



BUS (Bus Users and Stakeholders) Forum, 12th October 2023

Summary Report of the meeting – prepared for designated representatives from each of the Highways and Traffic Orders Committees (HATOC)

Purpose/role of the Forum

- The Forum acts as an informal body to consider current issues and opportunities relating to all aspects of bus services across the Devon County Council (DCC) administrative area.
- The Forum will represent the views of bus users and stakeholder across the county and provide a united voice through the invited representatives.

The Forum meets quarterly, and each of the eight HATOCs have an invited representative at the meeting. Bus operators are also invited to join. Terms of reference for the forum have been circulated previously.

1) DCC Officer Update

- Additional extension to the £2 fare scheme - now until December 2024!
- ZEBRA2 Fund has been announced (Zero Emission Bus Rural Areas Scheme) - £129M funding for ZEBs (Zero Emission Buses) including £25M ring fenced for rural schemes. Devon hope to put in a bid - does require significant investment from bus operators.
- DCC has just been allocated a total of £3.2m additional BSIP+ funding for 2023/24 and 2024/25 – this will be used to maintain existing service levels (due to contract inflation and increased costs) on DCC supported bus services. This funding gives some security for the network up until March 2026.
- DCC has also received permission from the DFT to reallocate funding for Fares Schemes (made redundant by the £2 Fare extension) to Bus Service Support. This means we can introduce enhancements to existing services, and also the following new services, all of which we hope to introduce in 2024:
 - We have already successfully introduced two new services as part of our initial funding – the X30 in East Devon and an extension to the 85 in West Devon
 - New link service – Exmouth to Exeter & East Devon Enterprise Zone (started Sept 2023)
 - New link service – Cullompton to Honiton Station
 - New link service – Newton Abbot, Dartmeet and Tavistock
 - New commuter service – Budleigh to Exeter (starts January 2024)
- Our “Miles of Smiles” campaign has been running since January 2023 – the first tranche of this focused on the £2 Fare, and we have now moved into the second tranche which encourages **National Bus Pass** holders to use the bus. The campaign has included radio, social media, direct mailing, outdoor displays (bus side/rears), and ONE magazine

2) BSIP Capital Schemes Update

Scheme	Update	Timings
Exeter		
New North Road - Bus Gate	Design and consultation completed – went to DCC Cabinet approved yesterday.	Following approval, work will start in Spring 2024
Cowick/Preston Street	Improvements to Preston St junction, traffic signalling and bus lane timings – design complete - out to stakeholder consultation	Consultation & cabinet approval to follow.

Heavitree & Pinhoe corridors	Still in design phase	Completion in 24/25 following consultation and Cabinet approval
Newton Abbot		
Highweek Street improvements	Improvements to junction layout and signalling to improve access and priority for buses.	Completion in 24/25 following consultation and Cabinet approval
North Devon		
Gratton Way Bus Gate	Design and consultation completed – went to DCC Cabinet approved yesterday.	Following approval, work will start in Spring 2024
Braunton Road	Scope extended to include an additional junction	Completion in 24/25 following consultation and Cabinet approval

Other schemes have been paused – we have applied for a reallocation of funding to the DFT

Scheme	Update
Bus Station Improvements	
Barnstaple	Shelter upgrades underway – new signage to installed imminently
Tavistock	Plan in progress to update signage, real time and cycle parking
Tiverton	Site visit pending
Exeter	Upgrades to CCTV – to link with ECC and police systems, 24 hours
Countywide	
Street Lighting Upgrades	Scheme completed
Bus Stop Infrastructure	3 year program underway to significantly invest in bus stop infrastructure, shelters and the Devon real time system
Bus Stop Multi-Modal Integration	Several schemes have been proposed and are at design phase – first will be at Drumbridges – going to local HATOC for approval next month.
Countywide Pinchpoint Scheme	Work underway on identified schemes

Q&A

Q: You mentioned the Braunton road scheme – what does this entail?

A: full details are on the DCC “Have your say” website: [Bus Services Improvement Plan \(BSIP\) in North Devon - Have Your Say](#)

Q: Thank you - lots of good things. Good to see smaller communities getting services. I have an issue with a local bus stop – reports from residents that it can’t be seen in the dark. It has been reported to DCC ...is it in the ‘too difficult’ pile? How do we prioritise small things alongside larger projects?

A: If it’s to do with passenger safety, we would prioritise. Please email us details so we can look into this immediately.

Q: Exmouth has actually lost services eg. a regular service to the airport. We keep asking to improve interchanges in the town. Bus services are not connecting and don’t use the station.

A: Exmouth has excellent connections both via bus and rail. There is a large scheme planned – the Exmouth Gateway - not through the BSIP funding – which will invest several £million into transport infrastructure in Exmouth.

Q: re £2 fare. Is it expected to lead to an increase in passenger numbers or has it plateaued? In Exeter, the feeling is that the £2 fare is great but it is still expensive for shorter journeys of 3-4 stops. Could there be a lower level?

A: Peter Knight will take more about increases in patronage through the scheme. In broad terms, the £2 fare is an attractive offer to the traditional motorist, and will hopefully help to increase modal shift. It doesn’t stop passengers buying a fare less than £2 – these should still be offered by the drivers if applicable.

Q: there are complaints about the Stagecoach app...other websites such as bustimes.org work better

A: Peter will address these questions and talk about the app later

3) Update from Stagecoach, Peter Knight, Managing Director

Headlines from Peter's speech

- Whilst Stagecoach represent 90% of the bus market in Devon, there are other operators.
- Here in the South west there has been 4.6% increase in passenger growth over the last 6 months, this was coupled with 1.6% increase in bus service operating miles on the Stagecoach network. Over the summer, local media have reported tourism numbers 10% down. We are bucking the trend on the general Devon economy.
- This September saw several changes to the network with additional services and journeys being added. September is generally a very busy time of year including the return to education. There have been challenging days but things have been settling down in the last couple of weeks.
- The specific challenge now is roadworks and the congestion that causes, especially in the Exeter Area – Stagecoach have felt the impact on services in Heavitree, A379 at the Devon Hotel and on the Topsham Road. Where these works have caused displacement of traffic, this has resulted in variations in congestion by day of the week, making it challenging to deliver reliable bus services.
- We are currently looking at our data – some are week days the congestion is worse than other days - which is a new trend.
- Through the Enhanced Partnership we are working with colleagues at DCC Highways to mitigate the effects of road works on bus services if at all possible. But it should be highlighted that often multiple sets of works on a single bus route have serious knock on effects to be able to operate our services reliably.
- £2 fare – it's a simple message and good value for money. Fares below £2 are still available. If passengers state their destination to the driver, they will suggest the best value fare. It's an expensive scheme for the government to run particularly in rural areas and therefore requires significant investment from the DFT.
- ZEBRA fund – Stagecoach are working up bids to the scheme for the network in the SW. It is pleasing to see the DFT have said they have ringfenced money particularly for rural schemes.

Q&A

Q: re the £2 Fare - How much extra patronage has been due to the £2 fare?

A: we have seen an increase of 3% patronage from the £2 fare

Q: Driver numbers – how are you doing? (re reliability)

A: over the last 6-12 months, driver numbers have increased, Stagecoach are in a better position - the training school is full and we now need to get drivers out of their training and onto the road. With regards to reliability of service – there has been a combination of short term sickness (respiratory and viruses that are prevalent at this time of year), and also variable road congestion which affects reliability. As part of measures to help ourselves, Stagecoach are offering complementary flu jabs to all staff, should they wish to have one.

Q: The Stagecoach App – though it is performing better, it's value is greatest when it tells you what you don't want to know eg when a bus is cancelled. It would be great if more/all buses were linked to the app. It is because GPS is needed?

A: Accuracy of GPS is a frustration and is a national challenge for all bus operators. The challenge is whether the bus is sending its GPS data. As you suggest, the Stagecoach moving map is complicated. We are looking something simpler, and we are discussing what a more user friendly format might look like. Unfortunately I can't give much more detail than that at this stage, but we are working behind the scenes on this.

Q: Timetable changes – there will have been 3 this year in March, Sept and a smaller one at the end of Oct. Will we ever get to one change a year, there's a perception that changes are proof of unreliability. In 2024, could SC aim for a timetable for the year with just one seasonal update?

A: Variable traffic conditions over a year is one factor why we can't get to one change a year. It is not always as simple as it seems. On the whole, changes are made to benefit the passenger and bus companies are trying to do this for their benefit – this does mean sometimes they will happen more than once each year.

Thank you – Stagecoach is very good at explaining each change. We know that you are doing your best.

Q: There have been complaints from students that the annual ticket is no longer available. The cost of the term-time tickets has increased. The Uni are asking students not to bring their cars to Uni but use public transport instead. They complain that the cost increase is too much

A: Happy to discuss this further off-line and I know that you have also had a discussion with our Commercial Manager regarding this, however sustainable fares balanced against the alternatives need to be considered as this is what protects the bus network in the longer term.

4) DevonBus Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey Results

- Requirement of our BSIP funding to conduct the survey annually
- Survey was funded and delivered jointly between Devon County Council, Torbay Council and Stagecoach
- Similar style to previous years – “on bus” physical survey
- Running for 4 weeks in June/July on routes all over Devon
- Over 2,400 responses were collected
- Queenswood Engagement delivered the survey on our behalf

The results of the survey were shared during the meeting, but attendees were asked not to share further at this stage as a press release is going out imminently.

5) Additional Q&A

Q: How much extra is anticipated for buses locally from HS2 funding?

A: The DFT announcement was clear; the only benefit to the SW is likely to be through the £2 bus fare extension. There will be no additional funding for local authorities in the South/South West

Q: Are we able to get more electronic information screens like the one on Bideford Quay?

A: we will be investing in updating our real time estate, but the screens are expensive and we have over 6,000 stops across the county. We are hoping to roll out QR codes to stops which will give real time stop data to passengers with a smart phone.

Q: Are our buses all old ones from elsewhere in the country. I went on the bus to Okehampton and it broke down one stop short of my destination. The driver said it had happened before. I am getting reports from other councillors that buses have broken down and/or been cancelled leaving people stranded.

A: (Stagecoach) the vast majority (90%) of vehicle started their life in the SW. You can spot local registrations starting with a ‘W’. Regrading reliability and breakdowns, they are machines and failures do happen despite 28 day inspections. The performance of vehicles in Devon are within the top 5 or 6 in the Stagecoach group. In rural areas it does take longer to get to a vehicle when an incident happens which causes disruption to passengers. Stagecoach are committed to investing in the fleet going forwards.

Q: Stagecoach had to severely cut back on capital investment in vehicles during Covid. Has this improved?

A: Stagecoach is no longer listed on the London Stock Exchange and is now supported by private investment. There are 10 new vehicles coming to the South West in 2024; there are plans to invest £1.5m in the fleet.

Q: re £2 fare – wonder how many people are aware of cheaper fares for shorter journeys? There is an issue when undertaking multi-journeys in one day. There is an extra cost if you have to get off one bus and onto another and pay again.

A: We looked at a £5 Devon Day Ticket. Stagecoach supplied a lot of data. People averaged 2.4 multi-journeys, so given the £2 Fare offer we did not think this would be attractive to very many people.

A: (Stagecoach) there are flexible bundles which you can buy via the app (eg 5 and 10 ticket bundles with 30% discount so the Day Rider becomes cheaper)

We will however revisit the multi-journey issue.

Big thank you to Andrea, DCC and Stagecoach - when there was a revolt regarding a service cut. We managed to get the route reinstated which was much appreciated by residents.

Luke Farley, GWR: from 10th December, some through ticketing will be introduced on rail-bus connections. It won't be universal to start but is addressing something long asked for (eg you can book a ticket through GWR from Combe Martin to Birmingham)

A: This is brilliant news – thank you. Can we promote it to let people know? There have been compliments about the 118 rail link service

Peter Nickol, Exeter BUG asked about the DCC Connecting You project, reported on at the last meeting

Karen Rose : The CY pilot has now concluded. The Drivers Disability Awareness Training Manual is being distributed to all bus drivers and community transport minibus drivers across Devon. Over 20 partners worked with DCC on projects. There were reports from some of the organisations and their beneficiaries of life changing benefits. A final report is currently being compiled for submission to DfT which will be followed with publication on the DCC and Devon Communities Together websites for everyone to read. *(Karen offered to report back at the next meeting on outcomes, conclusions and recommendations).*

6) Date of Next Meeting - to be confirmed.