

Minutes of a Meeting of the Bus Advisory Board held virtually on Tuesday, 18 July 2023 at 10.00am

Present:

Cllr Mike Rigby (Chair)

Natasha Bates

James Eustace

Mike O'Dowd Jones

David Redgewell

Josh Strickland

Phil Wright

Ian Bell

Lee Jones

John Perrett

Tim Reynolds

Peter Travis

Also in attendance: Cllr Dave Mansell and Andy Strong

The Chair opened the meeting and advised that unfortunately issues had arisen outside of the control of Somerset Council which meant that the Board was unable to fully discuss some of the planned agenda items. He said that it would be possible to cover the full agenda at a further meeting the following week and therefore proposed to adjourn this meeting and re-convene on Tuesday 25th July to enable the full agenda to be covered in detail.

He apologised for any inconvenience and assured members of the Board that all options had been explored, however, the Terms of Reference for the Board meant that the meeting could not be deferred at short notice. Somerset Council were extremely keen that a full and transparent discussion should take place about all matters that the Board had been put in place to consider, so felt that this was the best option in the circumstances.

The proposal made by Cllr Mike Rigby to adjourn the meeting to Tuesday 25 July 2023 at 10.00am was seconded by James Eustace.

A vote was taken and there were 12 votes in favour and 0 against.

It was therefore resolved that the meeting of the Bus Advisory Board be adjourned to Tuesday 25 July 2023 at 10.00am.

(The meeting ended at 10.04 am.)

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

Present:

Andrew Ardley	James Eustace
Peter Fairey	Luke Farley
Simon Goff	Phil Grocock
John Hammond	John Hassall
Dan James	Phil Wright
David Redgewell	Josh Strickland
Peter Travis	Mike O'Dowd-Jones
John Perrett	Ian Bell
Adam Ozdowski	Tim Reynolds
Lee Jones	

Also in attendance: Alex Halett, Cllr Dave Mansell, Tom Roberts, Linda Snelling, Pam Turton, Richard Morgan, Fiona Gourley, Stuart Radford, Stuart Moon

13 Welcome and Apologies for Absence - Agenda Item 1

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mike Rigby (Chair) and Natasha Bates. Mike O'Dowd-Jones chaired the meeting in the absence of Cllr Rigby.

14 Minutes of the Previous Meeting - Agenda Item 2

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2023 were approved.

15 Public Question Time - Agenda Item 3

A statement had been submitted from Andy Strong. In his absence the Chair read the statement aloud. He said work still needed to be done to attract non-bus users including comprehensive information such as timetables and maps on display. He recommended Somerset Council to work with bus operators and passenger groups to develop a Bus Information Strategy as a matter of urgency, and to assume responsibility for providing comprehensive information - recharging operators for costs associated with their commercial services.

John Perrett, Operational Services Manager thanked Mr Strong for his suggestions. He agreed there was a lot of work to do on bus timetables. The Council would need to look at its resources to see how it could support a better co-ordinated service. He

would report any progress back to the Board.

The Chair thanked Mr Strong for his contribution.

ACTION:

It was agreed the council would look at its resources to see how it could support a better co-ordinated bus service through an improved information strategy and report to the Board.

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

John Perrett, Operational Services Manager, introduced a report which addressed the requirement for those in the Enhanced partnership (EP) Scheme at paragraph 4.3 of the Scheme “that operators will work towards a system of agreed timetable change dates across the local bus network in Somerset”.

The report made four recommendations for the Board to consider.

During the discussion that followed Members said it was important to make sure seasonal services and the school timetable were taken into account whenever timetables were changed.

The Operators accepted the recommendations in the report and agreed the following:

- 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 17 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.**

ACTION:

2024 dates to be agreed at the next Board meeting in October.

17 Update from Operators on Taunton £1 Fare, Government £2 Fare and Services Updates - Agenda Item 5

Simon Goff of Buses of Somerset was invited to give an update. He apologised that it had been necessary to adjourn the meeting for one week. The reason for this had been the imminent announcement of the closure of the Bridgwater Depot by First Buses. He confirmed the depot would close at the end of September 2023. However, all bus services would continue to operate.

The closure would see some services relocated to other depots ie Taunton, Minehead or Wells.

He said whilst some routes were performing well and had recovered following the Pandemic, the closure of the Bridgwater Depot was necessary to ensure the long term sustainability of the bus service.

With regard to the £1 fares in Taunton, he reported there had been significant growth in trips made. And 45.5% of all journeys were being made as £2 single way trips.

Overall passenger recovery had been good. However, they were not quite back to pre-covid levels.

Stuart Radford, also of Buses of Somerset was invited to speak. He said there had been changes to the timetable and he offered to send a copy of the new timetable with the Board.

During the discussion the following key issues were highlighted:

- It was very important that everyone including the Council, the operators and campaign groups work together to promote the bus service. Especially as fares were as low as they had been for some time. The public should be encouraged to use the service.
- The £2 scheme would increase to £2.50 from November 2023.
- The 20-21 corridor, Weston-super-Mare to Taunton. It was suggested this

service had run better when it was one service rather than two.

- It was suggested the 77 bus service be returned to Wells
- Changes to timetables need to be joined up across the Somerset network. It was important for the service providers to provide a seamless service across the whole county.
- It was suggested that a spare bus be kept at Minehead as part of the recovery plan.
- It was further suggested that a service like the easy rider buses be introduced.
- Ideally, the Bus Advisory Board should have been consulted on about the closure of the Bridgwater Depot in advance of the public announcement.
- Concern for the welfare of drivers who had been used to using the Bridgwater Depot for breaks.
- Stuart Moon asked Ian Bell to contact him at info@dartline-coaches.co.uk to discuss statistics on the use of £1 and £2 fares.
- Concern for spikes in sickness. However, it was noted sickness levels were coming down and reliability would improve as a result.

The Chair thanked the participants. He said the statistics were encouraging. However, this was a very challenging time for the service. He clarified that the Council has agreed in principle to provide some of its BSIP+ funding to offset the need for the bus operator to reduce the level of service on some routes which would otherwise be at risk, and noted that specific publicity campaigns will be needed to ensure passengers are aware these services will be at risk in the future if people don't use them. He committed to working with First group on an appropriate publicity campaign for these specific routes.

The update was noted.

ACTION:

Buses of Somerset will provide a copy of the new bus timetables to the Board. Buses of Somerset to work with Somerset Council on a joint campaign to promote public use of routes that are likely to be at risk of reduced service.

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

John Perrett confirmed that the DDRT contract had been awarded to Pedam Mobility to deliver the driver and passenger apps, the booking website and the back-office system. He said that alongside this technology it would still be possible for the public to ring up and make bookings by telephone.

The Council had consulted with the Somerset Bus Partnership and elected Councillors were currently being briefed on the service and how it would work.

The aim was to introduce the new apps in the early Autumn to coincide with the delivery of the new vehicles.

They were currently looking for staff to run the app, and interviews were being carried out.

There were no questions, and the update was noted.

19 Passenger Satisfaction Survey - Agenda Item 7

Tim Reynolds, WSP Associate, said they had been working with Queenswood to set up a passenger satisfaction survey which would be available in September 2023. The results of the survey would be reported to service providers so that improvements in service could be made.

In response to queries Tim Reynolds said the survey would include questions about the bus stations and infrastructure as well as the quality of the buses, the drivers and the service. The questions would be similar to those used by Devon County Council, where the response to the survey had been good.

It was suggested that paper versions of the questionnaire be handed out people who use buses but were not on a bus journey that day.

20 Update from the Chair of the Bus User and Stakeholders Group - Agenda Item 8

Peter Travis, Chair of the Bus User and Stakeholders Group was invited to speak. His points included the following:

- It was important for the Council, the bus operators and the bus users to work together to improve the services.
- The bus user group was in a unique position to be able to announce unforeseen changes to bus schedules. He asked the bus operators to let them have new timetables as soon as possible.
- September would be very busy for the bus services because of the changes to the timetables and the return of schools and colleges.
- They noted the success of the £1 and £2 fares.
- They were pleased to note a new bus services in the north of the county.
- There had been problems with the regularity of buses in Burnham on Sea.

The Mayor of Burnham would like to meet with the bus operators to see how improvements could be made particularly to the 21 and 21a services.

- Disruption to bus services had also been experienced in other parts of the county too. For instance, in the Taunton area.
- It was disappointing that the Bridgwater Depot was closing. It was noted that Bridgwater would need a reliable bus service especially now there was to be a new factory in the area.
- It was suggested that the Council display the bus service charter more prominently on its website.
- Somerset Buses had been shortlisted in the Campaign of the Year for the National Transport Awards.
- Members were interested to know what the closure of the railway ticket office would have on the bus service. The Council would give a response once it had the results of the consultation on the closure of the ticket office.
- The Board noted the Council was working with North Somerset Council to resolve the 126 service and a draft timetable should be ready next week.

ACTION:

- 1. Peter Travis requested that Cllr Lesley Millard, Mayor of Burnham meet with Simon Goff and John Perrett to discuss the bus services in Burnham on Sea.**
- 2. With regard to the closure of railway ticket offices, John Perret agreed to send the Council's response to the consultation.**

21 Any Other Business - Agenda Item 9

Members said they were desperate to get the Taunton Bus Hub reopened. They noted proposals were being made for a new layout for the building. Information on this should be available soon.

Members were concerned about the issue of travellers at the Taunton park and ride. The Council was developing proposals to resolve this issue.

Member suggested that a bus be made available to bring passengers back from Bishop's Lydeard to the Taunton Railway Station for onward journeys.

22 Date of Next Meeting - Agenda Item 10

The Chair confirmed the next meeting would be held on 17th October 2023.

(The meeting ended at 11.45 am)

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CHAIR