

WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

Minutes of General Meeting No.112 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 28th November 2019

Present (24): Monica Burt (BAOPF); Kelvin Clayton (DC/BTC); John Collingwood (Bridport); Bob Driscoll (WATAG Chair); Anna Dunn (Chideock PC); Ian Gray (WATAG); Freda Hennessey (Corscombe, Halstock & District PC); Maureen Hymas (Bridport); Maureen Jackson (BLAP); Hilary Joyce (Char Valley PC); Patrick Lilleyman (Bridport); Chris Loder (Conservative); Gavin Maxwell (Bridport); Edward Morello (Liberal Democrats); Chris Noon (Char Valley PC); Geoff Parr (West Bexington); John Pearson (Chideock); Philip Sankey (Lyme Forward); Billy Shearer (WATAG); Aaron Sparks (First); George Stanley (Bridport); Guz Tidy (Loders); Martin Warne (Bothenhampton&Walditch PC); Alan Williams (WATAG).

1. **Apologies:** Andrew Ardley, Will Austin, Jackie Butcher, Sarah Carney, Colin Divall, Maureen Dormer, Sally Falkingham, Margaret Hayward, Sarah Herring, Geoff Parr, David Redgewell, Pamela Reed, David Taylor, Chris Turner.

Candidates' spot. Since publication of the agenda, the Chairman had invited each of the local Parliamentary Candidates to make a short statement.

Kelvin Clayton (Green Party) stressed the urgency in dealing with the climate emergency – “a ten year window”. There is a need for a Green New Deal. As a Dorset Councillor, he is a member of the Executive Advisory Panel on Rural Access to Services;

Chris Loder (Conservative) outlined his background, 20 years on the railway with South West Trains and South Western Railway. In this time the number of train services in this area had doubled. He felt that rural Bus networks were not fit for purpose and fundamental change was needed. He would argue for investment in railways in the south west; the integration of bus and train services and for franchise reform.

Edward Morello (Liberal Democrat) agreed with previous speakers on climate emergency. They would open up bidding to local authorities, rail companies and other transport providers. They would set up a Rural Services Fund. He stressed that it was important to look at ‘need’ and not simply ‘demand’.

Claudia Sorin (Labour) did not attend.

2. **Minutes:** The minutes of the previous (111th) 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. There was a gulf between ‘signposting’ and booking a journey. PramaLife’s main business is social care. It was felt that Dorset Council were sitting back and waiting for the Panel rather than dealing with issues. Dorset seemed to lag behind in bidding for government funds (£30 million in 2020-2021). At a recent TAG Leaders’ Meeting, there was discussion about the function and funding of TAGs. Hilary Joyce expressed frustration that nothing seemed to happen.

5. **Bridport – Yeovil corridor.** Nothing to report, although Yeovil College would prefer a joined-up arrangement. The “guaranteed connection” between Buses of Somerset and First Wessex no. 6 buses at Beaminster in the evening was again raised. Despite of assurances that measures were in place, occasional failures still occurred leaving passengers to fend for themselves in Beaminster,

6. Other Bus Operator News.

(a) **First Buses of Somerset/Wessex.** Aaron Sparks confirmed that the X51/X53 would run on Saturday times from 23 December until 3 January but with no buses on 25/26 December or 1 January; service 7 would run on Tuesday 24 & 31 December instead of the Wednesdays; service 6 would be “non schooldays” Monday to Friday service in that period. Aaron was asked to give a figure for the cost of running the first bus to Axminster earlier to connect into the 0737 train. Anna Dunn said that given this information parish councils or others might then be prepared to contribute. John Pearson raised the general issue of safety for those with disabilities. Being partially sighted, he had difficulties when shopping trolleys protruded into gangways or when dogs were there. He noted that some companies charged a dog fare. He also commented on the use of the wheelchair space – a dog in a pushchair not making way for a mother with two children. Aaron said that dogs were carried at the drivers’ discretion and that moving for people with a greater need was a matter of politeness and consideration for others. Ian Gray commented that a case of a wheelchair user being refused ended up in court, so it is a serious matter. Aaron also commented that some vehicles had more luggage space than others. Billy Shearer asked about the late running of a service earlier in the day which had led to the knock-on effect of missed trains and hospital appointments. It later transpired that the vehicle had suffered a breakdown en-route, although this information was not made available for several hours. People noted that drivers are generally helpful. Passengers can be carried on school services, but in the case of the A2 to Lyme Regis it was likely to be standing room only.

(b) **NORDCAT.** Freda Hennessey asked WATAG to seek news from NORDCAT as they were finding it difficult to find out how their services were doing.

7. Railway matters

(a) **South Western Railway.** Andrew Ardley had provided a written report. The through ticketing issue for local buses (X51/X53) will be attended to in the New Year, as staff energy is currently focussed on mitigating the effects of strike action. He advised people to consult the ‘strike’ web page. He explained that the Salisbury – Exeter service was provisional. Chris Loder confirmed that the meeting earlier in the day had broken up without agreement. He drew the meeting’s attention to changes to the new timetable due on 15 December, but which could be delayed until the New Year after the strike. He highlighted the following: 0619 Honiton to Waterloo starts at Exeter; 2120 from Waterloo extended to Exeter; 2220 from Waterloo extended to Yeovil Junction; evening trains from Exeter re-timed. Concern was expressed at a lack of planning and the withdrawal of advance fare tickets during the strike. As a proposal to add an extra train from Axminster to Exeter between the 0737 and 0903 had not been implemented, this increased the need for a bus link into the 0737.

(b) **Great Western Railway.** Sally Falkingham had attended the recent Heart of Wessex meeting at Trowbridge, chaired by Dan Okey, who read this statement from the partners.

“This has been a difficult year for the Heart of Wessex as decisions were reached on a new way forwards for the management of the partnership and we struggled on without a Partnership Officer. But much good work continued to be done by our hardy groups of community volunteers and station groups. This included continuing the programme of Wessex Wanderers walks and planning for their 25th anniversary next year, installation of bee friendly planters at Frome and excellent gardening works at Bradford on Avon and Trowbridge.

- We expect to have a new Somerset and Dorset Partnership in place early in the New Year, set up as a Community Interest Company, and in a position to recruit a new Partnership Officer.*
- But importantly, the Heart of Wessex Line itself will continue to have a clear and strong future. Alongside the new and existing partnerships, a new Line Strategy Group will be set up with the train companies, Network Rail and funding partners. This new group will ensure that the long term planning and strategic needs of the whole line will be considered. Alongside this, the Heart of Wessex will continue to be supported by a single Line Guide, a dedicated website and the co-operation of all involved to promote the Line for the benefit of all its communities and passengers.”*

Sally reported that the timetable changes on 15th December are minimal (details are in GWR booklet B1 – copies available at the meeting). The Sunday 0807 service from Weymouth to Cardiff will restart on 5 April. They are still waiting for a better service and more trains. Contrary to earlier publicity, the first train up from Maiden Newton has a connection to Paddington (arr 0836). The next meeting for the Group is planned for February.

Upgrade works are due to take place on the line between Weymouth and Yeovil Pen Mill/Castle Cary between January and March 2020 to improve the services provided on this line. The main objective is to replace the existing Yetminster River bridge, between Yetminster and Thornford, over a seven-day period, Saturday 15 February to Friday 21 February. Details of the disruption to services then and on the weekends, 25/26 January, 1 / 2 February, Sunday 1 March and 28/29 March will be published and be available at the Station, together with details of the replacement bus services between Yeovil Pen Mill and Weymouth. Track renewals will also be carried out before, during and after this. There are also plans to carry out maintenance inside the Grimstone tunnel by spraying concrete over a steel structure to strengthen the tunnel lining.

Sally added that the four light standards are now in place along Station Approach at Maiden Newton but they have still not been switched on.

8. Community Initiatives

a) Bridport and District Community Bus: In the absence of the Town Clerk, Kelvin Clayton reported that the Town Council is committed to continuing a service but is reviewing how it is run, focussed on three options – Dorset Community Transport, a local taxi firm or continuing with First Wessex. The Town Clerk is in contact with DCT and one taxi firm. If a change is agreed it would most likely happen early in the New Year. Meanwhile, the number of users is stable

b) Beaminster CB 3 service: Beaminster Town Council are in a position to continue and have kept their prices stable. There are some donations from concessionary pass holders which help finances. Some journeys are under-used but they are needed to place the vehicle for the next well-used one.

c) X53 Autumn Sunday Service:¹ Thank you to those who have used this sponsored service. Crowdfunding is taking off slowly but gives good publicity.

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

10/11/12 Democratic Moment / AOB / Meetings in 2020 Bob reminded people that the January meeting would be the AGM followed by the usual meeting. The Committee needs new members. He concluded by wishing everyone the compliments of the season.

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

The Annual Meeting and next General Meeting (GM 113)
will be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport
at 6.30 pm on Thursday 23rd January 2020

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¹ Alan Williams reports that passenger numbers were 125 on average for the first four Sundays. Revenue was up to £300 per day - and 40% of passengers were fare payers.

Dorset Council Officer Report

Executive Advisory Panel on Rural Access to Services

Dorset Council has recently set up an Executive Advisory Panel (EAP) on Rural Access to Services. The EAP on Rural Access to Services will investigate the barriers which prevent access to services and employment which disadvantage people living in rural areas. It will look to map existing support and services and identify gaps. It will look to understand spend and outcomes for people.

The aim of the EAP will be to provide clear advice and guidance to Cabinet on where changes can be made to improve accessibility for those living in rural areas. The panel has cross party membership and officers attend as appropriate. There have been two meetings and another two are scheduled. Recommendations may involve creating new policies or changing existing policies to improve accessibility for people living in rural communities.

Linking Dorset

Business and organisations across Dorset have come together in a bid to help people get out-and- about more across the county. An array of transport opportunities, including local bus services community-based minibus schemes, community car schemes and dial-a-ride helps ensure those living in the area are not isolated.

Now, a partnership led by PramaLife - called Linking Dorset - will provide a joined-up way of signposting people to transport schemes available.

The charity is working with Morebus, Dorset Community Action, Dorset Community Transport, Bus2Go, SEDCAT (South East Dorset Community Accessible Transport), NORDCAT (North Dorset Community Accessible Transport), DING (Dorset Interactive Neighbourcar Group), Christchurch Community Partnership, Hope in the Community, Faithworks Wessex, Help & Care and The Bournemouth and Poole Council for Voluntary Services to run the initiative.

The special information helpline is set to go live on 12th December 2019 and will be available between 10am and 2pm on weekdays to signpost those seeking transport in their area.

Linking Dorset is a signposting service only and will use the information readily available on the Dorset Council website and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council website to give out contact details of nearest schemes.

Once armed with the information they need, users of the service will be able to contact local schemes themselves to make bookings.

For more information contact Sue Warr on sue.warr@pramacare.co.uk or phone 07867 354588.

Cycling

The old railway line between Burton Road and West Bay has now been surface dressed. Additional cycle parking will be installed in early December.

East Road Roundabout – Dorset Council is still waiting for Highways England to conclude discussions with Connect (who operate and maintain the A35 on HE's behalf) concerning the electrical metering for the streetlighting before we can complete the surfacing, signing and roundabout re-landscaping. It is now likely to be completed in Spring 2020.

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