

Minutes of a Meeting of the Bus Advisory Board held online, on Tuesday, 25 June 2024 at 10.00 am.

**Present:**

Cllr Richard Wilkins  
Deborah Fiddik  
David Redgewell  
Josh Strickland  
Rebecca Mantyk  
Terrence James

Peter Fairey  
Richard Gibson  
Tony Reese  
Peter Travis  
Cllr Dave Mansell

**58 Welcome and Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1**

Apologies were received from Sunita Mills, Somerset Council and Darren Hewlett, Dartline Coaches.

**59 Minutes of the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 April 2024 were approved.

**60 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 3**

Questions were received from William Green and David Redgewell. The questions submitted and responses provided are as follows:

**Question 1**

I live in Coxley and frequently catch the 374 and 375 services. I've noticed many of them seem to show the wrong destination on the front of the buses. I often see Glastonbury or Wells written on the front of buses going to Bristol or heading off to Taunton/Bridgwater. Can this please be changed as people are finding it very confusing with some thinking they have to change bus?

**Response 1**

We have raised this with First West of England and asked them to review their destination displays.

**Question 2**

Can you please update the Public Transport stakeholders in Somerset and Dorset on the promised portable toilet facilities that Councillor Adam Dance told us the council was going to install including disabled access toilets and baby changes facilities.

Yeovil is a very important public transport hub in South West England for the bus network in Somerset and Dorset by all the following: First Group plc, South Buses Division, Wales and West Buses, South West Coaches Rail link, the bus service to Yeovil Pen Mill for First Group plc, Greater Western Trains Company Ltd, GWR First Group plc, MTR South Western Railway Company, Yeovil Junction railway station, coach services by Berry's Coaches to London Hammersmith and Taunton for Megabus, Scottish City link coaches and the Flixbus coaches network.

Are there any plans to reopen the bus and coach station cafe as a community café, working with bus and coach operators, First Group plc, South West Coaches Group and community groups similar to the Yeovil Pen Mill Railway station café?

### **Response 2**

The toilets had to close due to the Council's financial position, following a decision taken at Full Council, and the town council not being able to take this on. We are not aware of any funding for temporary facilities at present.

### **Question 3a**

In view of the issues of reliability and Punctuality on Somerset bus and coach Network, what discussions are taking place with the Somerset Highway Authority, North Somerset Council, Highways Authority BANES Council, Highways Authority West of England, the mayoral combined transport Authority and Bristol City Council Highways Authority, over road works and divisionary routes for bus and coach services and shuttle buses service to serve villages cut off from the bus and coach network?

An example being the Bristol bus and coach station to Bristol Temple Meads station, Totterdown, Knowle, Hengrove, Whitchurch, Pensford, Clutton, Farrington Gurney, Chewton Mendip, Wells bus and coach station, Glastonbury, Street, Walton to Bridgwater railway station and bus and coach station, Taunton Town Centre services 374 and 375 and connections at Wells bus and coach station for Glastonbury, Street, Somerton, Ilchester and Yeovil bus and coach services 77.

### **Response 3a**

Each Highway Authority should be publishing a list of forthcoming planned works which can be used to identify any works or road closures of concern. Within Somerset all planned road closure routes are published via One.Network which many neighbouring authorities also use. One.Network also makes it possible to set up route alerts for when work take place on specific parts of the network so the works promoter or highway authority can then be contacted if there are any concerns.

When a road closure within Somerset takes place that requires the use of another neighbouring authorities' network, that authority is already contacted to ask if their network is available for use and vice versa so to ensure there are no overlapping closures or works that would cause network issues, Somerset in turn is also informed of any road closures that require the use of its network by our neighbouring authorities.

The bus operator also has an ownership role to play in regularly checking and identifying any works on routes of concern to the relevant Highway Authority, such

as if a route used in the example provided from Bristol Temple Meads to Taunton is affected. Discussions can then take place to see if any changes can be made to these works with the relevant highway authority.

### **Question 3b**

There are other punctuality and reliability issues due to maintenance problems with the First Group plc South West buses fleet. Also, there is a need for a new depots in Somerset especially in Yeovil with maintenance facilities, cleaning facilities, driver accommodation, and a supervisor office. With the new battery factory in Bridgwater there is a need to make provision for reopening Bridgwater bus depot for maintenance.

What discussions are taking place with First Group plc South, and Wales and West bus division on the reliability and punctuality of the bus network and other bus operators such as Stagecoach South West, South West Coaches Group, Hatch Green, Libra Travel, Frome buses and Faresaver Somerset buses?

### **Response 3b**

We have monthly meetings with First South West covering a range of issues which includes punctuality and reliability. We also receive weekly updates regarding lost mileage and the causes thereof. With regard to other operators, we address issues as and when they arise.

At the end of the public questions, the Chair confirmed that public questions that had been received after the deadline would be responded to in writing in due course.

## **61 Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Update - Agenda Item 4**

The Service Commissioning Manager for Passenger Transport, Natasha Bates advised that following approval via the Council's internal governance, the final version of the BSIP for 2024 was submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) to meet the 12 June 2024 deadline and a copy would shortly be available on the Council's website. Local Transport Authorities were also required to submit a Bus Connectivity Assessment (BCA) by this date and having met both targets, the final tranche of the BSIP funding would now be released.

She thanked everyone who had engaged in the process and who had provided very useful feedback. She also acknowledged that the operators had had to provide a large amount of data in a short period of time. Going forward, it is expected that that the BCA is likely to be an annual process so the plan will be to build the data requirement into the quarterly requests, making it a more manageable task.

Councillor Dave Mansell queried whether the definition of "core network" had been addressed in the final version of the BSIP as without it, it would be difficult to understand what the plan was trying to achieve and the routes covered. In response, the Service Commissioning Manager explained that the core network would be established as the Local Transport Plan(LTP) was developed as it is supposed to reflect the LTP.

## 62 Timetable Changes proposed for 2nd September 2024 - Agenda Item 5

Rebecca Mantyk of First South West provided an update. With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, some of the points made included the following:

- Passenger numbers across Somerset slightly up on last year but with the bank holidays and the date of Easter this year it makes it a little harder to judge.
- The £1.50 fare introduced on 1<sup>st</sup> June has not yet resulted in any material impact, although it is very early days.
- Have seen improvements in customer lost miles in last few weeks due to many incentives including a change of management of the engineering function.
- Have kept a spare vehicle in Yeovil and a mobile engineer.
- Continue to work closely with the Council and the bus user groups.
- Are rolling out a leadership programme for supervisors with the focus on delivering brilliant basics every day.

Terrance James of First South West provided an update on the timetable changes proposed for September 2024:

- Service 7 – Extend to Taunton Station but reduce frequency from 60 minutes to 75 minutes.
- Service 25 – Reestablish links to Milverton.
- Service 28A – Reinstate the Saturday only 16.30 service Taunton to Minehead. Will replace the 16.00 service and not serve Norton Manor Camp.
- Services 2, 4, 6, 14 & X22 – There will be timetable tweaks to achieve enhanced reliability on these services.

The Chair requested that where bus services were less frequent, ie, a couple of hours between them, could the more reliable buses be used on these routes to avoid breakdowns on these less frequent services. Terrance James responded that this could be given consideration.

Councillor Dave Mansell requested that as the change to Service 25 did not involve a timetable change, could it be implemented right away? In response, Terrance James advised that they hoped to implement some of these changes sooner rather than later as it will be a benefit to passengers.

In response to questions, First South West advised:

- Improved reliability will be down to revision of timetables and resources.
- The extension of Service 7 to a 75-minute timetable is not ideal but it is the best solution for the time being in order to serve the railway station and will be reviewed.
- The capacity on Service 28A is a concern and will give consideration to making it a direct service.
- The increase of wheelchair spaces will be considered as part of the spec for the new electric vehicles.

Dan Ashworth from First West of England provided an update as follows:

- Service D2 – Bath to Frome frequency to approx. 30 minutes. Some journeys will no longer serve Rode and during daytime will terminate at Christchurch in Frome.
- Service D2X – There are route changes and it will no longer serve Beckington.  
Services 171, 173 & 174 – Departure times changed on most journeys. Some early and late trips on Services 173 & 174 and will be replaced by Service 171 due to low demand.
- Service 522 – The 522 Sunday service and 174 Service have been spaced out to approximately 30 minutes.
- Service 55 – The morning service will arrive at Strode College 11 minutes earlier at 08:35 and the afternoon service will depart Strode College 10 minutes earlier at 17:00.
- Services 374 & 375 – Will no longer serve Windmill Hill due to narrowness and parked cars.
- Service 373 – A new service between Wells and Street using a smaller bus which will serve Windmill Hill and there will be 10 trips per day.
- Service 376 – Extended to Yeovil and replaces Service 77 but the last trip of the day from Wells to Yeovil will only operate as far as Somerton due to low demand.
- Service 376X – Introduced this express service in mornings from Wells to Yeovil.

In response to comments and questions raised, Dan Ashworth advised:

- Regarding the changes to Service 77, the 376 will be a double-decker which will solve all the over-crowding issues. Only Services 55 and the 373 will be single-decker.
- The cancellation of some evening services between Wells and Bath will be investigated.
- Spacings on Services 54 and 376 to Yeovil can be looked into.
- Extending the Service 376 to Yeovil Pen Mill Station will add an additional 10 minutes each way but will see if this is a possibility.

The Service Manager for Transporting Somerset, John Perrett then provided an update. His comments included:

- There is some re-tendering happening in September for Services 10c, 51, 62, 66, 624, 646, 647, 667 and 652. There are no timetable changes or cuts in these services but maybe some minor tweaks.
- Service 12 – Taunton has a funding issue. The S106 money is coming to an end and have been asked to look at a way of bridging the funding gap to keep the service going, whilst they try to secure additional S106 funding.
- Stagecoach Service 24 – Minor timetable changes proposed.

## **updates - Agenda Item 6**

The Service Manager for Transporting Somerset, John Perrett advised there were no further updates at the moment regarding the £1.50 fare and are managing to maintain the number of people travelling on this fare. The government £2 fare continues to December and all operators in Somerset are continuing to offer this fare and there has been an increase of approximately 19% in patronage.

## **64 Update from the Chair of the Bus User and Stakeholders Group - Agenda Item 7**

The Chair of the Bus User and Stakeholders Group, Peter Travis, provided an update. He made the following comments:

- Appreciates the engagement with the Council, First South and First West of England to discuss the proposed changes and existing issues and that they have listened and implemented some of the User Groups requests.
- There have been 40 bus stalls across Somerset to distribute bus timetables. This is far more than in any other local authority in England. The plan is to hold 80 stalls in total, mainly in September following the timetable changes.
- Bus users need to have printed timetables as many do not have access to the online versions.
- Some operators print the timetables for the User Groups to distribute on the local bus stalls.
- The First South (Buses of Somerset) booklet is very popular.
- Other operators that print timetables for distribution by the User Groups include First West of England, Faresaver, South West Coaches and Hatch Green.
- Somerset Bus Partnership have printed and distributed over 20k timetables this year. To fund this, the Partnership has to raise funds.
- Following the September timetable changes, most information at bus stops will either be absent or out of date.
- In neighbouring authorities, the Council takes ownership of updating the timetables at bus stops. As this does not happen in Somerset it is important that major operators alert the media and use social media to warn bus users of the changes.
- There will be 20 bus stalls in operation on 1 and 2 September across Somerset to assist with the promotion of these changes.

At the conclusion of this update, the following comments were made:

- The Somerton Slinky route needs to be publicised in order to make it work. A lot has already been done – press, leaflets, Facebook - but to keep the service going it must be publicised and used and this will avoid the reliance on cars.
- The bus stop timetables at the BANES and North Somerset borders are either missing or out of date. The information needs to be updated on all these stops. Dan Ashworth of First West of England confirmed that these would be printed this week and the updates at the bus stops will be made as

soon as possible.

**65 Any Other Business - Agenda Item 8**

There was none.

**66 Date of Next Meeting - Agenda Item 9**

The date of the next meeting was noted as being Tuesday, 15 October 2024 at 10.00 am.

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**CHAIR**