

## **BUS ADVISORY BOARD**

Minutes of a Meeting of the Bus Advisory Board held virtually via Microsoft Teams on Thursday 17 February 2022 at 10.00 am

**Present:** Cllr John Woodman, Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport (Chair); Natasha Bates, Service Manager, Commissioning – Highways & Transport; Mike O’Dowd-Jones, Strategic Manager for Commissioning-Highways and Transport; Michael Bryant, Governance Manager – Democratic Services; Pam Pursley, Governance Manager – Democratic Services; Tim Reynolds, Associate, WSP; Andrew Ardley, South Western Railway; David Redgewell – Campaign for Better Transport; Peter Travis – Bus Users & Stakeholders Group Chair; Cllr Glen Burrows - Somerset Bus Partnership Co-Chair; Anthony Reese - Somerset Bus Partnership Co-Chair; Phil Grocock, Wiltshire Transport Authority; Dan James, Exmoor National Park; Deborah Fiddik, Dorset Transport Authority; Simon Goff, Buses of Somerset; Julie Reader-Sullivan, Mendip District Council; Alex Hallett – Libra Travel; Tim Blackburn, Mendip Community Transport; Richard Gibson, Cross-Country Trains; Josh Strickland – Hatch Green Coaches, Tessa Saunders – South Somerset District Council, Adam Hawksworth – Buses of Somerset, Simon Ford - Stagecoach

### **18 Welcome and 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 Owen Clark of Dorset Council.

### **19 Minutes of the Last Meeting - Agenda Item 2**

The minutes of the meeting on 23 November 2021 were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting, aside from changing Glenda Burrows to Glen Burrows.

### **20 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 3**

Public questions should be submitted in writing no later than three clear working days before the meeting to [democraticservices@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@somerset.gov.uk).

There were three public questions from David Redgewell and two from Nigel Behan; the first three were read by Michael Bryant, Governance Specialist – Democratic Services, while the last two were read by Nigel Behan himself:

**Questions from David Redgewell:**

- 1) In view of the need to make progress for passengers, including disabled customers, we believe that Somerset County Council, the Transport Authority, and Somerset West and Taunton Council should draw a design brief for a new bus and coach station for Taunton as a regional interchange for the bus and coach network, and that any temporary use should not be a car park or other structure. There is no reason to delay the building of a modern bus and coach station like the Gloucester transport hub or Exeter bus station, which have a waiting area, covered walkway, café, disabled toilet and changing area, and tourist information offices/travel centres. Such a station would also allow for coach interchanges at Gateway Park and Ride. We would also like the Councils to look at a temporary bus and coach station set at Tower Street bus station, similar to those set up in Bristol and Bath.
- 2) What provision is being made under the Transport Act 2000 for Somerset County Council as the local transport authority to make bus timetables available on all of the County bus stops, shelters, bus and coach stations, and interchange facilities, similar to those in Devon and Gloucestershire, which are maintained by the parish and town councils with the county councils updating passenger information? This is not dependent on Bus Back Better funding, as this service is provided already in those counties.
- 3) Frome Town Council and Mendip District Council are planning to carry out Green Breather days once a month on Saturdays, when the town centres are closed to private cars. We understand that buses, coaches, and taxis will use a bus gate, and stopping arrangements will be maintained in the town centres and at Cork Street coach station. What discussions have taken place with the bus and coach operators, i.e., National Express coaches, First Group buses, Faresaver buses, Frome bus company, Libra Travel, Wiltshire council (as transport authority), and the mayor for the West of England mayoral combined Transport Authority, Mayor Dan Norris, as these authorities fund public bus services?

**(A fourth question from David Redgewell will be answered with a written response)**

Mike O’Dowd-Jones, Strategic Manager for Commissioning-Highways and Transport, responded, saying that with respect to the first question, a funding request for Taunton Bus Station has been included in the BSIP ask, so we really need to wait and see what money is available from government for this in the first instance. In the interim, we have commissioned WSP to undertake a further study in terms of facilities required within a bus station

provision and accessibility to the site. They will also develop a 'commercial strategy' in respect of the bus station operation and they will review the interim proposals for utilisation of the bus station currently being progressed to ensure they are compatible with the preferred future scheme insofar as this is possible. The current facility is owned by Somerset West and Taunton, so we cannot dictate what the District Council does on an interim basis.

Regarding the second question, the bus stations and bus shelters across the County are owned and maintained by either the District, Town or Parish Councils. In terms of timetable provision, Somerset County Council work with operators to ensure that timetable information is provided at all stops where there is a facility to display this information, such as a pole or bus shelter. Some stops are in remote locations where it is not possible to hang a timetable display case. Unfortunately, incidents do occur where timetable casing gets vandalised but if it is reported to us then we can make arrangements to replace this. If any issues relating to timetable information are reported to us, then we will work with the operator to resolve this.

Regarding the third question, our Traffic Management Team attended an initial meeting with the Town Council last week and understood that this is something that they wanted to do once a month as a trial initially. It is a short closure from Cork Street to Justice Lane which is about 250m. The Traffic Management Officer in attendance raised the issue of bus access which we understand has yet to be determined but the Town Council were going to discuss this with the bus operators. The Town Council have been asked to prepare an event management plan and risk assessments, but this is still some way off being agreed and would require all stakeholder feedback to be taken into account.

As for Question 4, the written response states that Somerset has written to Baroness Vere expressing our concerns that the Bus Recovery Grant (BRG) is due to end 5<sup>th</sup> April 2022 and have asked her to consider the options for extending this. We have also written to the Treasury to raise our concerns with them as well. This is in-line with the ATCO position who have also written to Baroness Vere and the Treasury and have urged all LAs to do the same.

#### **Questions from Nigel Behan:**

- 1) The paper [the SCC EP Feedback Report] refers to Dorset Council responding; did any of the other Local Transport Authorities) such as Devon, Wiltshire, etc. provide any response? And did SCC respond to the equivalent consultations from the surrounding LTAs? If so, can you publish the responses from SCC?
- 2) How will the EP help to secure the aims of the following guidance with measurable and practical concrete outcomes so that bus users can understand the extent of successful improvements : "BSIPs should then

describe in outline how you and operators propose to deliver the key goals of the Bus Strategy in your area. These are making services:

- more frequent, with turn-up-and-go services on major routes and feeder or demand-responsive services to lower-density places
- faster and more reliable, with bus priority wherever necessary and where there is room
- cheaper, with more low, flat fares in towns and cities, lower point-to-point fares elsewhere, and more daily price capping everywhere.
- more comprehensive, with overprovision on a few corridors reduced to boost provision elsewhere and better services in the evenings and weekends, not necessarily with conventional buses
- easier to understand, with simpler routes, common numbering, co-ordinated timetable change dates, good publicity, and comprehensive information online
- easier to use, with common tickets, passes and daily capping across all operators, simpler fares, contactless payment and protection of bus stations
- better integrated with other modes and each other, including more bus-rail interchange and integration and inter-bus transfers."

Mike O'Dowd-Jones, Strategic Manager for Commissioning-Highways and Transport, responded to the first question by noting that all neighbouring authorities had been invited to respond; aside from Dorset Council, no such responses were received. The County Council is happy to respond to any other requests they receive, and their response to Dorset Council will be published after the consultation closes.

Responding to the second question regarding how the EP secures the aims listed, he observed that the BSIP has been prepared around those goals, and the goals have been linked to targets. There will be six-monthly updates on these targets. If any revisions are necessary, these can be made after the funding is known.

## **21 Update on the Appointment of the Bus User & Stakeholder (BUS) Group Chair & Vice Chair - Agenda Item 4**

The Chair invited Michael Bryant, Governance Manager – Democratic Services, to advise on this matter; he noted that the Bus Users and Stakeholders Group had met on 8<sup>th</sup> February and had appointed Peter Travis as Chair and Tony Reese as Vice Chair. The Bus Advisory Board will work with them, and further meetings of the Group will be scheduled.

## **22 Update on EP Timeline / DfT Announcement - Agenda Item 5**

The Chair invited Natasha Bates, Service Manager for Commissioning-Highways and Transport, who noted that the original deadline for EPs was the end of April.

Following an announcement from the DfT in January, they have now extended the deadline to enable Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) to submit a draft EP by the end of April 2022. They suggested that if an LTA has not yet started their consultations, they should pause the process. As Somerset is already a considerable way into the process, we are continuing with the original timeline and waiting for the funding to be announced. The original amount of £3 billion has now been reduced to £1.4 billion, with only approximately £1.2 for BSIP. The funding should be announced by the end of February, but regardless of how it is distributed, the DfT has advised that all EPs should:

- Commit to the relevant authorities to continue providing existing bus priority measures
- Implement any no-cost or low-cost improvements including bus passenger charters and quality information for passengers; in this respect, we have the New Think travel portal, which is now live and being rolled out to various groups before a wider launch, and provides a single source for bus passenger information
- Include a bus passenger charter, which is being reviewed and will be discussed with the Chair of the BUS Group to determine how best to involve bus passengers and stakeholders
- Be flexible; Section 5 of our EP allows the incorporation of enhancements if funding is available for them through a bespoke variation mechanism.

There were no questions from the Board or other attendees.

### **The Bus Advisory Board received and noted the EP timeline update and DfT announcement regarding funding**

#### **23 Formal Consultation Process Feedback - Agenda Item 6**

The Chair invited Tim Reynolds, Associate from WSP, to present the report. He noted that they have not had many responses to the consultation from statutory consultees, and the consultation closes later today; those they have received include Avon and Somerset Police, CMA, Transport Focus, Wedmore Community Bus, persons from the Somerset Bus Partnership, and Dorset Council. Everyone who responded is supportive of the EP plan with no objections, and they understand that it depends on funding. Avon and Somerset Police want the emergency services also involved in the BUS Group; there has been a good response from young people, who were happy to see their feedback on courtesy and cleanliness included; Wedmore Community Bus wants there to be access to information for non-IT savvy users; the CMA said that we need responsive transport without disenfranchising smaller operators when it comes to ticketing and such; and Dorset Council wanted to promote cross-boundary services and cost-sharing of services in regional areas as regards digital demand-responsive services. All of the comments were aimed at assisting and strengthening current commitments. They have not yet heard from the Traffic Commissioner, but it is to be

noted that there is no requirement for statutory consultees to respond. The final report will be made available to everyone. There will need to be further consultation on both the EP and the BSIP as we go forward, with any necessary changes being made through the bespoke variation mechanism, although there will be no need to change what has already been established or re-do any of the process.

There were no questions from the Board or other attendees.

**The Board received and noted the report on the Formal Consultation Process Feedback.**

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**24 Process for Making and Signing the EP - Agenda Item 7**

The Chair invited Mike O'Dowd-Jones, Strategic Manager for Commissioning-Highways and Transport, to make the verbal report. He said that they had made great progress in getting to the current position, but now there is the need for a firm process for signing the EP Scheme and Plan, which will take place in March. The recommendation is to delegate authority to him to complete the EP formally, after the Cabinet approves on 16<sup>th</sup> March the EP Plan and Scheme, the submission of the EP to The Department of Transportation, and the bespoke variation mechanism. They are still finalising and taking legal advice on the precise method of signing, but they plan to email the EP to operators to be signed during the period 16-31 March so that it is completed before 1<sup>st</sup> April; therefore, he asks that operators have a designated signor at hand during that time. There is some question about whether legally the EP needs to be signed, but it is sensible to do so as a partnership agreement. He will provide more information in the coming weeks.

There were no questions from the Board or other attendees.

**The Board received and noted the verbal report on the signing of the EP.**

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**25 Bus Passenger Charter - Agenda Item 8**

The Chair invited Tim Reynolds, Associate for WSP, to present the draft Bus Passenger Charter. He stated that these charters are one of the things that the DfT wants Local Authorities to continue with regardless of the allocation of funding and noted that our draft charter has drawn on best practice from other organisations, such as Transport Focus, an independent body that has helped greatly with both the EP and the BSIP. The draft charter, which has been circulated for input and feedback, should ideally be only two to three pages long. Not all groups have a charter, while some of them point mainly to operators' conditions of carriage which deal with the conduct and obligations of the operators and of the passengers. The charter needs to be kept simple; our draft charter is a bit long and needs to be discussed with operators to understand and create the conditions of carriage document. This draft is only a start

and will be made more concise after today's suggestions and comments, then it will be circulated to operators and the BUS Group for consultation. After finalisation, the operators and the Communications team will work together to announce and publicise the charter, making it accessible to all.

The Chair invited attendees to ask questions. Peter Travis advised that he welcomes the charter, which at this stage is more of a scoping document; he asserted that it will have to be shorter and in an easily understandable format for users, that the question of compensation with respect to conditions of carriage needs careful consideration, and that he has a major concern over the lack of any printed format for the charter being stipulated. He noted that older people, who are a very important demographic amongst bus users, often don't have mobile phones (half of those over 65 do not, nor does 1 person in 8 over the age of 55), and that Somerset has some of the lowest internet use in the country, with West Somerset the third lowest in the U.K. Therefore, bus operators and the County Council need to provide their loyal customers with timetable information on paper, like Wiltshire, who has suggested that 75% of bus stops have paper timetables. It is a necessity to bear the marketing costs for this and essential to put this in the chart, while also asking that operators be required to put timetable information on paper. In relation to this, Adam Hawksworth mentioned that Buses of Somerset produces a comprehensive paper booklet and maintains their own roadside timetables. It was responded that these were all great points, which will be noted during work with operators and passenger groups on the charter, although the BSIP does have a commitment to paper timetables.

Glen Burrows stated that she is concerned about the section on timetables and fares where it advises passengers to ask the bus driver for this information, as she believes that this underestimates the stress and time involved for the driver to provide this. She opined that this is a very bad idea, as the drivers need to concentrate on driving and safety, and perhaps conductors are needed. It was replied that this will be noted; although the draft charter is based on best practice across the country, there are pros and cons to the aspects involved, and they are happy to work to get it right.

David Redgewell stated that the timetables in areas such as Wells, Glastonbury, Cheddar, Bristol, Bath and Minehead concern him because these are big tourist areas, and it is difficult for persons on holiday to know how to get to one place from another by bus. He suggested having bus information at railway stations and working with tourist boards. He also asked if it would be possible to get a Rover ticket like Wiltshire has that could be used on any bus for a small fee. He believes there is a need to work with the Baroness to gain funding for marketing and to extend certain services. It was replied that these suggestions were noted, although much of it, such as the Rover ticket, was already part of the BSIP. Until funding was received, they will not know what can be done or not, but they will be able to have a much clearer conversation at the next meeting.

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Josh Strickland of Hatch Green Coaches said with respect to printed materials that operators agree; they have a comprehensive website but also spend a considerable amount for paper timetables since these are often requested. He also asked when operators would be asked to provide feedback on the charter. It was replied that the charter would be shortened and amended after today's input, then it would be circulated to operators and stakeholders/users.

Tony Reese said that he would be happy to see the charter shortened and that one page would be ideal in order to display it on buses; he would also be happy to have input from operators. He suggested that there is something missing that the Wiltshire charter has, i.e. information on a network of routes providing wide connectivity, which they must work toward; information on maintenance of bus stops; and something on various modes of travel, given that a bus journey is often part of a trip using integrated and different types of transportation. It was replied that these comments would be noted, that the Wiltshire document would be reviewed, and there would be a strengthening of the network of connectivity.

**The Board received and noted the report on the draft charter.**

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**26 Any Other Business - Agenda Item 9**

The Chair did not have any other items of business to introduce. Mike O'Dowd-Jones wanted to mention that he was very pleased with the level of engagement today from the operators, which lends itself to good collaboration and partnership working. David Redgewell wished to advise that the Mayor of West England/WECA will be holding a meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> March, to which he hopes our Board will send a representative.

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**27 Date of the Next Meeting - Agenda Item 10**

The next meeting is scheduled for 14<sup>th</sup> March at 10:00 a.m. via Microsoft Teams.

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**(The meeting ended at 10.57 am)**

**CHAIR**