

# WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

## Minutes of General Meeting No.104 held in the W.I. Hall, Bridport on 26th July 2018

**Present (20):** Nick Boothroyd (Bridport Labour); Monica Burt (Bridport Area 50+ Forum); Tim Christian (DCT); John Collingwood (Bridport); Colin Divall (Bridport); Bob Driscoll (Symondsburry PC); Sally Falkingham (Maiden Newton); Sheena Fox (Beaminster); Anthony Logan (Bridport); Anna Lovell (POPP); Dan Okey (GWR); Geoff Parr (West Bexington); John Pearson (Chideock); Janet Proctor (WATAG); Philip Sankey (WATAG Chair); Aaron Sparks (First); Robin Stapleton (Walditch); Chris Turner (Beaminster TC); R Webster (Bridport); Alan Williams (WATAG),.

**1. Apologies:** Andrew Ardley, Graham Bailey, Jackie Butcher, Maureen Dormer, Ian Gray, Chris Hook, David Marsh, Mary Marsh, Gavin Maxwell, Erica Pretty, Pamela Reed, Carol Sim, Guz Tidy and Sally Welford

**2. Minutes:** A correction was made to train times shown in the GWR section of Railway News in the minutes of the previous (103<sup>rd</sup>) meeting) - "29 minutes later" rather than seven. The minutes were then agreed and signed.

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

**4. Dorset Travel.** Chris Hook, Dorset Travel Service Manager, was due to give a presentation to the meeting and had assured WATAG that he would be bringing "good news" As neither Chris nor Philip Sankey were present at this stage of the meeting, Vice-Chair Bob Driscoll moved on to the next item pending their arrival. Philip came later and explained that he had been out all day and had come straight to the meeting without checking his e-mail<sup>1</sup>. He reported that he had met Chris at the Transport Action Group leaders' meeting two days earlier. Chris alluded to the "good news" but it was not yet anything definite at that time. However, it had been accepted that the "40" Bridport/Beaminster/Yeovil route is a core route and will therefore go out to tender. It was also made clear that coverage of Broadwindsor would not be included in service requirements and bidders asking for a premium for including the town would be disadvantaged. The tender would call for four trips a day on Mondays to Fridays only. Philip also raised the question of Councillor attendance at TAG meetings and was given to understand that there was little scope for lobbying as DCC Cabinet policy is inflexible and will remain so until the Unitary Council is in office. He also asked about the protocol for handling breakdowns and other incidents on school buses and was assured that discussions are under way between First and DCC to establish suitable procedures. Bob Driscoll expressed shock that the "40 core route" was only going out to tender at the end of July whilst current arrangements are due to end on 31st August, and he also mentioned that there is at least one student living at Broadwindsor who takes the bus to study at Yeovil College.

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<sup>1</sup> After the meeting, it transpired that Philip had been sent an e-mail from Chris earlier in the day giving his apologies for non-attendance due to sickness. The e-mail also outlined the main points of Chris Hook's presentation - see attached

**5. Councillors' slot:** No County or District councillors were in attendance.

## **6. Bus Operators.**

**a). First Wessex, Dorset and South Somerset:** Aaron Sparks reported that double-decker buses will be used on all X51/53 routes during the summer "to help squeeze everybody in". Sally Falkingham asked whether members of the public can use the B01 and B02 school buses (Frome St Quentin and Frampton to Beaminster School) as several residents of the Maiden Newton area need to visit Bridport Hospital. Aaron confirmed that these are public services, but they may well be too full for other passengers. Sally said that the alternative for outpatients going from Maiden Newton to Bridport Hospital was to take a train to Dorchester and then the X51 bus to Bridport town centre. They then have to wait for the no. 6 up the hill to the hospital. Aaron assured Sally that connectivity would be considered in the winter timetables. Colin Divall asked if First could say when through bus/rail ticketing to/from Bridport and Lyme Regis would be re-introduced. Although the company has made a commitment to bring back this facility, no date has yet been set. Chris Turner raised concerns about the future of the "strategic" Bridport/Yeovil route". Aaron explained that this depends on DCC and that First Wessex have no plans to extend the no. 6 as a commercial service. He also recognised that the 09.20 X53 service from Axminster invariably runs late and assured Alan Williams that the problem will be addressed in future schedules. First have been putting on an extra bus when available, although Bob Driscoll felt that there should be better communication for waiting passengers.

**b). Dorset Community Transport:** Tim Christian reported that the new fares and timetable for the service 14 (Thorncombe/Chard) came into effect in July and that DCT was monitoring the impact of the changes. DCT have deployed an alternate Saturday service on the C3 (ex-210) route from Long Bredy to Bridport in response to public demand. Tim confirmed that the weekly services in the WATAG area will continue during school holidays as the charity recognises the need for continuity. He explained to High Walditch resident, Robin Stapleton, that since places on PlusBus services are booked in advance, they are effectively reserved for the whole journey. Flat fares are therefore applied on all of the 18 PlusBus services. It may be better for passengers living within a short distance of their destination to use taxis or, as in Robin's case, to continue walking. Mr Stapleton maintained that the government's transport policy was unfair. Nobody disagreed and Bob Driscoll urged him to take up the matter with his County Councillor, Keith Day, with the assurance that WATAG would support his position. Tim suggested that Parish Councils may be able to help with a partial subsidy if several parishioners were faced with the same situation.

**c). Stagecoach South West:** A note from outgoing Commercial Director , Robert Williams, confirmed that the company have no proposed changes for the 9A Lyme Regis/Exeter service, although vehicles are being upgraded using cascades from Stagecoach South's Coastline 700 which have high back seats and tinted windows. All are being repainted and retrimmed prior to entering service.

**d) Axe Valley and West Dorset Ring & Ride:** Philip Sankey had attended the charity's annual meeting and reported that numbers are holding up. He stressed that the service is designed for the "more mobility-impaired" and runs Saturday trips as well as transport to local towns. It is very much a community service and offers social contact to its users.

**e) Jurassic Mule:** The service has resumed this year as a result of crowd-funding and now has a local manager

## 7. Railway News.

**a) Great Western Railway:** The chair welcomed Dan Okey, GWR's Regional Development Manager. His role has accountability for performance and he admitted that this had been "quite challenging" on the Heart of Wessex line over the past 6 to 12 months, with only 82% of trains running on time. Whilst offering an apology, he pointed out that GWR is undergoing a massive transformation - "the greatest level of change since Brunel built the railway!" The continued use of short and/or old trains is a consequence of changes elsewhere which prevent cascading rolling stock to the Heart of Wessex line. The company is expecting a difficult summer with light only coming at end of the tunnel "well into 2019". Sally Falkingham was particularly concerned about delays on the 07.59 Maiden Newton/Weymouth train which is not only the busiest southbound service of the day but also takes children to school; it is the only public transport available following the loss of the 212 (Dorchester/Yeovil) bus service. Dan undertook to let GWR control know about the importance of punctuality on this service. Bob Driscoll felt that capacity was also a big concern. Dan assured the meeting that the promised turbos would be brought in eventually, but the difficulties on the Heart of Wessex line are shared across the network - a big interconnected jigsaw. A note from a rail user suggested that some rail lines are refusing to help disabled passengers on to trains, citing the trouble and time it takes and possible delays to timetables. Dan assured the meeting that current regulations proscribe this practice and that from 2020 all trains must be disabled-accessible. Disabled passengers can contact GWR in advance if they need assistance in embarking or disembarking at unmanned stations or require a taxi.

**b) South Western Railway:** Regional Development Manager, Andrew Ardley sent an email outlining scheduled RMT strike action together with a public statement on the company's position. Up-to-date information is available at: <https://www.southwesternrailway.com/plan-my-journey/rmt-industrial-action>. Andrew's message also covered the postponement of the planned December 2018 timetable changes and contained an assurance that through tickets to Bridport/Lyme Regis are "still definitely happening", but SWR "cannot give a precise date as other projects need to be completed first." John Pearson told the meeting that he was unable to catch a bus at Dorchester South station (DCH) after returning from London, as the train stops at the "down" platform 2 and the bus stop is over a very steep bridge across the tracks. He had to stay on board to Weymouth and take the next train back to DCH to access the bus. Sally Falkingham recommended him to contact the guard the first time they pass through the train to ask whether the train can be brought into the "up" platform 1 at DCH. She maintained that this was a common practice which the operator was happy to perform where the timetable permits. Although this can be helpful, it cannot be relied on and this can be unsettling. John pointed out that Dorchester South is one of the main stations in the South-West which does not have a lift.

## 8. Community Initiatives

**a) Beaminster:** Chris Turner was pleased to report that the CB3 had been running for five weeks. The service operates with a 2-person crew. New drivers are being recruited. Bob Driscoll has been acting as conductor while Sheena Fox and others are being trained in the role. Chris left copies of his report to Beaminster Town Council. It indicated that some young people use the early run to get to work. Other passengers take the CB3 to catch a train or connect to the no. 96 Crewkerne to Yeovil bus or to X51/53 buses in Bridport. The report also contains information on receipts, expenditure and usage statistics. The service is settling in and there are still some empty runs. Chris reported that the bus has a donations box to receive any contributions concessionary pass holders may wish to make to ensure the continuation of the service. No pressure is applied. There are now a number of regular users and the atmosphere on board is convivial. There are plans to make an application for a section 19 permit to run trips for local clubs and boost income.

b) **Bridport and District:** As no Bridport Town Council officers or councillors were present, Bob Driscoll - in his capacity as advisor to the council - explained the origins of the project. Although what is to be known as the number 7 covers sections of the old 44 and 210 routes in the Bridport area, the circular route emerged from the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan and earlier schemes. First have been awarded the contract to run the service, but the smallest vehicle they have available has proved to be too large for certain sections of the route, in particular on Chestnut Road. The bus will run on Wednesdays and Saturdays and will call at Bradpole, Jessopp Avenue, Lower Walditch on to South Lawns Bothenhampton (avoiding Crock Lane due to potential problems with parked cars), Burton Road (for the Wanderwell Estate), West Bay, Morrisons, Bridport Leisure Centre, Skilling, St Swithins, Court Orchard and back to Bridport town centre. Chris Turner was anxious to ensure that the 7 and CB3 timetables “mesh effectively”. Bob said that the shared route sections between Bradpole and Bridport would relieve potential capacity issues.

**9. Democratic Moment:** Philip Sankey reminded the meeting that the Parliamentary Transport Committee has launched an enquiry into the decline of the bus market in England outside London. This is of particular relevance to the WATAG area and comments are invited from individuals and groups by Monday 24<sup>th</sup> September.

The address for written submissions is:

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/transport-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/health-of-bus-market-17-19/commons-written-submission-form/>

**10. Any Other Business:** Several WATAG members had attended a “Stakeholder Engagement Event” meeting organised by the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group on 17<sup>th</sup> July on Integrated Transport - non-emergency patient transport services (NEPTS)

The promoters of the Bridport Area Neighbourhood Plan sent a reminder regarding the public pre-submission consultation which ends on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> September. A section of the plan is devoted to Transport and includes discussion of a transport hub

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

The next meeting (GM 105) is to be held in the WI Hall North St Bridport at 6.30 pm on Thursday 27th September 2018.

**Chair:**

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**e-mail sent from Chris Hook to Philip Sankey at 09.55 27/07/18.**

I was actually looking forward to this evening as there is a huge amount of work coming to fruition.

Unfortunately no one else is free due to leave or existing commitments.

In summary though I was going to:

- 1) commend the work of Bridport and Beaminster for the local solutions they have developed. DCC have supported short notice for the Bridport 7 service which can commence on 22 August
- 2) remind about the community transport grants of £2,000 revenue and £5,000 capital
- 3) confirm a few changes within the team with Debbie Fiddik being tasked with all things public transport including infrastructure. This releases Amanda Evans purely on Community Transport
- 4) confirm the bus station RTI screen is being replaced and that work continues with operators to ensure 100% real time
- 5) finally announce that DCC will be tendering for a service to operate between Beaminster and Crewkerne with peak extensions to Yeovil. This will be on a 1 year contract with potential to extend to 3 years. Until the alternative service commences, DCC will continue with its 40 operation.

I'm happy to attend the next meeting and apologies I am unable to join this evening.

Thanks  
Chris

Chris Hook  
Dorset Travel Service Manager