

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.108 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 28th March 2019

Present (28): Andrew Ardley (SWR); C Ashe-Cregan (Beaminster); Will Austin (Bridport TC); Jackie Butcher (Mosterton), Tim Christian (DCT); John Collingwood (Bridport); Maureen Dormer (Mosterton), Bob Driscoll (WATAG Chair); Chris Everidge (BLAP / Char Valley PC); Ian Gray (WATAG), E Hands (Bridport); Richard Huntley (Bridport); Maureen Jackson (BLAP); Anna Lovell (WATAG); Maggie Luck (Bridport); Gavin Maxwell (Bridport); Chris Miller (Bridport); John Nash (Bradpole); Geoff Parr (West Bexington); John Pearson (Chideock); Sue Pugh (Bridport); David Redgewell (Bus Users UK); Pamela Reed (Mosterton), Philip Sankey (Lyme Forward); Daniel Sibley (Beaminster); Guz Tidy (Loders); Aled Williams (Buses of Somerset); Alan Williams (WATAG).

1. **Apologies:** Bryony Chetwode, Colin Divall, Sally Falkingham, Sheena Fox, M Hayward, David Marsh, Mary Marsh, Dan Okey, Janet Proctor, Billy Shearer, Carol Sim, Aaron Sparks, Chris Turner.

2. **Minutes:** The minutes of the previous (107th) meeting were agreed and signed.

3. **Matters arising not covered later:** Public Transport to hospitals: Chris Everidge felt that information on public transport links (particularly to Blandford) were sparse at recent consultation events about the transfer of certain services out of Bridport Hospital. Guz Tidy (Loders/WATAG Committee Member) had provided this information to them. There would be one further event in the W.I. Hall Bridport on 11 April (10.00-12.00) when concerns could be voiced. Will Austin felt that three hours each way to Blandford was unreasonable.

4. **Dorset Travel.** No representative attended the meeting. A short report was read out and is attached. The school route affected by overhanging trees is the A2 to Woodroffe from Thorncombe etc.

5. **Bridport – Yeovil corridor.** Aled Jones, Operations Manager for Buses of Somerset, explained how the timetable starting on 8 April had been put together. Buses of Somerset were contracted by Dorset County Council to fill the Beaminster to Crewkerne gap using one vehicle that was doing school work for DCC morning and afternoon. First Wessex had sought to run the 6 commercially without subsidy (but were paid for the 6A school journeys and the B5) but it has not proved profitable. By working together to provide through buses from Bridport to Crewkerne they hoped to eradicate the problem of poor connections at Beaminster. On the evening journeys when a change will still be needed, he hoped that with the ability of both Yeovil and Weymouth control to track their buses and liaise no one should be stranded. Tickets from both First companies will be inter-available but because of competition rules the County Councils' involvement would be essential to broker a deal for through ticketing with South West Coaches. One Mosterton stop had been sorted but there remained an issue with the one at the Village Hall which Aled promised to look at. The only possible round trip from Mosterton allowed just 45 minutes in Bridport or waiting until 1715. Aled promised to look at the possibility of the 0930 Beaminster to Bridport starting in service from (say) Mosterton and the 1315 from Bridport remaining in service as far as (say) Mosterton. Aled could provide an estimate for the 'subsidy shortfall' – money that Town Councils would need to find to 'buy' a better service (e.g. to provide the 'B5' journey in school holidays). The loss of the 0930 direct from Bridport to Yeovil and 1300 return was lamented by a regular user.

6. Other Bus Operator News.

- a) **First Wessex.** The new booklets with timetables from 7 April were available. The question was asked why Sunday buses only ran for 5½ months of the year. If WATAG wished to influence what happens next winter, discussions needed to start soon. This could include seeking support from Town Councils en route and from South Western Railway for this rail link service.
- b) **Stagecoach South West Service 9A** continues between Exeter and Lyme Regis.
- c) **Dorset Community Transport.** Weekly PlusBus – one day a week village services continue. Service 14 and 688 continue but the afternoon round trip to Chard on service 14 has been discontinued. Sally Falkingham had sent some information. The Tuesday and Thursday Ring and Ride bus service from Cattistock to Dorchester run by Dorset County Council has gone into the new Dorset Community Transport Directory as still a service on trial.
- d) **South West Coaches:** David Redgewell said that the 96 Yeovil to Crewkerne connections should be secure as Somerset County Council were not cutting financial support.
- e) **National Express:** from 1 April, Service 315 will only operate one journey each way between Plymouth and Bournemouth in new timings.
- f) **Axe Valley & West Dorset Ring & Ride** had been invited to a Community Transport meeting with Amanda Evans at Dorset Council on 9 April but did not have anyone able to attend. Tim Christian (DCT) said he will be attending.

7. Railway News.

- a) **Great Western Railway:** Sally Falkingham reported that the installation of lighting on Station Approach at Maiden Newton Station should now start at the end of April/ beginning of May. Regional Development Manager Dan Okey has confirmed this and the news about the Dorchester West ramp (see Dorset Travel report),
- b) **South Western Railway:** Andrew Ardley highlighted changes for May 2019. The extra Summer Saturday train to Weymouth via Salisbury, and Yeovil – Weymouth shuttle will restart but the extension to Corfe Castle is not yet finalised with Swanage Railway. They hoped to reach a final agreement with the unions soon on guards on trains. Trains from Waterloo to Weymouth will be faster by splitting at Southampton and omitting some stops in the New Forest. There will be three additional trains west of Salisbury serving Yeovil Junction/Pen Mill. Work to refurbish and improve reliability of rolling stock continues. Delay repay (compensation will start at 15 minute delay) will be automatic for advance tickets bought on SWR website (and Great Western Railway will be doing the same). SWR have now launched their Smartcard. Bids are in for station improvements – access for all at Dorchester South & Yeovil Junction; cycle storage at Dorchester South & Weymouth. He was asked about the engineering work which will disrupt access to London on the day of the London Marathon. Andrew Ardley that there are ‘events’ most weekends and the work has to be done. The withdrawal of trains early on Sunday was to give a larger engineering window. The add-on fares to Bus 31 are on the system. Alan Williams said he can buy a return from Bristol but not at Axminster for a journey to Bristol. Andrew asked for people to let him know specific examples where they had been unable to get tickets. Tickets can be downloaded on smartphones. Footfall made it unlikely that Bridport TC could be a booking point, but they might be able to print off pre-booked tickets. Publicity is planned for the through tickets but local promotion (eg through WATAG and Community Rail Partnerships) can be more focussed.

8. Community Initiatives

- a) **Bridport and District Community Bus:** BTC Town Clerk, Will Austin, reported that the revised timetable had started on 6 March but that usage needed to grow. It served the town centre and Morrisons more often. It will run until August when the 'community benefit' will be assessed. Alan Williams noted that the island at Chestnut Road had been removed and suggested that it should not be replaced or be redesigned to facilitate bus access.
- b) **Beaminster Saturday Service CB 3:** No timetable changes at present although they are likely to omit Salway Ash at a future date. Without more volunteers the service is 'fragile'.

9. **Democratic Moment:** Gavin Maxwell as a West Dorset DCHT governor had real concerns about the transport implications of transferring services away from Bridport (although there were sound clinical reasons). The three governors resident in Bridport had written a paper. The relevant part states: "The move will affect around 1,400 patients per year, most of whom need to access these services once or a couple of times for a diagnosis or urgent pain relief. While we are satisfied that the grounds for moving these services are reasonable and justified (in terms of the number of patients affected, safety and cost), we remain extremely concerned about the travel implications. We are worried that some patients, particularly vulnerable patients, will fall through the gaps left by a defective bus service, parking problems, a patient transport system with too-stringent rules and eligibility criteria, and other voluntary services that are only ad hoc. However, this is a major problem that applies to all patients accessing all hospital and medical services across West Dorset and we would like to see a comprehensive review of all transport access for patients, relatives and staff." He hoped WATAG would support such an initiative. It was noted that Devon had worked on integration but nothing seemed to have emerged from Dorset's Integrated Transport review event held in February 2018.

The new Dorset Council starts on 1 April with elections in May. It would be important to engage as they develop bus and other transport policies. WATAG had a presentation on LTP (Local Transport plan) in 2010 and this will need updating in due course. David Redgewell reported that Giles Fearnley (Managing Director of First Bus) had spoken at the recent TravelWatch South West meeting and had said that he would be interested to have a stakeholder engagement event in Bridport (for the public and the new Dorset Council). Will Austin will see whether the Town Council can facilitate this..

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.25 pm.

The next meeting (GM 109) is to be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport
at 6.30 pm on Thursday 23rd May 2019.

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Dorset County Council Officer Report

Public Transport

The revised bus service along the Bridport to Crewkerne corridor starts on Monday 8th April. The journeys will be renumbered as Service 6 with the exception of the school journeys that will remain as B5 (am only) and 6A. Most journeys will be run either by Buses of Somerset or First Dorset directly between Bridport and Crewkerne with no need for passengers to change at Beaminster. The exceptions are on the First Dorset 1715 journey from Bridport and the 1635 Buses of Somerset departure from Yeovil where passengers will have to change in Beaminster. The companies have made arrangements for these buses to have a guaranteed connection. Additionally First Dorset and Buses of Somerset will accept each other's tickets. The Council will explore the feasibility of providing through ticketing arrangements for travel to/from Crewkerne and Yeovil on South West Coaches service 96/96A.

First Dorset will be arranging for roadside publicity to be put in place by 8 April.

It is hoped that these changes will provide some stability to the service and encourage more people to use it with confidence.

Trees:

Dorset Highways has appointed an enforcement officer to oversee the tree cutting programme. There has been some progress and we will provide a further update for the May meeting.

Rail

Dorchester West – Access Ramp:

The Dorchester West Access Ramp is now in for planning and should be determined in early April. Dorset County Council is still working with Network Rail on land exchanges and legal agreements.

Changes to your councils in Dorset

Local government in Dorset is going through some big changes. On 1st April 2019 the county's nine councils will be replaced by two entirely new organisations:

- Dorset Council, and
- Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council

The new Dorset Council will replace the existing district and borough councils (East Dorset, North Dorset, Purbeck, West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland) and Dorset County Council, all of which will cease to exist. From April 2019, Dorset Council will deliver your local services, working in partnership with parish and town councils.

Why the councils are changing

There are several reasons why we're coming together as one Dorset Council:

1. to protect important services for residents including bins, housing, road maintenance, schools and social care
2. to reduce costs and give better value for money and cutting duplication
3. to give Dorset a stronger voice nationally which will help attract business investment and government funding and support local economic growth

How the changes may impact you

Although it sounds like a big change, you shouldn't notice any major changes to the council services you get from 1st April. For example, transport services will not be directly affected, your bin day will stay the same, you'll be able to park in the same car parks and we'll continue to maintain roads and public spaces as normal.

For further information, visit: www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/about