

# **BUS ADVISORY BOARD**

## **Minutes of a Meeting Held Virtually via Microsoft Teams**

**13 October 2022**

### **Attendees:**

Cllr Mike Rigby (Chair), Anthony Reese, Cllr Glen Burrows, Peter Travis, Cllr John Hassall, Natasha Bates, John Perret, Marc Morganhuws, Tim Reynolds, Phil Grocock, Josh Strickland, Lee Jones, David Redgewell, Stuart Moon, Richard Gibson, Ian Bell, Deborah Fiddick, Chris Parkinson, Daniel Mumby, Joanna Moczadlo

### **Welcome and Apologies for Absence – Agenda Item 1**

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

There were no apologies received.

### **Minutes from the Last Meeting – Agenda Item 2**

The minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting held on 14 July 2022.

### **Public Question Time – Agenda Item 3**

There were no public questions or statements received; however, given that Board member David Redgewell was unable to join the meeting via the Teams meeting link and could only listen by telephone, several of the issues he wished to raise were read by the clerk of the committee and responded to by John Perrett, as follows:

#### **Question 1:**

What is the long-term future of the Service 126 from Wells bus and coach station to Weston bus and coach station via Westbury, Draycott, Cheddar, Axbridge, Winscombe, Banwell, Locking? Are there discussions between North Somerset and Somerset County Councils?

#### **Response:**

John Perrett stated that this service is being funded by SCC using BRG funding until the end of March; its long-term viability depends on the patronage and on funding.

There is currently no funding from North Somerset, although discussions are ongoing; there may be a possibility of amending the route.

**Question 2:**

What is the status of the bus services into Dorset and in Yeovil, i.e., the #11 to Sherborne and Dorchester (South West Coaches), the #10 to Sherborne and Blandford (First Group), and the Y6/Y6a to Crewkerne, Beaminster and Bridport station and hospital (First Group).

**Response:**

John Perrett stated that all three of these services are Dorset County Council contracts; he has not been able to contact them recently, but the last time he spoke to them, they said that they would re-tender. Anthony Reese commented that these cross-border services are essential and both Councils need to discuss them urgently, as the contracts expire at the end of December. The service is not supporting the people of Somerset, and he is disappointed that Mr Perrett has not been able to speak to Dorset representatives. Bus users need to know what is in the tenders in order to plan ahead; there is no communication. It is necessary to try harder to resume discussions. John Perrett said that he would keep trying; he did know that all three routes are being re-tendered, with the #6 being the first. He will get information out to the Board about what is happening. Marc Morganhuws noted that the #10 and #58 are Somerset commercial routes, and Dorset says that their end will be complete by the end of the year. Tenders for the #6 have gone out, but there is now a new version of the tender. It is very difficult to predict what the funding will be, including the BRG, which is being discussed with the DfT and needs to be discussed with Dorset as well. There is no certainty regarding the future; the #10 and #58 are relatively stable through the end of March, and there is a possibility there will be more money in the pot in the future.

**Question 3:**

What is the status of the planned countywide bus timetable?

**Response:**

John Perrett stated that there has been an offer to compile this, but as they are still working through some issues with Buses of Somerset, they are waiting to publish it. Marc Morganhuws said they are still very committed to publishing it.

**BSIP Funding Update – Agenda Item 4**

Natasha Bates presented the report and slides, reiterating that the BSIP funding allocation was confirmed by the DfT in August and encompassed £8.161m capital and £3.695m revenue over the three years from 2022-2025. There is a need to formally

vary the Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme to reflect this funding and include the Bus Passenger Charter in order for the first tranche of annual funding to be released. She reviewed the agreed-upon capital and revenue spending, outlining the funding for schemes forming part of the Taunton Bus Town initiative, bus priority measures in Bridgwater, schemes in Somerton which form part of the rural test bed, and expansion of the Think Travel portal as well as marketing.

She also discussed the indicative timeline (which could be subject to change as schemes develop), which has the bus priority programme (Taunton and Bridgwater), the Taunton mobility hub, and the Somerton mobility hub all starting between August/September this year with the initial scheme development and feasibility. This will be followed by consultations from winter of 2022-23 through spring/summer 2023, and then by detailed design and procurement (winter 2022-23 for Somerton mobility hub, spring 2023 for bus priority programmes in Taunton and Bridgwater, and autumn/winter 2023 for the Taunton mobility hub). Works will start in early 2023 for Somerton, summer 2023 for bus priority programmes, and spring 2024 for Taunton mobility hub. The predicted completion will be spring 2023 for Somerton and winter 2024 for the other two. Other endeavours including the Taunton public transport £1 fare initiative and the Taunton area trial weekend and evening services will begin with scheme development and feasibility this autumn, with the actual start of these in autumn/winter 2022. Other initiatives beginning in the same timeframe are the Taunton Park and Ride £1 fare, service marketing, and programme management; with the Somerton area enhanced Demand Responsive Transport initiative starting in spring 2023 and the expansion of the Think Travel portal beginning in summer 2023. There were no questions.

### **Enhanced Partnership (EP) Scheme Variation Including Bus Passenger Charter – Formal Adoption – Agenda Item 5**

Tim Reynolds presented the proposed variations to the EP Plan and Scheme, explaining the need to update it to reflect the amount of funding received and the details that have changed with respect to the areas being funded. The first part, which is the Plan itself, has not changed, as any change would require a new round of consultations. It is various areas of the Scheme which are being changed, with the key areas being:

- Section 3 - Facilities (physical items such as bus lanes but also including marketing and fare schemes): All bus lanes, priority junctions, etc. have been listed.
- Section 3 – Taunton Town fare plan: This includes the £1 fare in the town zone and £1 fares for Park and Ride, with a cap at £2 for a return journey. There is also information on the Taunton mobility hub, the Bus Passenger Charter, and

the Somerton mobility hub, as well as vehicle standards required by operators in terms of fleets with 10 or more vehicles. The fare plan could be instituted in different ways; what's in the EP plan at the moment, which is mandatory for all bus operators, entails a £1 charge for any journey in each direction. Capping it at £2 would require a voluntary multi-operator ticketing scheme, while running a mandatory scheme would mean that passengers still pay £1 every time they change to a bus belonging to a different operator. If the voluntary scheme was chosen, every operator would have to sign up to it, and they would be reimbursed in a different way to the £1 scheme; Somerset County Council and First Bus are keen to be part of this scheme, and we would invite any other operators to join at any point. With respect to the £1 fare plan, operators would need to give us their fare charts showing what they would normally charge for those journeys within Taunton, and they would be reimbursed for the difference.

- Section 4 – Operator obligations (vehicle standards, fares, timetable changes, etc.): There is a new section, 4.2, which regards the investment mechanism, which is very important from the DfT perspective, which states that once funding is invested in certain facilities (like bus lanes) which will save operators time and, for example, potentially allow them to take a vehicle out of that service, the operators must commit to putting any savings back into their services, perhaps by increasing the frequency of the service or providing a new service.
- Section 5 – Governance arrangements: These have not changed much, but if the Board cannot reach a consensus on anything, there is a mechanism for statutory decision making based on which operators do the most mileage across the network, although it is hoped that this will not be necessary very often.
- Section 6 – Voluntary ticket scheme: This section is new and details the multi-operator ticketing scheme.

A discussion followed; Cllr J Hassall pointed out that one problem in Taunton is traveling from the station to the hospital, as the #3 stops at Parkfield Road but not many people know about it and it is a difficult walk for the disabled. He asked if the Park and Ride could go past the station. He added that there is an industrial estate that the #20 goes by, which he would like to discuss with Stuart of Dartline. John Perrett responded that SCC has recently taken on the #3 and it is on the Buses of Somerset timetable; they are looking at a new stop at the hospital and will try to promote it more, but it only runs hourly. Stuart Moon replied that the situation is very difficult because all of his routes are tendered, so he might not have the cash to adhere to certain initiatives in the EP Plan and Scheme like the £1 fare. His company is marginalised, especially as a cross-country operator, and there is no way to recoup

losses like commercial operators because his fares in Devon are set by Devon County Council, which is very uncomfortable. Cornwall has exempted him from their own EP plan. He opined that the tendered operators had been forgotten and they have to try to work to three different EP plans; all of them are making changes, and it is hard to keep up with them. He stated that he could sign up to this modified EP plan and scheme right now; patience is needed, and he will provide information on Devon's plan. Natasha Bates has also spoken to Devon to get clarification.

There were no objections to formally approving the variations to the EP plan and scheme.

### **Update on Bus Services – Agenda Item 6**

John Perrett advised that they have intervened with the #126 and, from Monday, there will be service from Axbridge to Wells for students and workers. They have reviewed school contracts as well, and have built-in meal breaks for drivers to make the changes sustainable in the future. With respect to the D2 from Frome to Bath, there was an issue with evening services; agreement has been reached with First West of England using BRG funding to keep the Monday-Friday evening services, while there are also weekend services. Regarding the #81 from South Petherton to Yeovil, South West Coaches are willing to discuss continuing the service; there will be a meeting about it shortly.

### **Update from the Chair of the Bus Users & Stakeholders Group – Agenda Item 7**

Peter Travis, Chair, noted that the BUS Group last met in early September; this was before the bus passenger charter was sent out, but the group had input into it. The main focus of the group is promoting bus usage, so they welcome the Bus It campaign; they are hoping for television coverage in the future, and they will continue to work with SCC on it. They will use the database of concessionary card holders to contact passengers. There were 21 bus events organised in Somerset during September, more than anywhere else in the UK. It is significant that so many people at these events asked for a printed timetable, of which they gave away thousands and for which they are grateful to the bus operators. He said that they are not reaching enough non-users and need to reach out to potential passengers; they also need to update timetables at bus stops, which is essential as many are out of date or missing altogether. He thanked West of England for sorting out the D2 route and said they will be addressing evening services on all buses. Road works were also discussed at the last meeting, with Jonathan Weeks attending to answer questions on the issue.

The Chair of the Bus Advisory Board thanked Peter for all his work. Cllr J Hassall observed that they handed out 200 timetables in Taunton in just two sessions. He asked with respect to the Silk Mills Park and Ride if the number of empty spaces could be monitored to see how many there are on certain days, noting that there were 200 empty spaces out of 650 recently. He also advised that he went to a jobs fair and learned that many people can't get to jobs because of the lack of bus service; he asked if services could be provided through the community or the operators. The Chair replied that he had heard that there is now more patronage of the Park and Ride.

### **Bus It Campaign – Agenda Item 8**

This campaign has been run during August and September in association with the Somerset Bus Partnership; the key messages have been the cost of using a car vs using the bus and promoting the use of concessionary passes (ENCTS). The campaign has used printed ads, social media, and numerous events. Phase 2 of the campaign will introduce further messages on the environment, £1 fares, and a possible fare cap from the government. Operators are being asked if they have seen more patronage or have ideas, which the Chair said he was very keen to hear.

Anthony Reese thanked Natasha Bates and the Council for this campaign; it was the first in a long time and was successful, and he is grateful for the support from volunteers. There may be more events, and the biggest ask is for printed timetables, which happily we still have a commitment to provide. He is grateful for the support from Councillors, and many compliments, complaints, and suggestions have been collected. Marc Morganhuws stated that there is a whole series of opportunities, with BSIP as the key, and Taunton is the place to prove our capability to deliver. The new administration of SCC is committed to it, and there is the opportunity to build into a brand. The danger is if we don't create enough of a marketing strategy, as opposed to just a campaign. He noted that Natasha Bates and Tim Reynolds are constantly in touch regarding all of it, and there is a commitment to doing the work and funding, but he suggested that professional advice be obtained. He asked that it be put on the agenda for future meetings, and said there is a need to build the strategy once BRG and the £1 fare are dealt with. He also opined that it should be on the EP plan and scheme.

Stuart Moon of Dartline there has only been a marginal effect from the campaign, with two extra passengers as a result; however, most passengers are pleasantly surprised that they can go on a return bus journey from Taunton to Seaton for £6.60 and to Wellington for £6.95. He added, though, that he only has two buses to travel to Seaton and that he doesn't have the capacity to change to bigger buses.

### **Any Other Business – Agenda Item 9**

Stuart of Dartline noted that his tap in/tap out cost for his fleet is £34,000-38,000, while redemption will be only £2.45 a week on the voluntary scheme. So Devon and Somerset need to agree on a common EP plan and scheme; otherwise, it would be prohibitively expensive for him to be involved with. John Perrett will note that in his work.

It was asked by the Chair if the £2 fare cap scheme could be discussed before the next meeting on 17 January; John Perrett said there was nothing from the DfT so far on the matter, but it may need to be discussed before January.

Peter Travis pointed out that the BRG ends at the end of March and bus groups need to know which bus routes will then be most under threat; he asked if John Perrett could provide this information when available.

### **Date of Next Meeting – Agenda Item 10**

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

**The meeting ended at 11:21 am**

**CHAIR**