

BUS ADVISORY BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting Held Virtually via Microsoft Teams

2 December 2022

Attendees:

Cllr Mike Rigby (Chair), Anthony Reese (Somerset Bus Partnership/Vice Chair-Bus Users & Stakeholders Group), Phil Grocock (Wiltshire Council), Josh Strickland (Hatch Green Coaches), Lee Jones (SCC In-House Fleet), David Redgewell (Campaign for Better Transport), Richard Gibson (Cross-Country Trains), Deborah Fiddick (Dorset Council), Adam Hawksworth (Buses of Somerset), Peter Paddon (South Somerset District Council), Andrew Ardley (South Western Railway), Peter Fairey (South West Coaches), Cllr Diogo Rodrigues

SCC: Natasha Bates, John Perrett, Ian Bell, Joanna Moczadlo, Tim Reynolds, Andrew Melhuish, Terrie Brazier, Jonathan Hallows

Welcome and Apologies for Absence – Agenda Item 1

The Chair read the meeting guidance and etiquette for virtual meetings.

Natasha Bates, Service Manager Commissioning-Highways and Transport, gave an update on membership, noting that Dartline had just been acquired by Go South West; it will still be known as Dartline, but Mark Collins will now be its Board member, with Richard Stephens, Managing Director, acting as the contact for signing the Enhanced Partnership Scheme and Plan and any related agreements.

Apologies were received from Cllr Glen Burrows, Joe Walsh, Joana Jackson, Peter Travis, and Marc Morganhuws

Minutes from the Last Meeting – Agenda Item 2

The minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting held on 13 October 2022.

Public Question Time – Agenda Item 3

There were no public questions or statements received.

Enhanced Partnership (EP) Scheme Variation 2 and Formal Adoption – Agenda Item 4

Tim Reynolds, Associate-WSP, stated that after the first variations which were approved by this Board at the last meeting, there have been further communications with the DfT, who had approved most of the Board's variations to the EP, but they had wanted to strengthen the wording in Section 3, while in Section 4 regarding operator commitment and obligation, nothing has changed. In order to allow SCC to draw down the first year's funding through the BSIP, the DfT had wanted SCC to strengthen their commitment to exploring a range of different facilities and measures that are linked to funding either directly or indirectly. SCC had also been asked to remove some elements of Section 3 where funding had not been granted, in order that the EP scheme be clearly linked to the funding presently available. Those items that had not been granted funding through the BSIP program this time round were put into an annexe, so there are now two additional annexes at the back of the scheme; these outline measures and facilities which SCC would like to commit to in the future if funding can be secured but which are not currently funded and not in the main scheme, thus making it very clear what has been funded and what has not. The DfT had also asked SCC to strengthen a section on community engagement, so a new Section 7 was added which details SCC's commitment to quite detailed consultation with the public on their views about how the BSIP is performing and the processes used to verify that. After these alterations, the EP had been returned to the DfT once again, and they approved it in its entirety, which is what has now been circulated to Board members. The DfT was now looking for SCC to approve it as soon as possible so that it can be sent back to the DfT, in order for them to begin the process that allows SCC to draw down the Year 1 funding.

The Chair invited comments from the Board. Tony Reese, representing the Somerset Bus Partnership, said with respect to the strengthening of our commitment to listening to customers that he had a list of things that the Partnership has been doing: They now have 100 registered 'bus champions' from across the county; they have been requesting timetables and requesting reports on the progress of the Somerset-wide timetable in conjunction with First Bus; and they have been working with parish and town councils to print and distribute timetables as well. Finally, they have just started carrying out a bus stop audit, so if anyone had any comments on that, he would be interested to hear them.

David Redgewell, representing The Campaign for Better Transport, asked if it could be ascertained that all of SCC's legal agreements were with First Group and First Bus, and not with Buses of Somerset. With respect to the bus shelters, he said that it should be known from an audit point of view who is responsible in the Bridgwater and Taunton

areas covered by the BSIP for maintenance of bus shelters and schedules and who is going to carry that out as part of the customer service element of the local authority. This includes the information displays on the bus stops and good repair of the bus shelters, because that is what enhanced partnership with the operators is about. He asked if a proper audit could be ensured once the unitary council is in place and takes control of these bus shelters and assets. The Chair responded that they are already working on who owns what and will subsequently organise a maintenance schedule.

Tim Reynolds noted with respect to the legal entity of the contract that it is with First Bus, who is the local operating partner and signatory of the EP; if that needs to be updated or an additional signatory slightly higher up in First Bus needs to be added, that can be done later as an amendment to the EP, without that issue holding up the imminent draw-down of funding. In terms of bus stops/shelters and other general information in the EP, the scheme can be varied at any point, so it is probably sensible to wait for the unitary status of the local authority to be confirmed, at which time it will be known what assets are where and who owns what, and there is a maintenance schedule in place. At that point, once a clear level of ownership and accountability is known, detail could be added to the EP.

All operators present unanimously agreed to adopt the latest variations to the EP through the bespoke variation mechanism.

Update on Weekend/Evening Services Trial – Agenda Item 5

John Perrett, Service Manager-Transporting Somerset, stated that they had been working on these proposals for the Taunton area since the last meeting and looking at the commercial bus network where there will likely be sufficient usage. All of these proposed routes are operated by Buses of Somerset.

- #1 Town Service – This is the busiest route in Taunton which goes out to Priorswood services; we want to extend it to the Silk Mills Park and Ride in order to bring the park and ride sites into the network without running this specific park and ride service after 7:30 pm but rather linking it to existing services in town. The #1 will run hourly with the last bus from Taunton to Silk Mills at 10:35 and from Taunton to Priorswood at 11:00 pm. All of the journeys will also serve Musgrove Park Hospital.
- #21 Taunton-Bridgwater – This will be an hourly service with the last bus from Bridgwater at 10:15 and the last bus from Taunton at 11:04 pm, and it will be extended to start and finish at Musgrove Park Hospital.
- #22 Taunton-Wellington – An hourly service with the last bus from Taunton at 11:05 and the last bus from Wellington at 11:31 pm; it will also serve Musgrove Park.

- #28 Taunton-Minehead – This is a much longer route and will not be hourly, but there will be two additional return journeys from Taunton at 10:30 and from Minehead at 10:15 pm. On the last three journeys, there will be a diversion via Cotford St Luke and Norton Fitzwarren in order to serve more heavily populated areas on the outskirts of Taunton.
- #30 Taunton-Chard – There will be three journeys added with the last bus from Chard at 9:11 and the last bus from Taunton at 10:10 pm including a diversion to the Gateway Park and Ride site, in order that people can leave their cars at the Park and Ride during the day and still have the gates open when they come back in the evening.

There is no fixed date yet for the introduction of these services, but it will be sometime in January 2023. Discussions are underway with our property services team regarding the planning permission for extending hours for the Park and Ride. Also, Buses of Somerset are making other changes to their timetables as well, so it is hoped to have all services/changes introduced on the same date.

The Chair thanked John Perrett for this very exciting news, which will create the ability for thousands of people to move between the big population centres in the evening. He invited Board members to comment; David Redgewell asked if, given the shortage of bus drivers in the southwest, there will be enough drivers for these additional routes. John Perrett replied that he had raised this question himself and been assured that there would be. David Redgewell then suggested that the Chair meet with RMT, as it is always useful for the Chair to have a dialogue with the unions that cover the bus industry. The Chair confirmed that he would be more than happy to do so at the appropriate time. Tony Reese commented that these evening services were a wonderful addition to the current services, although the finish times looked a bit early.

The Chair thanked everyone for their work and noted these changes will boost the nocturnal economies of the towns involved, particularly when the evening services are combined with the capped fares that are soon to come. He observed that obviously these new services will entail major changes to timetables, and he asked if anyone from First West of England could confirm if the timetables for the D2 services at bus shelters had been changed, especially as the online timetables were updated a week ago. It is necessary to ensure that staff at Musgrave Park Hospital are fully aware of the new times, as parking there has been a big issue for a long time. Hopefully, connecting evening services with the Silk Mills Park and Ride will have a huge impact on hospital staff's ability to park and get into work, but he needs a commitment that these services will be very well advertised as they go forward. Adam Hawksworth, of First South West trading as Buses of Somerset, said that he could confirm that they are planning to produce a printed timetable booklet and update all roadside timetables within Taunton as soon as a start date for the evening services has been agreed, and as soon

as their own proposed changes take place, which he will discuss in more detail with John Perrett and colleagues at Somerset. Tony Reese advised that the D2 timetables as yet had not been changed. The Chair stated that John Perrett has been in discussions repeatedly with First West of England about the matter and will continue to do so. David Redgewell suggested that the Chair speak with the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, given that some of the routes are in their area and they are also behind in updating their timetables, such as on the service to the Royal United Hospital in Bath. He also suggested a meeting with the CEO of First Buses regarding First South West and First West of England in order to resolve some of these county-wide issues with First Group. The Chair said they would pick up that issue.

Update on £1 Fare Scheme in Taunton Town – Agenda Item 6

Natasha Bates stated that offices had been working with operators on the agreements, and all of the operators in the zone have signed them; ticket machines had also been updated. The £1 fares will come into effect on 5 December, and the Communications Team will put out promotional materials which have been approved by the DfT and a press release has also gone out. Materials have been shared with the operators and will continue to liaise with them about further promotion. Operators who have signed up include Buses of Somerset, Hatch Green Coaches, Dartline, South West Coaches, and the SCC in-house transport team.

The Chair said that this was fantastic news, that we really want to make this work, and there will be support from the Bus It marketing campaign. He stated that this initiative will make a difference in passenger usage and can lead to rolling it out in other parts of the county where additional funding becomes available.

Update on £2 Fare Trial – Agenda Item 7

John Perrett stated that the details of this trial are still unclear; there has been no direct contact with the DfT, as the DfT has been dealing directly with operators. Participation in the trial is voluntary, including both commercial and tendered services; as he understands it, the scheme is only open to those operators who claim the Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) or the old fuel duty rebate. This means that some operators, particularly those who only operate tendered services or those who do little commercial mileage, have not been invited to take part, meaning participation will be patchy. Operators have been asked by the DfT to provide considerable data up front for the DfT to analyse and work out payments, which has made matters difficult, as there is only a fixed amount of funding available from the DfT and the amount to be received by each operator will only be known by 12 December. However, the operators

then have to confirm by 16 December if they want to participate, and then the publicity from central government begins the next day on 17 December.

One thing that they have been asked to ensure is that there are no penalties on the £2 fare in relation to concessionary fares and that we don't make adjustments to payments to operators on concessionary fares; however, this won't apply to Somerset, because we have been paying fixed rates based on the 2019-20 level of concessionary fares, and that will continue until at least 31 March. In any case, by 16 December there will be confirmation of which operators are participating, and a list will be published week commencing 19 December.

The Chair thanked John Perrett for his update, noting that this was another opportunity to recover patronage after the Covid pandemic, and he invited comments from the Board. Tony Reese asked what SCC and the Somerset Bus Partnership could do to help publicise this, as it will need to be publicised widely once it starts; John Perrett replied that there would be press coverage and communications once the list of operators is known. He said that Ridler's Coaches in Minehead could be ruled out, because they are a small operator that does not have the capacity to meet the demands of the data requirement from the DfT.

David Redgewell expressed his concern that there is far less information available in the South West than in the Midlands, while in the North, the Secretary of State for Transport had gone to Manchester with the new buses Minister to meet the authorities to discuss this £2 fare issue. He noted that there are two transport boards, the Peninsula and the Western Gateway, and these transport boards could possibly be a vehicle for conversations between the Chair and DfT officials about a regional approach to the matter. He opined that it is not right that the DfT is bringing schemes into the South West without speaking to statutory transport authorities, who are the ones who have to administer those schemes and protect public money. He noted that there is a Peninsula board meeting next week and also one for Gateway; this topic should be on the agenda of those meetings, as passengers will be confused and concerned if the DfT talks about the issue publicly without them having the details first about why they are paying different fares on different buses. The Chair confirmed that he would be happy to raise it at the boards and noted that they had used the same body to invite Wendy Morton some months ago when she was the Rail Minister; so perhaps these boards could be used to get the Secretary of State or the Rail Minister here to speak to us, particularly regarding how it will affect more rural areas as opposed to urban areas in the north.

Phil Grocock, Bus Network Manager at Wiltshire Council, addressed the situation of operators who are not registered for BSOG grants, stating that he had raised this issue personally when the DfT did their briefing a few weeks ago, and the DfT had to admit that they had forgotten to incorporate these operators. The problem mainly affects

those working on behalf of Councils who are not allowed to claim BSOG for services subsidised by the Council; others principally affected are rural operators with small staff numbers who cannot cope with the immense bureaucracy required to claim. He said that the DfT is attempting to find ways to make these operators eligible to participate. Another problem is that it has been left to operators to decide whether they will participate, but it should be Councils to decide when it's a subsidised service. Many of the operators don't have the time and manpower to provide the huge amount of data requested by the DfT so they have declined to participate.

The Chair stated that the organisation of this trial could have been better, but it is a good opportunity, and he will try to help push it forward and make it as widely available as possible.

Service Updates from Operators – Agenda Item 8

Adam Hawksworth of Buses of Somerset presented their proposed changes on routes 29, 54, 55, 75 and 77, for which there would be short notice, and requested feedback on them. He noted that there was a network review in June, which revealed concerns over Somerton and the Taunton-Yeovil services. Buses of Somerset had been able to re-work everything in those areas and had tried to address as many concerns as possible, but it was necessary to keep changes to a minimum.

- #29 – There will be one change in the morning where the service does not go up Windmill Hill, but that will be replaced by the #75, and the morning journey that starts at Creech will now start at Glastonbury. Also, the last bus of the day from Strode will run just a few minutes later.
- #54 – This route involves the main change; it is proposed to reinstate the direct Taunton-Yeovil service running every two hours, and also to divert in Yeovil to Stiby Road and Larkhill Road. This will fill the gap left by the #53 being taken out. There will be a 16:40 service which suits college students, then one at 18:40 which is a bit late but will assist with Ilchester and Somerton travellers.
- #55 – This no longer goes to Taunton; it will operate only between Wrantage, Langport and Strode and will run on college days only.
- #75 – There has been one change only, with the morning journey to Windmill Hill running five minutes earlier.
- #77 – Changes have been made to the evening service, moving it from 18:10 to 18:40, and it will have connections to Wells; in the morning the route will start in Street but will connect to the #29 from Glastonbury.

The Chair invited feedback; John Perrett stated that on the whole it's an improvement on the network, especially the through journeys, and the re-routing in Yeovil also resolves concerns that were expressed when the #53 was withdrawn. He welcomed

the changes and hoped they could be made as soon as possible in order to link them to the introduction of the evening services in Taunton.

David Redgewell said that this is the reason they had met in London with Janet Bell, the CEO of First Buses, because people in Yeovil were so angry, and he is very grateful for the work done for the South West with respect to the many concerns expressed by Yeovil residents and NHS workers. There is a need to ensure that First South West and First West of England are joining up fares between Wells, Glastonbury, and Street and making sure that there is good connectivity between those towns with Musgrove Park, Taunton, Bridgwater, and Yeovil. Connectivity from Wells to Bath and Shepton Mallet and across Mendip is also important. It is necessary that Doug Claringbold of First West of England and Simon Goff of Buses of Somerset discuss these matters.

Tony Reese opined that the changes were good news, although it was unfortunate that the Taunton-Yeovil services was only every two hours; it's helps bridge the gap but needs improvement. The relationship with bus users is damaged when we make changes to timetables and cancellations, especially with very short notice; we may be able to produce a timetable in January, but we may need to make further changes in March. The Chair stated that it was necessary to accept that we were in a unique historical situation requiring changes, and these changes are for the better.

In response to a question about the #54, Adam Hawksworth clarified that the #77 will be running hourly and the #54 sits between the #77 services, so within every two-hour period there will only be a 30-minute gap, which will benefit Ilchester and Somerton.

John Perrett said they will work to make the changes as soon as possible. He noted with respect to South West Coaches that changes to the timetable had been shared, with the #81 service being maintained by running the most heavily used journeys and using one bus instead of two. Also, the X11 service between Yeovil and Dorchester will be maintained but will now be registered as the #5, and that will start next Monday. Peter Fairey confirmed that all else is the same as before.

Update from Chair of the Bus Users & Stakeholders Group – Agenda Item 9

Tony Reese presented the update on behalf of the Group's Chair, Peter Travis. He offered congratulations to SCC on the £1 fare initiative and said that the £2 fare trial needed to be published as soon as possible. With respect to the threats to buses in April when government subsidies are due to end, this is a great worry; a meeting was held about it, and there were hundreds of people interested. The Group were persuading everyone to write to the new Minister of Transport to extend the bus recovery grant beyond March; it is up to the politicians to try to persuade the DfT. He noted that their group had been running more Bus Awareness Month events than

anywhere else in the country. Regarding changes to the #81, given that these go into effect Monday, it will be necessary to be out on Saturday and Sunday with timetables and to let people know. With respect to the audit ownership of bus shelters, there is much doubt over this, and there are problems of vandalism as well. A series of meetings will be held beginning in January regarding interchanges between buses and trains; there is no arrangement with South Western Railway similar to the one that Great Western Railways has, but the responsible person from GWR would be happy to meet at Yeovil Pen Mill to discuss anything that can be done. The Chair confirmed that he would respond in writing to Peter Travis regarding these matters, and Andrew Ardley added that as Regional Development Manager for South Western Railway he would be happy to help in any way possible regarding the interchanges. He said that they didn't have the same personnel resources as GWR, but he has started working on station travel plans and would like to assist with developing bus links to rail stations. He noted that he has worked with Great Western Railways, and they could meet with Tony Reese and SCC to develop a joint approach to connections at Yeovil.

Lee Jones, Manager of the SCC In-House Fleet, stated with respect to the #68 that he would like to be involved with any meeting at Pen Mill, because he often gets feedback from the team that's operating the buses advising that the gates are locked or the locks are being changed.

The Chair advised that SCC had signed the contract to build a junction at Trenchard Way; the junction provides access to the multi-story car park entrance where buses have been impeded from going to the train station to drop off passengers. This work will rectify that problem and should be finished around Easter.

David Redgewell stated that there is a significant issue in the north of the county with driver shortages; they are 150 drivers short in the West of England. There is concern regarding short-notice cancellations of the #376 in Glastonbury-Wells-Street and also Bath and Bristol, as it serves as the main access to those areas for work, college, and shopping. He suggested that the MP of Heart of the South West could push bus driving as a career, and noted that there had been a DfT conference in London about this issue. He also noted that there were problems with the timetables for #173, #174, and #376 services, and asked if joint timetables could be done with First South West.

As regards trains, David Redgewell asked if rail replacement services could be provided when trains go down on South Western Railway, rather than leaving passengers with no connections, and voiced the need for a plan like Great Western Railways has to substitute cancelled trains with buses. The Chair said he will pick up those points and respond in writing. John Perrett pointed out that it is in the domain of the railway companies to make these arrangements and request buses. Andrew Ardley stated that they use First Transport Solutions to source buses in these situations, but buses simply are not available; even Great Western Railways has some problems with this, due to

the national bus driver shortage. He said that they are working with First Transport Solutions to resolve the problem, but despite trying very hard, they cannot get enough drivers.

Any Other Business – Agenda Item 10

Tony Reese stated with regard to the mobility hub that he was pleased to see the changes and improvements to Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) services and wants to keep Somerton Town Council involved; Josephine Paterson has agreed to speak to them about DDRT and the local reorganisation. He would like to get local people involved as much as possible.

David Redgewell said that at the right time various operators should send their regional managers to meet with us about these issues, before there is public consultation, after which we should get the quote, then planning permission, and some construction dates. He believes the hub will do more to get people onto buses in the South West than even fare initiatives. The Chair requested that an update on the mobility hub be put on the agenda for the next meeting of the Board.

The Chair summed up that he had only been part of the Bus Advisory Board for five months, but surely this had been the most positive agenda for many years. This was a golden opportunity to transform bus usage in Somerset with all of the initiatives coinciding and connecting 150,000 people. The next three months are key, so he asked that everyone involved push as hard as possible with respect to the Bus It campaign, timetables, etc. He thanked everyone for their work on these matters, and in particular John Perrett and Natasha Bates.

Date of the Next Meeting – Agenda Item 11

The next Bus Advisory Board meeting is scheduled for 17 January 2022.

The meeting ended at 11:30 am

CHAIR