Concerns have been raised by passengers and WATAG officers that connections between services 6 and 40 are not guaranteed, particularly on the last southbound journeys of the day. The companies concerned, Buses of Somerset and First Wessex, are continuing to seek a resolution. The feasibility of through ticketing arrangements are also being investigated.

Concerns have also been raised regarding Christmas running of Service 40 on 28th December and 31st December. The company confirmed that they ran on both days but acknowledged that the last bus from Crewkerne to Beaminster was 32 minutes late.

RTI¹

The system has been upgraded and there seem to be fewer complaints across the county. If passengers see any errors, please report them to Dorset Travel so that they can be investigated.

Rail

Dorchester West – Access Ramp:

Dorset County Council's Highways Engineer met with Network Rail earlier this week to discuss constructing the access ramp at Dorchester West Station, subject to funding and planning permission.

Network Rail (NR) are gearing up to get the planning application in and there will be a flurry of activity between DCC and NR to get various procedures completed and signed off. Once NR have updated their programme, we will be able to provide some more specific information.

Cycling

East Street Roundabout Cycleway Safety Improvements – Construction is now expected to start at the end of January 2019.

Old Railway line (Burton Road to Meadowlands) – vegetation clearance expected January 2019, resurfacing anticipated April 2019.

Burton Road Cycleway – Construction is anticipated to start on 25th February 2019.

¹ Real-Time Information