



Notice of Meeting of

BUS ADVISORY BOARD

Tuesday, 18 July 2023 at 10.00 am

Virtual

To: The members of the Bus Advisory Board

Chair: Cllr Mike Rigby

All Somerset Council Members are invited to attend.

For further information about the meeting, including how to join the meeting virtually, please contact Democratic Services

All members of the public are welcome to attend our meetings and ask questions or make a statement **by giving advance notice** in writing or by e-mail to the Monitoring Officer at email: democraticservicesteam@somerset.gov.uk by **5pm on Wednesday, 12 July 2023**.

This meeting will be open to the public and press, subject to the passing of any resolution under the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A: Access to Information.

The meeting will be webcast and an audio recording made.

Issued by (the Proper Officer) on Monday, 10 July 2023

AGENDA

Bus Advisory Board - 10.00 am Tuesday, 18 July 2023

Public Guidance Notes contained in Agenda Annexe (Pages 5 - 6)

Click Here to View Online Meeting (Pages 7 - 8)

1 Welcome and Apologies for Absence

To welcome attendees and receive any apologies for absence.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting (Pages 9 - 14)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2023 as an accurate representation of the meetings.

3 Public Question Time

To receive any public questions or statements submitted three clear working days in advance of the meeting.

4 Enhanced Partnership (EP) Scheme - Setting Fixed Dates for Timetable Changes (Pages 15 - 18)

Report attached.

5 Update from Operators on Taunton £1 Fare, Government £2 Fare and Services Updates

To receive any updates from operators.

6 Update on Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT)

To receive a verbal update.

7 Passenger Satisfaction Survey

To receive a verbal update.

8 Update from the Chair of the Bus User and Stakeholders Group

To receive a verbal update.

9 Any Other Business

To raise any other relevant issues from the Chair or Board members.

10 Date of Next Meeting

To note that the next meeting is scheduled for 17 October 2023.

Guidance notes for the meeting

Council Public Meetings

The legislation that governs Council meetings requires that committee meetings are held face-to-face. The requirement is for members of the committee and key supporting officers (report authors and statutory officers) to attend in person, along with some provision for any public speakers. Provision will be made wherever possible for those who do not need to attend in person including the public and press who wish to view the meeting to be able to do so virtually.

Inspection of Papers

Any person wishing to inspect minutes, reports, or the background papers for any item on the agenda should contact Democratic Services at

democraticserviceteam@somerset.gov.uk or telephone 01823 357628.

They can also be accessed via the council's website on [Committee structure - Modern Council \(somerset.gov.uk\)](#)

Members' Code of Conduct requirements

When considering the declaration of interests and their actions as a councillor, Members are reminded of the requirements of the Members' Code of Conduct and the underpinning Principles of Public Life: Honesty; Integrity; Selflessness; Objectivity; Accountability; Openness; Leadership. The Code of Conduct can be viewed at: [Code of Conduct](#)

Minutes of the Meeting

Details of the issues discussed, and recommendations made at the meeting will be set out in the minutes, which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting.

Public Question Time

If you wish to speak or ask a question about any matter on the Committee's agenda please contact Democratic Services by 5pm providing 3 clear working days before the meeting. (for example, for a meeting being held on a Wednesday, the deadline will be 5pm on the Thursday prior to the meeting) Email

democraticserviceteam@somerset.gov.uk or telephone 01823 357628.

Members of public wishing to speak or ask a question will need to attend in person or if unable can submit their question or statement in writing for an officer to read out, or alternatively can attend the meeting online.

A 20-minute time slot for Public Question Time is set aside near the beginning of the meeting, after the minutes of the previous meeting have been agreed. Each speaker will have 3 minutes to address the committee.

You must direct your questions and comments through the Chair. You may not take a direct part in the debate. The Chair will decide when public participation is to finish. If an item on the agenda is contentious, with many people wishing to attend the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group.

Meeting Etiquette for participants

Only speak when invited to do so by the Chair.

Mute your microphone when you are not talking.

Switch off video if you are not speaking.

Speak clearly (if you are not using video then please state your name)

If you're referring to a specific page, mention the page number.

There is a facility in Microsoft Teams under the ellipsis button called turn on live captions which provides subtitles on the screen.

Exclusion of Press & Public

If when considering an item on the agenda, the Committee may consider it appropriate to pass a resolution under Section 100A (4) Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 that the press and public be excluded from the meeting on the basis that if they were present during the business to be transacted there would be a likelihood of disclosure of exempt information, as defined under the terms of the Act.

If there are members of the public and press listening to the open part of the meeting, then the Democratic Services Officer will, at the appropriate time, ask participants to leave the meeting when any exempt or confidential information is about to be discussed.

Recording of meetings

The Council supports the principles of openness and transparency. It allows filming, recording, and taking photographs at its meetings that are open to the public - providing this is done in a non-disruptive manner. Members of the public may use Facebook and Twitter or other forms of social media to report on proceedings. No filming or recording may take place when the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting.

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Minutes of a Meeting of the Bus Advisory Board held Virtually, on Tuesday, 25 April 2023 at 10.00 am

Present:

Cllr Mike Rigby (Chair)

Andrew Ardley	Natasha Bates	Ian Bell
James Eustace	Luke Farley	Simon Goff
Phil Grocock	Joana Jackson	Dan James
Lee Jones	Adam Ozdowski	John Perrett
Amy Poole	David Redgewell	Tony Reese
Tim Reynolds	Josh Strickland	Peter Travis

1 Welcome and Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies for absence were received from Mike O'Dowd Jones, Rob Pymm (First Bus) and Deborah Fiddik (Dorset Council).

The Chair proposed and it was agreed that Agenda Item 9 would be taken before Agenda Item 5.

2 Minutes of the Last Meeting - Agenda Item 2

The minutes of the last meeting held on 17 January 2023 were confirmed as a true record.

3 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 3

There were no public questions received.

4 Enhanced Partnership (EP) Scheme - Setting Fixed Dates for Timetable Changes - Agenda Item 4

Natasha Bates, Service Manager – Transport Commissioning, explained to the Board that as part of the Enhanced Partnership, there was an aim to agree fixed dates for timetable changes across operators. During the discussion the following key issues were highlighted:

- There was difficulty in committing to a timetable of dates with the uncertainty of future funding from the Bus Recovery Grant.
- There needed to be some flexibility in the frequency of timetable changes to cater for leisure services, or consideration for whether seasonal periods could be detailed within individual bus timetables.
- It was important to also coordinate the timetable change dates with neighbouring authorities, particularly where there were cross border services.
- There was a desire for timetable changes to be communicated in a variety of ways, particularly to reach bus users who may not readily have access to the internet.

Board Members commented that current bus timetable changes were difficult to follow, where the frequency of changes were sporadic and vary across both services and areas. If there were set dates for timetable changes bus users would have awareness of when to expect timetable changes.

ACTION:

It was agreed that Natasha Bates would consult with operators on the best point in the year to set for timetable changes and bring proposals to the next meeting.

5 Service Updates from Operators - Agenda Item 9

The Board received an update from Simon Goff (First Bus), including:

- The £1 fare in Taunton had been in place since December 2022, running for a period of 2 years. The data had started to show a steady increase in usage of the fare. There had been a 28% increase in passenger numbers for the first quarter of 2023 in comparison to last year.
- The National £2 fare scheme had led to overall steady growth in passenger numbers, with a stark increase seen in the previous week, yet to be investigated. The increase in passenger numbers mainly related to interurban routes.
- Overall patronage in Somerset remained at 85% of pre covid levels, this was an improvement on last year, which was 65%.
- The evening service trial in Taunton started at the end of January 2023 and had received positive encouragement, with a particular increase in journeys in the early evening period.

- There had been an improvement in delivery of services, with actions and plans in place to mitigate against a shortage of drivers.

Josh Strickland (Hatch Green) highlighted the following points:

- There were many potential benefits from cooperation and partnership working, with assistance needed going forward to help coordinate services, journeys and hub interchanges.
- There had been growing concerns from service disruptions resulting from unexpected roadworks or closures, and stressed the importance of having an immediate contact at Somerset Council in such situations.

Members of the Board highlighted the following points:

- The need for improved communication of short notice cancellation of services, making use of more social media platforms and apps, where possible.
- The importance of the availability of buses and drivers, to be able provide reliable services for bus users. It was understood many operators were taking actions to share drivers to mitigate in the short term, and increase wages and training programmes to mitigate in the long term.

John Perrett, Operations Service Manager for Transporting Somerset, confirmed that the Street Works teams did impose fines where roads were incorrectly closed, however there could be emergency closures at times which the Council may not be aware of.

ACTION:

It was agreed that John Perrett and Natasha Bates would explore a system for which operators could contact with immediate concerns over roadworks and closures.

6 Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Reporting to SYSTRA - Agenda Item 5

Natasha Bates, Service Manager – Transport Commissioning, gave an update on the BSIP reporting to SYSTRA, who were supporting the Department for Transport with data analysis and confirmed:

- The requests for data would be regular, on a quarterly basis.
- The next deadline would be 10 July 2023, for data covering the period April to June 2023.

In response to a question raised, it was confirmed that the request for data collection had been received directly from SYSTRA to Somerset Council.

The update was noted.

7 Update on Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) - Agenda Item 6

Natasha Bates, Service Manager – Transport Commissioning, gave an update on the Digital Demand Responsive Transport trial in Somerton and highlighted the following key points:

- Following procurement, the contract for delivery of the DDRT trial was to be awarded later this week, with an aim for the service to commence late summer.
- The service would include passenger and driver apps to make and manage bookings, alongside a back office system, including a phone line booking service.
- There was work ongoing with current DDRT providers to avoid the conflict of area coverage and to ensure the services complemented each other.
- The Somerset Bus Partnership will be consulted via Peter Travis/Tony Reese

Members of the Board highlighted:

- The importance of how the service would be communicated locally to maximise awareness and promote usage.
- The need for the service to have enough availability to join up with main line buses.
- The importance of phone line capacity to meet the needs of users.

The update was noted.

8 Update on Evening Services Trial - Agenda Item 7

John Perrett, Operations Service Manager for Transporting Somerset gave an update on the evening services trial in Taunton including:

- The services, whilst still relatively new, had been running well, with no plans to make any changes currently.
- Whilst there had been some cancellations generally due to driver shortages, there had been little impact on the reliability of the evening services.

The update was noted.

9 Update on £1 & £2 Fare Schemes - Impact on Patronage - Agenda Item 8

John Perrett, Operations Service Manager for Transporting Somerset gave an update on the current fare schemes, and confirmed:

- Operators working within the £2 fare scheme were continuing to do so.
- There had been some service information missing on bustimes.org, which had now been updated to include over 95% of bus times in Somerset. It was hoped that this would encourage further bus usage.

Members of the Board expressed the importance of lobbying Government to provide funding to allow the fare schemes to continue, and also to maximise opportunities regionally to communicate this to Government. The Chair confirmed that this was ongoing and that he had written to the Secretary of State urging the continuation of funding.

The update was noted.

10 Update from the Chair of the Bus User and Stakeholders Group - Agenda Item 10

Peter Travis, Chair of the Group, praised the progress being made and presented the update, including the following:

- The need to lobby Government, and confirmed a letter had been sent to Somerset MPs to encourage this.
- The importance of reliable services to maximise the increase in bus users with the current fare schemes.
- The need for more stability in bus timetable changes and the desire for more bus operators' involvement in the meetings.
- The importance of weatherproof waiting areas for passengers. Although the Mobility Hub in Taunton was underway which would provide this, Taunton Train Station currently had no enclosed spaces for waiting bus passengers. It was understood that there may be funding available for bus shelters.
- There had been more engagement across Somerset with rail operators in interlinking services and looking at bus shelters at the train station in Yeovil.

The update was noted.

11 Any Other Business - Agenda Item 11

Members of the Board expressed concerns over the withdrawal of National Express services from Frome and highlighted the need for ensuring tickets could be accepted across other operators. Amy Poole (National Express) confirmed that the change would not take place until June and that suggestions were currently under active consideration.

12 Date of Next Meeting - Agenda Item 12

The Chair confirmed the next meeting would be held on 18 July 2023.

(The meeting ended at 11.18 am)

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CHAIR

Bus Advisory Board – 18th July 2023

Item 4 – Somerset Enhanced Partnership (EP) - Coordination of bus timetable changes

Author: Natasha Bates, Service Manager – Transport Commissioning

Contact: natasha.bates@somerset.gov.uk or 01823 357299

1. Background:

- 1.1 As part of the government’s National Bus Strategy: Bus Back Better, Local Transport Authorities were required to enter into an Enhanced Partnership (EP) with local bus operators.
- 1.2 Somerset entered into this partnership and created an Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan and Scheme which came into effect from April 2022 and sets out the obligations on both the Local Transport Authority and the local bus operators in relation to the delivery of public transport services.
- 1.3 The Scheme (Appendix A) sets out in paragraph 4.3 that “operators will work towards a system of agreed timetable change dates across the local bus network in Somerset”.

2. Recommendation:

2.1 That the operators subject to Somerset’s EP:

- i. **Adopt two key periods in the year, from 2024, when timetable changes will be implemented. These are recommended as:**
 - **Easter (dates will vary depending on when Easter falls)**
 - **Beginning of September (in time for the start of the new academic year)**

- ii. Agree that the exact dates for the subsequent year will be decided at each Autumn Board meeting. With the 2024 dates being agreed at the 17th October 2023 meeting.**

- iii. Agree that flexibility will be maintained for seasonal timetable changes and emergency/unforeseen circumstances. These will be by exception and not the 'norm' and will need to be discussed/agreed with the Local Transport Authority's Public Transport Team.**

- iv. Agree that where dates of seasonal changes are known in advance, these will where possible, be registered at the same time as the Easter and September changes, although the implementation of the change will fall at a later date.**

3. Reason for Recommendations:

- 3.1** Coordination of timetable changes will ensure more consistency for both bus passengers and bus operators. It will make it easier for passengers to understand when they can expect the majority of changes to take effect during the year. It also helps operators to co-ordinate any changes across the network of services.

We need to maintain an element of flexibility for seasonal services where the summer/winter timetables change at alternative dates due to the levels of passenger demand. Although where these changes are known in advance, we would request that operators, where possible, submit the registration along with any other registrations for either Easter or September, so passengers are at least aware that the changes are coming. In addition, operators need to be able to react to emergency/unforeseen circumstances such as road closures /temporary diversions and unforeseen operational issues.

4. Consultation

- 4.1** Timetable changes were discussed at both the Bus Advisory Board on 25th April 2023 and the Bus User and Stakeholder Group on 13th June 2023. The general consensus from both meetings was that adopting two fixed dates, whilst maintaining some element of flexibility was welcomed. Local bus operators were contacted directly following the Board meeting and asked for their feedback. Those that responded

constitute a large proportion of the bus network and were supportive of the proposal.

Discussion has been had with other neighbouring local authorities through a meeting facilitated by the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and these proposals align with the points in the year being set by WECA and North Somerset, who are also looking at Easter and the start of the academic year.

Following internal discussions, as contracts for supported services are re-tendered the end dates will also be aligned with either the Easter or September period.

5. Background papers

Appendix A – Somerset’s Enhanced Partnership (EP) Plan and Scheme

[The National Bus Strategy – Bus Back Better \(somerset.gov.uk\)](https://www.somerset.gov.uk)

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