



BUS (Bus Users and Stakeholders) Forum, 7th October, 2024

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

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 and are available on the [TravelDevon website](#).

1) Welcome (Councillor Andrea Davis, Chair of the Devon Bus Forum)

2) Devon & Torbay Local Transport Plan 4 – Consultation (Lauren Allington, DCC Transportation Planning Team)

Lauren presented slides and a short video about the proposed Local Transport Plan (LTP) 4 which is currently out to consultation until 30th November 2024. The Transport Plan is a statutory document, setting out the medium to long term priorities for transport in Devon & Torbay.

We would welcome your responses to the consultation via the website: [Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan 4 - Have Your Say](#) You can also send email responses to transportplanning@devon.gov.uk or respond by post: Transport Planning, Devon County Council, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter, EX2 4QD.

Q: Were the aims for the Transport Hubs achieved in the last Transport Plan or is this a fresh look at them with different modes of travel now being available?

A: This is building on our previous LTP but definitely recognises that the world has moved on, including electric vehicles, and schemes such as the introduction of zero emission buses next year. The new LTP builds on the ambitions we had but takes into account new technology and the new ways people are moving. Through our BSIP, we have delivered on some multi-modal hubs at Drumbridges and Yelverton.

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

- **2024 Bus Passenger Satisfaction Survey** – Over 2,800 responses this year. Results will be published in due course but the headline is that 87.9% of passengers were either satisfied or very satisfied with their bus journey – this is a small increase on 2023 which was 87.3%
- DfT are currently preparing a New Buses Bill, and also currently reviewing our 2024 BSIP submission and completed Bus Connectivity Assessments. There is also a spending review underway - any funding announcements will follow the budget announcements at the end of October
- Franchising – consultation on changes to franchising powers for local authorities has been announced. DCC have responded and are open to looking at future franchising opportunities but, to manage expectations, it is a complicated and lengthy process and anything we did would probably take several years to introduce. We would need to have the correct funding in place to make sure we could deliver for Devon and ultimately improve things for the bus user. No funding has been confirmed yet by government and we await to see how franchising would work under the new amendments.
- Devolution deal with Torbay – this has now been approved and we will work towards creating the Devon and Torbay Combined Authority. We await further information on what this means for transport, and continuing to work closely with our colleagues in Torbay.
- Bus Punctuality Group – we now have a framework established, and are working really closely with bus operators and our highways colleagues to keep the bus network moving, especially if there are major road works schemes.

Update on BSIP Capital Schemes

- **New North Road Bus Link** – this scheme is now completed and opened in July. Positive feedback from passengers and operators – diverts 200 vehicles every day down Sidwell Street, away from a residential area, school and mosque.
- **Cowick Street** – part of this scheme will go ahead (technology and traffic management proposals); the Exeter HATOC did not approve the TRO to extend the extension of bus lane timings.
- **Heavitree & Pinhoe Road** - The proposals for the Pinhoe Road and Heavitree Road schemes in Exeter have been approved by Cabinet but will go before HATOC on the 12th November. The TROs for these have been published and there is an opportunity for you to show your support (*link was shared but this consultation is now closed*). Councillor Davis added that those elected members who support bus services and complain on behalf of their constituents about bus punctuality need to make sure they submit a response if we are to help make buses frequent and more reliable. These proposals affect buses coming into Exeter from all over Devon. We are grateful to those bus operators, and individuals from other organisations who will be speaking at the meeting to show their support.

Scheme (£ is BSIP amount - may also have LTP investment)	Status	Consultation	Committee Approval	Delivery timeline
Exeter				
New North Road (£300K)	COMPLETED!			
Cowick Street (£125K)	Partially progressing	October 2023	Cabinet - January 2024	Completion by December 2024
			HATOC May 2024 - TROs rejected	
Pinhoe & Heavitree Road (£2.15M)	On track	April 2024	Cabinet - July 2024 HATOC - Nov 2024	Completion by March 2025
Newton Abbot				
Highweek Street (£650k) - plus Sherborne Road	On track	Not required	Cabinet - July 2024	Completion by March 2025
Barnstaple				
Braunton Road (£585K)	On track	Jan-Feb 2024	Cabinet - July 2024	Completion by March 2025
Gratton Way Bus Gate (£380K)	On track	Summer 2023	Cabinet - October 2023	Completion by March 2025
Barnstaple Rail Station (£660K)	On track	Summer 2024	Cabinet - Sep 2024 HATOC - Dec 2024	Completion by March 2025

Q: Can you please clarify that the failed Cowick Street TRO would have affected buses coming in to and out of Exeter from other towns and rural areas?

A: Yes, it would have affected buses coming from the West Devon corridor among others. The Pinhoe and Heavitree routes are some of the busiest bus corridors in Exeter affecting buses coming from Mid Devon and East Devon as well as housing developments East of Exeter such as Cranbrook. We want to ensure we are future-proofing and we have the money to deliver this scheme now.

Q: You mentioned street lighting upgrades around bus stops, we have some issues at local stops which are not lit?

A: Rachel asked for specific location details to be forwarded. We don't have specific funding in the BSIP but we would look at on a case by case basis. We have installed solar lighting at a bus stop recently.

Q: Is the Bus Punctuality Group open to people external to DCC? The University is working with Stagecoach on the punctuality of the service 4 on the Streatham Campus regarding the morning peak hour.

A: Are aware of the punctuality issue on this service and are working with Stagecoach to address it. The Punctuality Group is an internal meeting for DCC officers and bus operators. Please use this forum group to raise issues or contact us directly – we appreciate your feedback.

Councillor Davis highlighted why Bus Priority was so important to maintain bus punctuality in the City and that we should take the opportunity to respond to the Exeter TRO consultation for HATOC.

Q: Is there still funding for new bus shelters?

A: We still have match funding for town/parish councils – BSIP funding can contribute 50% of the cost of a bus shelter (up to a maximum amount), as long as parish/town councils are able to own and maintain going forward. It also depends on the location and whether it is suitable for a shelter. Please email devonbus@devon.gov.uk for more information.

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

- Generally, Stagecoach are seeing a settled and stable picture although struggling with the performance of the highway and congestion challenges with variables around the county.
- Peter Knight echoed the comments about bus prioritisation, the TRO consultation and the Heavitree Road corridor where there has been significant growth in traffic in the last few weeks with university students returning and people settling into new September routines. On Service 4 alone, this accounts for 1.1 million passenger journeys a year. Please consider these figures when making your representations.
- A month on from the Stagecoach September service changes, things have settled down nicely with just a couple of pinch points around capacity on certain times of day.
- Delighted with the news around our successful ZEBRA bid - 20 zero emission buses are coming to Exeter to operate on services from next summer, with 21 to follow in North Devon later in 2025. The two projects are progressing well and are currently on schedule.
- Some may have heard that Stagecoach are beginning to take delivery of 20 new Optare Solo diesel buses. 10 have been received now – 5 are currently in service in Barnstaple on some of the more rural routes (DCC supported services). We are delighted with these additions to the fleet which we hope demonstrates our investment in the South West.
- The £2 fare cap – there isn't any clear guidance yet of what this will look like beyond 31st December.

Q: When planned roadworks are coming up which affect a bus service, there is not always the communication with the local Member about it. It does cause concern particularly for elderly people who rely on buses. It is appreciated that when there are emergency works, there is nothing which can be done about it so this query is specifically about planned works.

A: Agree more detailed communications to each Member would be helpful and Stagecoach aim to put any planned work notifications on their website. The volume of roadworks being dealt with are very challenging. Often it is difficult to know which Wards they fall within and who to notify so Stagecoach are grateful to officers at DCC in Public Transport and Highways for their help to get the information out to bus users and customers. Collectively as an Enhanced Partnership, we can look at better communication in times of disruption.

Where there are major disruptions, the Public Transport team will send out communications to relevant members. Members should contact DevonBus if you do not feel you are getting enough detail or coverage on this. The DCC permit team get 50,000 applications a year for road closures around the county. Some are extremely short notice and do not facilitate time and planning. The ambition is for a broad disruption system that will publish 24/7 and 365 days a year as to what's going on in the network.

Q: What is the protocol for drivers leaving their engines running whilst stationary?

A: Two minutes

Q: Why is there is no reduction to the £2 fare for children? Have Stagecoach had thoughts about a family ticket? It can be surprisingly expensive to take a family across the city from one side to the other.

A: The £2 fare cap is for adults only. The child fare is product of the uncapped adult fare. In some cases, the child ticket would be cheaper at £2 than an uncapped reduced adult fare. There are group tickets by fare zone and those

are unlimited travel products. That would be an Exeter or an Exeter Plus ticket. They're generally priced at two times the adult price and they allow for any five people to travel together. All details are on the Stagecoach website.

Q: What is the latest information on passenger numbers and are things progressing back to pre-Covid levels? Secondly, what is the seating capacity of the new minibuses?

A: There is a 5% growth in the concessionary market, but it is a bit early to give a definitive indication about how September has gone with the return to college and University. Bus patronage up until that point has moved about 1% up year on year in Devon, experiencing quite a high volume of growth in the previous year. More patronage information is due next week. The new minibus capacity is in the region of 30 – 32 seats.

Q: Will the new buses will have audio/visual displays and audio announcements on them?

A: Yes all new vehicles are all fitted with next-stop audio and visual announcements. The team are currently recording all the audio files and they will be live in the next 2 – 3 weeks. There is an on-going plan to roll out the audio and visual equipment to the rest of the vehicles in line with the legislation; it is predicated on how old a vehicle is and when it went into service.

5) **Update from Don McIntosh, Tally Ho Coaches** - Don introduced himself and explained that he represents a number of small bus companies in Devon on the BSIP Enhanced Partnership Board.

- Don reported that smaller operators are upgrading their audio/visual equipment on buses. Newer vehicles are due to be upgraded in October, however there is a problem getting the companies that supply the screens and the hearing loops due to demand! However the project is under way and coming soon.
- Commenting on the TROs consultation and HATOC, Don mentioned the frustration for a small operator getting in and out of Exeter, and from a passenger's point of view they need to know reliably what time they are going to get to their destination. Witnessing cars being driven with only one person in and thinking about air quality and social issues, this needs to be addressed. Whilst having huge sympathy with shopkeepers and their deliveries, we have to all work around each other. Please help and comment on the HATOC deliberations.
- The £2 fare scheme has been an absolute boost for local buses in the rural areas. There's a lot of chat about rural buses being limited to what they can do in the future because local authorities aren't going to get lots of extra funding for new routes, etc. The key is getting the numbers up and everyone on this group can do their own little bit to promote local bus services. The £2 fare cap scheme is ending on the 31st of December and the bus trade association describes it as a cliff-edge moment for local rural bus services. All of us need to push to get a good replacement and an extension, if possible.

Q: There is dissatisfaction from passengers regarding Plymouth area services which have reduced in frequency or had routes truncated, for example, making crossing Ivybridge difficult.

A: Stagecoach operate services in this area so Peter K took the question and offered to have a more detailed discussion as to the challenges and why things are the way they are at present. Darren Hewlett, Dartline also offered to put him in touch with so he can respond to the concerns raised on behalf of Plymouth City Bus.

Andrew Draper, Filers Travel said that as a company they are stepping back from running local bus services. Their last service comes to an end on Saturday and they will be undergoing a restructure. They will still remain as an operator and want to remain highly involved in plans coming up for bus transport in Devon. Andrea thanked Andrew and offered best wishes to all at Filers.

6) **A Community on the Move” National Lottery project update (Faye Ashton, CEO, Mid Devon Mobility)**

- Faye reported their good news of being awarded £254,000 Lottery funding in July for a three year project called ‘A Community on the Move’. It involves getting more people out and about from rural areas, and getting them out at the weekends, which is their loneliest time.
- The project will connect with Mid Devon Mobility's Community Hub, which is open 5 days a week. People struggle with getting in and out of the building because it is based inside a multi-storey car park so MDM are re-developing what they do.

- MDM are also hosting 12 community transport awareness open days with their first trial session on Wednesday 9th October. There will be others delivered in rural areas, hosting events in outlying villages. Passenger numbers have dwindled post-Covid so MDM plan to re-energise the services that are needed there.

7) Travelling with Confidence – update from Living Options Devon (Laila Underwood, Project Lead)

- Now 6 months into the project, helping disabled people with travel training to get them using buses and trains and also disability awareness training for transport providers.
- The disability awareness training sessions are free and the project is keen to work with the transport providers.
- Anyone wishing to suggest individuals, organisations and their service users who could benefit from the project, please get in touch. Contact details: laila.underwood@livingoptions.org / Tel: 01392 459222

8) Questions from the Floor

Q: Whilst rural bus services enable rural communities to access to town centres, what about accessing the countryside from large towns and cities? Using buses to access a country walk fits with the Wellness agenda and helps promote buses to tourists. I am particularly concerned about access to Dartmoor and regret the loss of the Dartmoor Explorer service. Timings of services and long gaps between services can make a day walk impossible for individuals and walking groups. Whilst recognising that such services may not be a priority, access to the countryside should not be forgotten. Could this be borne in mind as a general subject for the future?

A: Councillor Davis added her enthusiasm for this issue as the lead for National Parks England for health and wellbeing and public transport access. She agreed that National Parks are there for the health of the nation but explained that the National Parks are not allowed to spend their budget on public transport. However, they can do things like encourage people to use public transport. Andrea will bring this up in her meeting with the Chairman and deputy Chairman of DNP and commented on how nice it was that someone from Exeter raised this issue.

Mike Tucker (DCC Integrated Public Transport Team) added that the DCC Public Transport team talk to Dartmoor National Park as one of our key stakeholders. The National Park are also concerned about car usage on the moor and increases will lead to saturation in their car parks and lay-by spaces. So they are keen to encourage bus use and using the BSIP funds we supported a bus service out from Newton Abbot up onto central moorland. That proved quite successful so we will discuss with them about next year – it is an on-going conversation. There are also opportunities and frequency with the rail service up to Okehampton camp.

- Andrea thanked everyone for attending and reminded everyone that it is imperative that we get some responses to the TRO traffic regulation order please.
- Date of Next Meeting to be confirmed.