

The decline of rural buses: A Joint Inquiry by the County APPG and CCN

WATAG Case Study

Title of Project	Route 6: Bridport-Beaminster-Crewkerne-Yeovil Strategic Corridor
Organisations/Agencies Involved	Dorset Council; Somerset County Council; First Wessex; Buses of Somerset; Yeovil College; WATAG.
Overview of Proposals/Project (250 words max)	<p>The Bridport-Yeovil service before July 2017 was operated at marginal-cost by Go Ahead subsidiary Damory Coaches. It provided a through peak journey to Yeovil, giving workers and college students an arrival before 0900 and a return at 1715. Peak departures from Beaminster to Bridport gave arrivals of 0730 and 0856, allowing a range of travel opportunities, with returns to Beaminster and beyond until 1835. There was also a regular off-peak service. The route ran Monday to Saturday, although Saturday services were fewer. This service was well utilised and had a high passenger satisfaction rating. Dorset County Council (DCC) included it as one of its "inter urban strategic routes".</p> <p>In summer 2017 DCC awarded the majority of tendered work in the area to First Wessex, excluding Bridport-Yeovil: Damory left Bridport and withdrew the service. DCC had made no provision for this unintended consequence. DCC initially operated a service itself (Mondays to Fridays), then from September 2017 it 'shared' the route with First Wessex. There were frequent timetable changes, and from October 2018 all commuter/Yeovil College services were withdrawn, and DCC contracted Buses of Somerset to operate an off peak service between Crewkerne and Beaminster, 'shared' with First Wessex; DCC withdrew its service.</p> <p>The service as at March 2020 is wholly inadequate, running between Bridport and Crewkerne three times a day off-peak Monday to Friday. There is currently no direct service between Bridport and Yeovil.*</p> <p>* An "emergency" Covid-19 service starts 11 May UFN.</p> <p>WATAG has been working with all interested parties since 2017 to ensure that users' needs along this strategic corridor are met.</p>

<p>What is the issue, and why is this important?</p>	<p>As well as access to employment, shops, main hospitals and other facilities in the larger towns for those living along the corridor, the 6 should enable Dorset students to enjoy the educational opportunities at Yeovil College not available elsewhere in the county.</p>
<p>Who is impacted by this, and how are they impacted?</p>	<p>Anyone requiring access to work, college, shopping centres and hospitals (Yeovil/ Bridport) who does not drive or own a car. The present service suits virtually no-one, and passenger loadings reflect this. In January 2020, First Wessex announced withdrawal from its part of the route from 01 May "<i>in the light of continuing losses on the service</i>".</p>
<p>How have you or partners been working to resolve this issue?</p>	<p>WATAG has tried, so far in vain, to persuade DCC and its successor Dorset Council (DC) to engage with stakeholders along the route to provide a "fit-for-purpose" service. This includes a variety of timetable suggestions by transport professionals (including bus companies). DC will not even engage with other bus companies (e.g. South West Coaches) to enable through ticketing that would make the use of connecting services more attractive.</p>
<p>What outcomes have been achieved by these? (e.g. for residents, partners, the Council, Whitehall etc...)</p>	<p>Very little has been achieved so far, and WATAG offers this case study as an exemplar of how not to plan a rural bus service.</p>
<p>What other specific powers, freedoms or incentives could the government introduce/devolve/change to improve local bus services?</p>	<p>Local-transport authorities should have a statutory responsibility to provide rural-transport networks (not limited to buses) adequate to the social, economic and cultural needs of their inhabitants. These networks must be funded through ring-fenced, long-term (say three- or five-year) central government grants based upon proposals derived from the Local Transport Plan.</p>
<p>Contact Details (If we require further detail on your submission)</p>	<p>Bob Driscoll (WATAG Chair) e. watag@hotmail.co.uk t. 01308 425518 m. 07856 291891</p>