

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.111 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 26th September 2019

Present (46): Nadeem Ahmad (Bridport); Will Austin (Bridport TC); Monica Burt (Older Peoples Forum); Jackie Butcher (Mosterton), John Collingwood (Bridport); Phyllida Culpin (Pymore/Allington PC); Daniel (Bridport); Maureen Dormer (Mosterton), Bob Driscoll (WATAG Chair); Anna Dunn (Chideock PC); Louise Ferguson (Bridport); Sheena Fox, (Beaminster); Ian Gray (WATAG); Keith Hatch (Bridport); Freda Hennessey (Corscombe, Halstock & District PC); Rod Jones (Burton Bradstock); Hilary Joyce (Char Valley PC); Elizabeth Kingston (Litton Cheney); Geoff Langwell (Burton Bradstock); Marge Langwell (Burton Bradstock); Debbie Lindsay (Bridport); Rob Lindsay (Bridport); Anna Lovell (BLAP); Peter Lucas (Pymore); Maggie Luck (Bridport); Gavin Maxwell (Bridport); Chris Miller (Bridport); Simon Newport (local resident); Chris Noon (Char Valley PC); Jon Orrell (Dorset Council); Christine Preston (Bridport); Sue Pugh (Bridport); Pamela Reed (Mosterton); Philip Sankey (Lyme Forward); Patricia Schofield (Litton Cheney); Jacqui Sewell (Broadwindsor Group PC); Billy Shearer (WATAG); Aaron Sparks (First); Tony Taylor (PSWB PC); Rosetta Tolkovsky; Chris Turner (Beaminster TC); Gerry Waugh (Bridport); Vanessa Waugh (Bridport); Alan Williams (WATAG), Lydia Wilson (XR); Seth Winter (Bridport).

1. **Apologies:** Chris Addiss, Andrew Ardley, Sarah Carney, Tim Christian (DCT), Colin Divall, Carolyn Emmett, Chris Everidge, Sally Falkingham, John Firrell, Margaret Hayward, David Marsh, Mary Marsh, Geoff Parr, Helen Reed, Guz Tidy.

2. **Minutes:** The minutes of the previous (110th) meeting were agreed and signed.

3. **Matters arising not covered later:** None.

4. **Travel Dorset Report.** A report from Amanda Evans (attached) was read out. Alan Williams who had attended the meeting with Dorset Travel as a WATAG representative then gave his more detailed report on the meeting. The loss of a through shoppers' service to Yeovil and its replacement with connecting services was a turn-off for passengers who, with reports of missed connections, dare not risk being stranded. Even the guaranteed connection had not always worked. WATAG's priority remained the provision of commuter journeys to/from Yeovil available also to college students. In the morning, this was possible in term-time using the B5 and 96A changing at Misterton. In the evening the 16.35 departure was too early and needed to be retimed to 17.15. Buses of Somerset had stated that this would not fit neatly into the drivers' hours so the extra cost would be substantial. A bus contracted by Colfox and Beaminster Schools (Y1) leaves Yeovil at 17.15 three days a week. The School(s) as contractor would have to make the approach for any change, and had previously been unwilling and there would be the cost of running the two extra days. Although through ticketing between operators had been discussed previously, it was felt the formula was complex and would probably not benefit South West Coaches that much. Buses of Somerset also felt that as the 96 relied on Somerset CC subsidy, it could be affected by financial pressures on the Council.

5. **Bridport – Yeovil corridor.** A meeting had taken place but there was still some reluctance to alter anything. A through service to Yeovil was needed cutting out a change at Misterton or Crewkerne. Mosterton was in Dorset so residents needed to access GP practice in Beaminster and (usually) Dorchester Hospital. Times did not work for either or provide reasonable 'shopping' time in Bridport. Rebecca Knox is Dorset Council member covering Mosterton. Jacqui Sewell said things had deteriorated since the loss of service 47 (the established Bridport – Yeovil service which had run for many years). With the Climate Emergency, highlighted by Extinction Rebellion, the political will (and resources) were needed at local and national level to rethink.

Daryl Turner, Chairman of the Place Scrutiny Committee had suggested that as it was uncertain whether the Executive Advisory Panel would look in detail at individual routes, the 6 should be proceeded with as a matter of urgency, so Bob was still hopeful. In any event, WATAG and others 'at the coal face' should offer input to the panel.

6. Other Bus Operator News.

(a) **First Buses of Somerset/Wessex.** Bob Driscoll reported that Aled Williams was leaving First Buses of Somerset and moving to Ireland. Aaron Sparks had new First Wessex winter timetable books with him. Some early morning and late evening journeys were being withdrawn. There are planned changes for Colfox School services after half-term. The C2 would start at Dorchester and continue to Bridport Bus Station after Colfox. The C1 would be diverted via South Street en route to Colfox to drop other passengers nearer the town centre. Several users of the discontinued journeys expressed their concern and told of the difficulties created. The connection into the 07.37 train to Exeter at Axminster was used by students and commuters. The bus might not be 'profitable' as a standalone but it fed into a well-used train operated by the same group. Towards Dorchester, not only had the first journey been withdrawn (and had been used to connect into a London train) the next journey offered a tight connection that the bus often failed to make. In the evening, one passenger saw the bus pulling away as he crossed the footbridge. As a commercial service, First were free to operate as they wished. How they provide what they schedule is monitored for the Traffic Commissioners but they do not have an input to the schedules. Several people commented that it was a political issue and the way the framework to support public transport worked was failing. Dorset could support these journeys as socially necessary if it wished and had the resources. Some people had encountered 'discourteous' drivers. First claimed that what they are paid for those travelling on concessionary passes is not really enough. First seemed poor at generating demand and was generally reactive. There seemed to be little promotional activity. The new timetables were on the bus stops a week before the changes started. With tourists still around, this had caused confusion especially westbound where summer times are earlier than the winter ones. Some people had missed the change and had been caught out. There was not a lot in the press to alert folk. Patricia Schofield had lived abroad and asked if the urban model was appropriate. In places abroad she had encountered shared taxis. Bob said that the next meeting of TravelWatch South West on 18 October would focus on rural transport. The recent Dorset Council news sheet did not feature transport. David & Mary Marsh reported that there was now space on the A2 to Lyme Regis, but Aaron said that the tree issue was not resolved so it was likely to be standing room only with 46 children regularly booked to travel on the single-decker.

(b) **Dorset Community Transport.** Tim Christian reported that following a prompt and encouraging level of engagement with passengers, they had revised their proposed changes for Bridport C (the Wed/Sat service serving the Bride Valley area). This would run alternately on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Despite the four then 10 day intervals this creates between each run, there was a strong preference to retain the service into Bridport on a Wednesday. They will review passenger numbers at the end of the year.

7. Railway News.

a) **South Western Railway:** Andrew Ardley had sent his apologies but reported that their stakeholder report is now available on-line at <https://www.southwesternrailway.com/other/about-us/stakeholder-annual-report>. They have received a high volume of bids to their Customer and Communities Improvement Fund and hope to advise short-listed bidders in November, although final confirmation is subject to DfT approval in the New Year. Many of the submitted projects are for improvements at stations in Dorset or nearby areas. They are working closely with Network Rail and BCP Council to try and reduce the high level of trespass and fatalities in the Bournemouth / Poole area which has had a major impact on service reliability in recent months. They continue to work with local partners to secure external funding sources for station improvements. Additional cycle parking at Weymouth and Dorchester South is expected to be installed by June 2020 following the successful bid to the DfT this summer. There will be a further timetable change in December this year although there are no significant changes planned for the Bournemouth / Weymouth line following the enhancements in May this year.

b) **Great Western Railway:** Sally Falkingham sent apologies but reported that she would be attending a meeting in Trowbridge on 27 September to discuss the future of the Community Rail Partnership covering the Weymouth to Westbury and Bristol line. Kelly Flynn would also be attending.

8. Community Initiatives

a) **Bridport and District Community Bus:** The Town Council is committed to continuing a service but is looking at a number of alternative models, including using another operator (such as DCT) or converting to a shared taxi model. Meanwhile, the service will continue in its present form. He also updated the meeting on plans for a community building on the bus station site as well as a transport hub. A joint officer working group is being set up. He also noted that Cllr Ray Bryan sees public transport as a key element in responding to climate change.

b) **Beaminster CB 3 service:** The service has been running for 15 months with only one change to the timetable. They are in a position to continue and have kept their prices stable. Beaminster Town Council have agreed to set up a separate CB3 bank account and this will enable them to accept card payments as soon as they have the necessary kit on the vehicle.

9. **Meetings attended on behalf of WATAG.** None to report.

10. Democratic Moment.

Bob Driscoll said it had been a privilege to speak at the Extinction Rebellion event the previous Saturday. Climate change and plastic waste are the key priorities for our time. Other comments from the floor were that action and not just words were needed from Dorset Council to address the Climate Emergency. The Council newsletters had not mentioned transport. It was noted that there is a Government Minister for loneliness with whom WATAG should raise its concerns. Car share – although being suggested as an alternative, information was not widely available. WATAG promised to investigate. Anna Dunn asked whether the Sunday bus would serve Chideock. This Autumn's service with a private sponsor was only running between Bridport and Weymouth. It would need further funding from parish councils etc to extend it after Christmas or west of Bridport.

Will Austin thought there was merit in this but felt that it needed co-ordination by Dorset Council. Gavin Maxwell said that visits by relatives and friends were an important element in patients' recovery. It was the sickest patients who remained in hospital at weekends when people are often freer to visit. Freda Hennessey commended the Rural Services Network weekly e-mails that often had useful information.

11. **AOB.** Bob said that WATAG would need to consider the pattern of meetings for 2020. Should they remain bi-monthly or would quarterly be sufficient? Monthly meetings would probably be too much to handle but much would depend on an incoming Chairman, as he was looking to stop. If the pattern of meetings was being altered, it would be helpful to eliminate the periodic clash with the DAPTC meeting.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.40 pm.

The next meeting (GM 112) is to be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport
at 6.30 pm on Thursday 28th November 2019.

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Dorset Council Officer Report

Public Transport

Operational Managers from Buses of Somerset and First Wessex and officers from Dorset Travel met with committee members from WATAG to look for ways that could offer a more attractive bus service between Bridport and Yeovil as well as improving the travel opportunities for people who work in Yeovil or attend the College. One of the proposals has been to retime the 1635 journey from Yeovil. A later departure of 1715 has been suggested by WATAG and we will see if this could be achievable under the current contract. WATAG also stressed that there is no confidence that the last journeys of the day will make their connections in Beaminster. The bus companies will continue to work together to come up with a robust arrangement to ensure that through travel is provided.

While all parties understand the issues for the service, any major changes to this and other services in the area (and other parts of Dorset) are likely to be put on hold until the newly formed Executive Advisory Panel (EAP) for public transport provides a strategy to work to. The Panel will meet to come up with suggestions for strategic bus and rail services. Councillor Jill Haynes will chair the group and she will be responsible for putting together a committee.

Cycling

Burton Road cycleway has been completed and was part funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. The old railway line between Burton Road and West Bay has been resurfaced with tarmac and the vegetation was heavily cut back. This will receive a tar and chip surface dressing shortly and additional cycle parking will be installed. This was funded through the Coastal Communities Fund.

Dorset Council will be completing the East Road Roundabout Cycle safety works in October/November. This is on Highways England infrastructure and was funded by Highways England.

Dorset Council is currently liaising with Highways England to get the cycleway along Sea Road South widened along with better crossings. HE has completed the first phase report and will be bidding for funding to undertake a business case study in 2020/21.

Appointment to Dorset Travel

As part of the restructure for the new Dorset Council unitary authority, Becky Holland has recently been appointed as Dorset Travel's Service Manager for Fleet Operations.