

BUS (Bus Users and Stakeholders) Forum, 11th January, 2024

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.

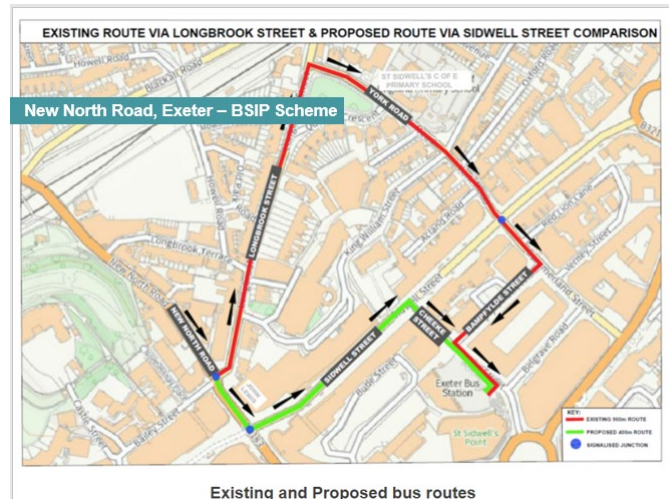
The Forum meets quarterly, and each of the eight HATOCs have an invited representative at the meeting. Bus operators are also invited to join. Terms of reference for the forum have been circulated previously.

1) DCC Officer Update (Rachel Phillips, Integrated Public Transport DCC)

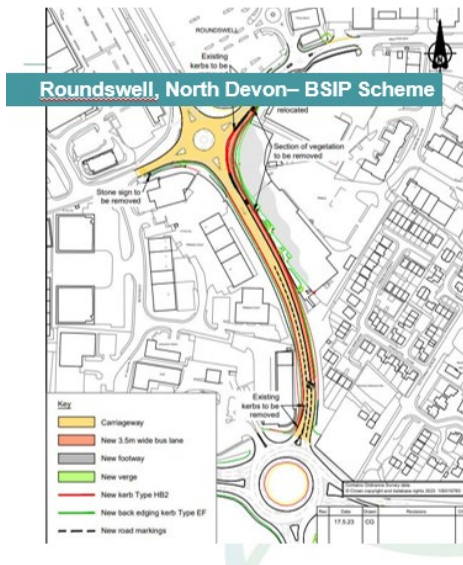
ZEBRA2 Fund (Zero Emission Bus Rural Areas Scheme)

- DfT announced the ZEBRA2 Fund (Zero Emission Bus Rural Areas Scheme) - £129M funding for ZEBs (Zero Emission Buses) including £25M ring fenced for rural schemes
- Competitive bid process, applications had to be made by Local Transport Authority (Devon County Council) – however does require **significant investment** from bus operators
- Stagecoach and Devon County Council have put in a bid – awaiting a decision from the DfT which will be in March 2024
- Proposal includes electrifying routes in both Exeter and North Devon

2) BSIP Capital Schemes Update



Existing and Proposed bus routes



- New bus lane (500m) between Gratton Way and Roundswell roundabout
- Improve bus journey times for services from Barnstaple towards Roundswell
- Priority for buses and taxis to avoid the queuing traffic, ensuring more reliable bus services onto the A39

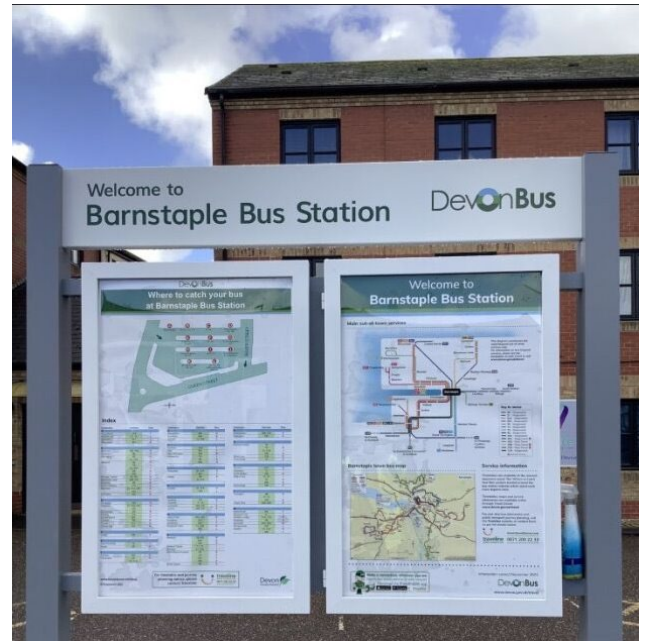
Scheme	Update	Timings
Exeter		
New North Road - Bus Gate	Approved by Cabinet – contractors are being appointed	work will start late-Spring 2024
Cowick/Preston Street	Improvements to Preston St junction, traffic signalling and bus lane timings – consultation complete.	HATOC approval at January HATOC
Heavitree & Pinhoe corridors	Still in design phase – consultation to begin in February	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, Roundswell	Approved by Cabinet – contractors are being appointed	Following approval, work will start in Summer 2024
Braunton Road	Consultation currently underway: Bus Services Improvement Plan (BSIP) in North Devon - Have Your Say	Completion in 24/25 following consultation and Cabinet approval
Barnstaple Rail Station – improved access for bus passengers	Approval given by DFT to move funds – now in design stage	Timeline TBC

Bus Station Improvements	
Barnstaple	Site visit complete – works have started to replace shelters and update signage (see photos below).
Tavistock	Site visit complete – plan in progress to update signage, real time and cycle parking
Tiverton	Site visit pending
Countywide	
Street Lighting Upgrades	COMPLETE

Bus Stop Infrastructure	£1M of investment – completed Y1 / Y2	Plan in place to spend remaining fund in Y2 & Y3
Bus Stop Multi-Modal Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drumbridges pilot project – HATOC approval – work to start spring/summer 2024 • Design proposal in place for Yelverton and Tavistock 	
Countywide Pinchpoint Scheme	Work underway on identified schemes	

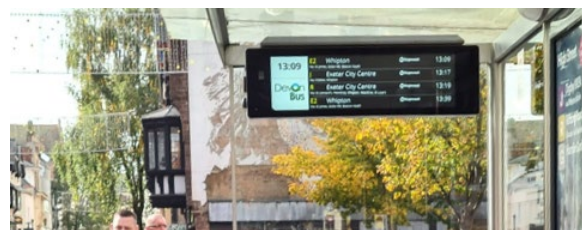
Barnstaple Bus Station

- Upgrades to shelters – replacement of perspex
- All signage replaced
- New real time signs will follow



Upgrades to Real Time Estate

20 screens going in imminently – mainly in Exeter. Longer term plan to replace existing estate. Following this we will identify new locations around the county.



Q&A

Q: May I request a reminder as to what the Braunton road scheme entails?

A: Improved bus priority coming into Barnstaple from Braunton. (this has now gone to consultation - full details are on the DCC "Have your say" website: [Bus Services Improvement Plan \(BSIP\) in North Devon - Have Your Say](#))

Q: regarding Barnstaple Rail Station; does improving access mean matching bus & train times? Particularly regarding East-the-Water services?

A: It is capital investment, so this means physical improvements at the rail station. Quite a few bus routes have been re-timetabled, improving connections. The main bus service between Bideford and Barnstaple is at a 15 minute frequency, which does link to rail services.

Q: In Exeter High Street, the screens are displaying timetabled information rather than real time information?

A: We do not understand this as have seen real time on these screens - the limitation in the High Street could be when buses have just started their journey, so there is no previous vehicle tracking for the journey (DCC have since checked the system and provided evidence to the individual that the screens do in fact show real time information – this will, on occasion, default to scheduled information if real time information is not available)

Q: Will further bus/rail links be added in 2024?

A: We are always looking for opportunities to do more.

3) Update from Stagecoach (Peter Knight, Managing Director)

Headlines

- Reminded attendees whilst Stagecoach represent 90% of the bus market in Devon, there are other operators.
- Stagecoach had a very busy Christmas period with 5% increase in passenger numbers in the run up, compared to last year. Situation has improved regarding service reliability. However, it has been extremely challenging regarding current levels of congestion in Exeter causing punctuality to drop. Whilst the congestion problems have mainly been within the city, most services touch upon Exeter at some point so this causes delays across the county.
- From a service delivery standpoint, Stagecoach has a full complement of staff across the business and has made significant investment in driver recruitment and training to achieve this and ensure that services operate per the published timetables. However, the variable levels of traffic congestion do cause issues with services being operated punctually.
- The wider view and Government policy: The £2 fare cap runs until the end of December 2024 and Stagecoach are expecting to participate for this length of time. It has helped grow patronage and helps customers knowing their fare; therefore addressing uncertainty.

Q&A

Q: Any news on the new vehicles coming in the Spring? Is it dependent on winning the ZEBRA 2 bid?

A: 10 new diesel vehicles are still coming to Devon very shortly.

Q: Will new vehicles have audio announcements?

A: Yes, they will be equipped with next stop information and a hearing loop. This is a government requirement for any new passenger service vehicles which are purchased.

Q: Regarding usage increase, what is the percentage increase in Exeter? Also, £2 fare cap – what if people have to travel and change buses - are there thoughts on a through ticket system?

A: Percentage increase for Exeter was 6.9% in the 4 weeks running up to Christmas. Re the £2 Fare; this is for one single journey. There are barriers to technology regarding fare-capping and therefore enabling 2 hour tickets that allow multiple journey's in that timeframe. Stagecoach as a group are investigating options but it will not be achievable particularly quickly. If there are 2 bus journeys to a destination, plus 2 return journeys; then a day ticket or flexi-bundle may be the best value option.

Q: For many years, there was a half-hourly evening service in Exeter, now late evening is hourly on the 2, 5, 9 services. It is quite a sever drop to get back from an evening event.

A: It is challenging in the context of hourly services not being as attractive. However, there is also the challenge of a structural change post-covid and there are not as many people around in the evenings, coupled with inflationary increases with £40+/hour operating costs now. The economics don't warrant a more frequent service. Vehicles might look busy (eg from Exmouth) but would look a lot less busy if we halved the numbers onto a more regular service; but incurred twice the cost - it wouldn't necessarily generate more passengers. Stagecoach do tailor their service to actual travel patterns and therefore do review services regularly.

In conclusion, Cllr Andrea Davis (Chair) reminded all that we must use services or lose them.

4) Equality Impact Assessment Discussion – ZEBRA 2 Bid (Rachel Phillips)

- As part of our ZEBRA2 bid DCC, have conducted an equality impact assessment (EIA) to ensure due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty (s149 Public Sector Equality Duty – Equality Act 2010), and how people with

protected characteristics will benefit from the scheme and to ensure any possible negative impacts are mitigated early on.

- We must consider how ZEBRA 2 positively or negatively affects people.
- Rachel talked through the slides and EIA consultation completed so far and asked if anyone had anything to add.
- Comments from the discussion have now been incorporated into the EIA which will be published in due course with our ZEBRA2 bid.

5) Connecting You – project summary and update (Karen Rose, Devon County Council)

- Devon Connecting You final report was submitted to DfT at the beginning of November. There is an embargo on sharing it until DfT have had the opportunity to review all 12 pilots and release their report. This is anticipated to be February.
- Karen was able to share some examples of the life changing stories which the pilot received from the transport projects funded through the Connecting You pilot.
- There is no news of further DfT funding to address loneliness but some of the Connecting You projects have used their experience gained from this pilot to apply to other sources to continue their work.

A comment was made about the positive results from the pilot and suggested that social prescribing could be a good way to link people to public transport.

6) Questions from the Floor (raised in advance)

None received.

- Cllr Andrea Davis (acting Chair) thanked everyone for attending and reminded all that this meeting represents the end of the first year of the forum and we need to consider electing a new Chair. Nominations to rachel.phillips@devon.gov.uk please.
- Date of Next Meeting – 11th April 2024