

BUS ADVISORY BOARD

Minutes of a Meeting of the Bus Advisory Board held virtually via Microsoft Teams on Thursday 16 December 2021 at 10.00 am

Present: Cllr John Woodman, Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport (**Chair**); Natasha Bates, Service Manager, Commissioning – Highways & Transport; John Perrett, Service Manager, Transporting Somerset; Mike Holmes, Director – Transport Planning, WSP; Tim Reynolds, Associate, WSP; Lee Jones, SCC In-house Fleet; Andrew Ardley, South Western Railway; David Redgewell – Campaign for Better Transport; Peter Travis – Somerset Bus Partnership Co-Chair; Cllr Glen Burrows - Somerset Bus Partnership Co-Chair; Anthony Reese - Somerset Bus Partnership Co-Chair; Phil Grocock, Wiltshire Transport Authority; Carl Nicholson, North Somerset Transport Authority; Dan James, Exmoor National Park; Daniel Pickford, Faresaver; Deborah Fiddik, Dorset Transport Authority; Owen Clark, Dorset Council; Joe Walsh, South Somerset District Council; Josh Strickland

10 **Apologies for Absence** - Agenda Item 1

The Chair noted that the meetings of this Board are not subject to the statutory public meeting requirements and will therefore be held virtually, with a recording to be made and published on the Council's website. Members of the public can also observe virtually. The Chair reminded attendees that the role of this Board is to provide a formal structure for discussion and engagement between the local authority and bus operators.

There were apologies from Doug Claringbold (First West of England), David Northey (Network Rail).

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

The minutes were accepted as accurate and signed by the Chair.

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

There were two public questions, to which responses were provided ahead of time; the second question and response was read by Chair:

Question 1:

"Following on from the formal submission of the Electric Bus Partnership proposal to Somerset County Council on 8 December, what is the timeframe for processing the associated request for Option 24/7 and TravelWatch SouthWest to join the Bus Advisory Board as members?"

Response:

The Terms of Reference for the Bus Advisory Board have now been agreed. In order to have an effective and business focussed Board, we will keep the membership as it is.

The Chair of the Bus User and Stakeholder (BUS) Group (once appointed) will sit on the Bus Advisory Board and will ensure that the views of passengers and stakeholders are fed into the Board for consideration. Representatives from both Option 24/7 and TravelWatch Southwest are invited to the Bus User and Stakeholder Group and will have the opportunity to feed into the process through this Group.

Question 2:

"My question is that the timescale for the setting-up of the BUS group is too long. The election process needs to be shortened, so that the incoming chair can make the BUS group truly independent from mid-February at the latest. The chair can then call meetings to his/her (and the BUS group's) timings and start commenting on developments in bus services as they are promulgated."

Response:

The timeframe has been designed to give interested parties sufficient time to discuss any queries with Democratic Services in advance of submitting their Expressions of Interest (this takes into account the Christmas period and other pressures on everyone's time). Time will be needed following submission of the Expressions of Interest to collate and circulate the responses, and to undertake a voting exercise to identify the successful candidate. The Chair will be formally elected at the 8th February meeting, and (providing they are comfortable to do so) they can take up that role with immediate effect and chair that meeting (with support from Democratic Services if required). They will also be able to attend the Bus Advisory Board meeting on the 17th February in their capacity as the BUS Group Chair.

13 Updated Board Attendees - Agenda Item 4

The Chair noted a minor amendment to the Board Attendees document. This does not change the agreed membership but ensures that Stagecoach is now correctly recorded under 'Bus Operators operating registered bus services' as opposed to 'Express Coach operators', as the Falcon is a registered bus service. Apologies for the original error and any confusion.

The Bus Advisory Board noted the updated list of Board attendees.

14 Update on Enhanced Partnership Process - Agenda Item 5

The Chair invited Tim Reynolds, Associate-WSP, to present the update. He stated that the Enhanced Partnership Scheme and Plan continue on schedule; currently the 28-

day formal objection (from operators) period is proceeding up until early January, after which time the formal consultation period will commence. Thus far, there have been no objections, and regular dialogue is continuing with operators, who are providing suggestions; however, the EP Plan and Scheme themselves cannot be altered until early April in order to not trigger another objection/consultation period.

David Redgewell stated that he understands this statutory process, but he is concerned that if the Covid funding process is not updated after the holidays, there will be a de-registration of services due to plummeting passenger numbers. It was replied that such an issue is outside of the Enhanced Partnership process, which cannot be altered at this time.

The Bus Advisory Board noted the Enhanced Partnership process update.

15 Formal Consultation Process - Agenda Item 6

The Chair invited Tim Reynolds, Associate-WSP, to provide the update. He stated that it is set out in the legislation who must be involved in the formal consultation; they are working on the logistics of it, but they will not take the consultation any wider than necessary or extend the list of stakeholders (the public, for example, will not be included). After the current objection period finishes, a Members Briefing will be held to update County Councillors on the next steps. There have already been discussions with the Bus Users and Stakeholders (BUS) Group, who will be advised of how the process will be carried out; an email with a copy of the EP Plan and Scheme will then be sent to all stakeholders in order that they can formally review the plan and scheme and provide feedback.

The Bus Advisory Board noted the update on the formal consultation process.

16 Update on Bus User and Stakeholder (BUS) Group - Agenda Item 7

The Chair invited Natasha Bates, Service Manager, Commissioning-Highways & Transport, to present the update. She noted that the BUS Group's first meeting was held last Tuesday, 7 December 2021, where the Terms of Reference for the Bus Advisory Board and the remit of the BUS Group were introduced. The Group also received a presentation on the EP Plan and Scheme process and time scales. The process for electing a Chair and Vice Chair was also reviewed, and expressions of interest for the positions are now being received, with a deadline of 4 January 2022. The actual election of the Chair and Vice Chair will take place at the 8 February meeting.

David Redgewell stated that he appreciates the establishment of the BUS Group, but he wanted to note that as the Group is following legislation for funding and the development of grants, they should get a 'steer' from SCC, given their expertise on transport matters, rather than simply having a wide discussion about what they would

like. It was responded that Democratic Services will continue to support the Group and the Chair with the agendas and meeting, while SCC officers will continue to provide updates for the Group as the process progresses. The Chair added that it was important to make the Group and the process very organised.

The Bus Advisory Board noted the update on the BUS Group.

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

David Redgewell again brought up the importance of the bus operators grant, noting that First Group are in a difficult financial position and after 12 January 2022 will have to scale back services if they do not receive more grant money. The Chair replied that these are valid points and he is very concerned about the matter, but that it is not on the agenda and this meeting was for the purpose of updating the status of the processes which are underway. He suggested that the issue should be raised with the relevant officers outside of the meeting.

The Board were informed that the next three meetings of the Bus Advisory Board will be held on 18 January, 17 February, and 14 March, 2022.

(The meeting ended at 10.30 am)

CHAIRMAN