

# WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (WATAG)

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**WATAG's objectives are to seek and achieve sustainable improvement in transport systems within the Dorset Council Wards covered by the Local Area Partnerships of Lyme Forward, BLAP and BAVLAP; these include the towns of Lyme Regis, Bridport and Beaminster and surrounding hinterland.**

**Additionally, WATAG will seek to achieve sustainable improvement in the transport links between the defined areas, neighbouring counties and elsewhere.**

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## NATIONAL BUS STRATEGY: "BUS BACK BETTER" Bus Service Improvement Plan: WATAG's Initial Suggestions

Date: AUGUST 2021

### INTRODUCTION

We recognise that rural public transport will always be the poor relation to 'urban' public transport, and that Covid-19 has changed people's travelling habits – certainly in the short term.

However, we also recognise that unless there is a VAST improvement to the existing piecemeal/ ad hoc system, the 'spiral of decline' will continue, as those services that *do* operate tend to be infrequent, inconvenient, and unreliable; they also start too late/ finish too early. In most cases they are expensive and connections with other operators/ modes of travel are often hit 'n' miss, with no guaranteed connections or inter-availability of ticketing.

Prior to listing our suggestions for a Bus Service Improvement Plan for this area, we wish to make the following caveats, which are in addition to the "BUS BACK BETTER: BUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN" submitted by STAG on behalf of the TAG Leaders in April 2021:-

- Predictions on potential usage of public transport in general – and buses in particular – will, at least initially, be very much guesswork in the post Covid-19 world
- Decisions made by Dorset County Council (DCC) since 2011, which have impacted on both 'financially supported' and 'commercial' bus routes in our area, have resulted in a lack of trust/ confidence by the travelling public. If trust and confidence is to be regained, there will have to be cast iron guarantees as to the long term continuity of services.

We show below our suggestions for creating a step change in travel habits, to the benefit of all, and to enable Government's aspiration to "level up" to be achieved.

### KEY POINTS

1. There needs to be minimum frequencies and hours of operation on all core routes, 7 days a week  
**[Convenience + a genuine alternative to private car]**
2. There needs to be real cooperation in service planning between bus and rail operators (and individual bus operators where connections are possible) so that connections can be held, or alternative transport provided **[Confidence]**
3. Bus Stations and "Key Interchanges" need proper passenger facilities, which, depending on location and the amount of time a traveller will be there, should include shelter; toilets; access to refreshments; a manned information point **[Encouragement + confidence]**
4. Real Time Information (RTIS) should be improved in those locations that have them (Weymouth and environs; Dorchester and environs; Bridport. RTIS should be extended to all bus stops in due course) and have constant monitoring **[Accuracy of Information + getting the message across]**
5. Marketing of all services needs to be centralised (as it once was) rather than each operator producing its own literature showing only its services **[Advertising + getting the message across]**
6. Parish/ Town Councils should be more involved, particularly in installing and maintaining bus stops/ shelters, and ensuring roadside publicity is kept up to date **[ensuring travellers are welcomed + giving confidence]**
7. Punctuality of buses is an on-going issue, and 'bus priority' schemes need to be developed, including enforcing the rule of the road "give way to buses" **[Reliability + confidence]**

## **SPECIFICS**

### **A. TRUNK ROUTES: X51 (Axminster – Dorchester); X53 (Axminster – Weymouth); 6 (Bridport – Yeovil); 9A (Lyme Regis - Exeter)**

- **Days of Operation:** All trunk routes should operate 7 days a week
- **Frequency:** At least hourly on all routes, with variations on Sundays, depending on demand:-
- **X53:** hourly from 06.00 – 22.00 from Axminster to Weymouth – 7 days a week
- **X51:** half hourly throughout the day, say 07.00-19.00; hourly before 07.00 and after 19.00. Start and finish times to coincide with train connections to London [aim to arrive London before 10.00 and be able to leave London after 19.00]. Frequency could also be increased by extending some no. 10 services to Bridport [**The current service, just two hourly Mon-Sat (no winter Suns), has resulted in a decimation of the commuter and general trade; visitors to Dorchester County Hospital – even those who have concessionary bus passes – tend to drive rather than risk having to wait for up to 2 hours for a bus back home]**]
- **9A:** some services *could* be extended to Bridport Coach Station, to provide additional frequency between Lyme Regis and Bridport
- **6:** hourly 07.00 – 20.00. Timings early morning and late afternoon should cater for commuters to Yeovil and students travelling to Yeovil College. Certain services from/ to Bridport might terminate at/ start from Crewkerne and connect into/ out of South West Coaches' 96/ 96A, subject to adequate interchange facilities and inter-availability of ticketing arrangements.
  
- **Connections:** Buses to be timed to connect with trains at Axminster, Dorchester South, Weymouth, also Crewkerne (all locations requiring proper passenger facilities\* ALL DAY). Also cross boundary links with other bus services: Axminster (30 to Taunton; 885 to Colyton/ Seaton+Beer); Lyme Regis (9A to Seaton/ Sidmouth/ Exeter); Crewkerne (96/ 96A to Chard and Yeovil).  
\* See KEY POINT 3 (above)

### **B. MINOR ROUTES**

We feel that reinstatement of several of the services that were summarily axed between 2014 and 2017 – regardless of usage – would be a useful starting point. These include:-

- 73: Maiden Newton – Bridport, reconfigured to provide connections to/ from trains at Maiden Newton; there would be opportunities for certain journeys to be operated by DRT principles
- 213: Beaminster – Dorchester
- 42: Drimpton – Bridport
- 210: Litton Cheney – Bridport

### **C. MISCELLANEOUS**

There are several communities that used to have regular bus services that now have none at all. We acknowledge that a degree of pragmatism is needed when deciding how best to organise public transport for such locations, and “community transport” will often provide a useful ‘shopping trip’ solution, although even these need funding.

There are certain villages that, in our opinion, have been unnecessarily removed from the ‘public transport map’; these include:-

**Martinstown:** this used to be a substantial generator of business for the X51 [formerly 31 (Weymouth/ Dorchester – Axminster)] and there are many care homes in the area whose staff used to commute by bus.

**Netherbury:** except for the Saturday only Beaminster Town Council Community Bus, and the 6A school days only, this village is only served by the book-in-advance Axe Valley Ring&Ride.

*[Please contact Chairman for more details]*

*Page 2 of 2*

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