



WEST DORSET WESTERN AREA TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP

website www.watag.org.uk - e-mail: watag@hotmail.co.uk

MINUTES OF WATAG AGM 25 & GENERAL MEETING 129 Held at Mountfield, Bridport on 29 January 2026 at 6.30 p.m.

Present (16+14 virtual=30): Nick Boothroyd (Bridport), Cllr. Sarah Carney (Bridport Town Council), *Cllr Anne Clements (Maiden Newton & Frome Vauchurch PC)*; John Collingwood (WATAG chair), Phyllida Culpin (WATAG), Bob Driscoll (WATAG), Jennifer Dare (Bridport); *Paul Everall (Bradpole)*; *Nigel Ewens (Jurassic Coast Railways Ltd/Bridport Community Railway)*, Elaine Glover (Radio presenter); Adrian Glover (DC Public Transport); Pamela Hatton (Bridport), Sarah Herring (West Bay), Nick Hurrell (WATAG), *Katie Moore (Charmouth PC)*; *Willam Neal (First Bus)*; *Nadeem Ahmad (Bridport)*, Cllr Nigel Rawlings (BTC); *Tony Reese (WATAG)*; *David Redgewell (South West Transport Network)*, Sal Robinson (WATAG), *Leanne Rowland-Bright (First Wessex)*, *Anne Sankey (Lyme Regis)*; *Linda Snelling (Yeovil Bus Users Group)*; Diane Stanley (CPRE); Guz Tidy (Loders); *Giles Watts (DTAG/DCAN)*, *Alan West*; Mike Westbrook (Bridport); *Noel Wright*.

- Apologies:** Andrew Ardley, Belinda Bawden, Colin Divall, Anna Dunn, Paul Kimber, Craig Monks, Edward Morello MP, Alan Williams.
- Minutes of the 2025 AGM** were agreed as a correct record.
- Reports from Chair and Treasurer** - attached
- Election of Officers:**
Current committee stood down. Election of new officers:

Chair Nick Hurrell
Proposed Phyllida Culpin
Seconded John Collingwood
Elected

Secretary (minutes): Phyllida Culpin
Proposed John Collingwood
Seconded Sal Robinson
Elected

Vice chair: John Collingwood
Proposed Bob Driscoll
Seconded Nik Hurrell
Elected

Other committee members:
Nick Boothroyd,
Colin Divall,
Bob Driscoll,
Tony Reese,
Sal Robinson
Elected

Treasurer Anna Dunn
Proposed John Collingwood
Seconded Sal Robinson
Elected

- There being no further business the AGM concluded at 18.45

Chair's Report on 2025

The recent storms and extreme weather conditions in our county and around the world demonstrate that climate change is here and that carbon emissions from human sources are largely responsible.

The size and number of private vehicles, soaring flying figures, indifference or denial and unhealthy lifestyles are distancing us from the consequences of our actions. We all have a part to play. It is our children and grandchildren who will suffer for our reckless inaction. Public and active transport are part of the way forward and WATAG is central to promoting these in our area.

I took over as chair on an interim basis last year in the hope that we could remain active, strengthen our team and ensure that the voice of users and potential users is heard by the transport authority, bus and train operators.

My hopes were realized when Nick Hurrell, Phyllida Culpin and Nick Boothroyd joined us, bringing a variety of skills and wealth of experience.

We have sharpened our focus with an impressive new website complete with group logo to show who we are and what we can do. Anybody wishing to come on board or have their say within our advisory group is welcome to come to our Advisory Group meetings - next one in the afternoon of 11th February

We have faced challenges this year - not least sudden changes in the winter timetable of our East/West bus routes - the X51 and X53. Intervention by the three Transport Action Groups directly involved (Western Area, Dorchester and Weymouth) went some way to restoring the butchered services.

The episode has demonstrated the contribution that TAGs can and should make to planning changes to bus services in Dorset. Consultation matters.

When the dust settled, we resumed publication of the WATAG Bus Times, sponsored by Alan Williams. The public have now come to depend on these reliable and popular booklets.

The CR6 Bridport/Beaminster/Yeovil service now runs on Saturdays and replaces the well-used CB3 service brought in by Beaminster Town Council following the withdrawal of the Saturday service in October 2017 due to "insufficient demand". The CB3 now usefully connects surrounding villages to the CR6 route.

The WB1 - the best way to West Bay - weekend shuttle service run by Bridport Town Council and Dorset Community Transport is proving popular and we expect Lyme Regis Town Council to run an evening weekend service between their town and Bridport starting in the spring.

Rail news includes the nationalisation of South Western Railways on 25th May, the soil moisture deficit on the West of England Line and the impact of the severe weather conditions this winter..

WATAG remains committed to promoting active travel and welcomes the opening of the first section of the Chideock to Bridport path in May. We expect news on completion of the route and on progress on the Loders to Bradpole greenway shortly.

We look forward to working constructively with Dorset Council, Town and Parish councils in the WATAG area, bus and train operators, Dorset TAGs and other organizations seeking to promote public transport and reduce reliance on the private car.

This is our twenty-fifth annual AGM and I must mention that Bob Driscoll was involved from the outset and remains synonymous with WATAG. Despite a spiral of decline and public transport now being less accessible than ever, meticulous and unfailingly civil Bob is an inspiration to us all.

John Collingwood - 29 January 2026

Treasurer's Report on 2025

Hall hire charges for public meetings have been our major item of expenditure for the past few years. The advisory group meetings were conducted in the Lord Nelson meeting room and in the George snug without cost. We have now taken out a Zoom account to give us greater flexibility and coverage.

Our current balance stands at £434.01.

Our accounts do not include the generous contributions made by ex-WATAG Advisory Group member and bus champion, Alan Williams, to a variety of local transport initiatives, not least the preparation and printing of timetables.

A copy of the Accounts can be provided on request

Anna Dunn - 26 January 2026

General Meeting 129

- 1 **Present:** As for AGM - **Apologies:** as for AGM
- 2 **Minutes of meeting 128:** approved with no matters arising
- 3 **“Vision for the Future” for Public Transport in our area.**

WATAG’s newly-elected chair, Nick Hurrell gave a presentation on current and future provision of public transport in West Dorset. Key to future provision will be improved bus funding - and a comparison with the much higher funding received by Devon was highlighted. The presentation slides and speaker’s notes are available in the News section of WATAG’s website.

The audience was invited to comment.

Sarah Herring (SH) stressed the need for connectivity between bus services (eg between CR6 and buses to West Bay). She was delighted with WB1 service as it made Bridport more accessible to West Bay residents, although it would be good for it to run on Wednesdays as well.

Pamela Hatton (PH) no longer has a car and has needed to get treatment at DCH on regular basis since the last meeting. There was no bus available on the first morning and at the time, there was no bus back at 4pm. Buses needed to be maintained and run on time. DC and First Bus should sample bus travel first hand.

David Redgewell (DR) spoke of the passage of the Bus Act through Parliament and emphasised that DC needs to present a plan on how they will spend the BSIP money. This funding is low in Dorset compared to Cornwall and Somerset. We need to lobby MPs in the South-West – We need a strong voice. Nick Hurrell pointed out that West Dorset MP, Ed Morello is keen to support the provision of better public transport in West Dorset.

Guz Tidy (GT) reminded the meeting that out-patients can use community cars to get to hospital and suggested the X51 now continues from Dorchester to Weymouth in order to facilitate driver changeovers.

PH wondered whether Dorset received less BSIP money than elsewhere as it was considered to be an affluent county.

Linda Snelling (LS) spoke of the case of Yeovil where there are several 2-hourly bus services and the depot is in Taunton. Somerset Bus Partnership liaises with the County Council and Bus Operators to raise concerns and this contact has been invaluable. She also maintained that BSIP funding does increase in more deprived areas. Need to improve communications between counties.

Adrian Glover, Dorset Council’s Public Transport Manager, thanked WATAG for the initiative. The themes that are being raised are key. Dorset is starting from further behind than other counties and needs to uplift residents’ experiences and direct them into getting something done. The need for better services is all too apparent. He pointed out that we must not lose sight of the challenges faced by bus drivers.

Nick Hurrell insisted that WATAG needs to know passenger numbers. The group wants to work with DC to make improvements and we need better support to work together effectively. For example, WATAG were not advised about the DC cabinet meeting on transport on the night of GM129. For example.

SH suggested that a Freedom of Information (FOI) request may unlock information on passenger numbers.

Mike Westbrook has recently moved to Bridport from Bournemouth. He feels that West Dorset has very poor bus services. They need to be made more attractive and should run later and connect with trains.

The meeting unanimously endorsed the strategy with a show of hands. Phyllida Culpin asked all for their support in spreading the word.

4 Bus Matters

1. WB1. Bridport/West Bay weekend shuttle

Bridport Town Council's new Town Clerk, Sally Fremantle, submitted a report on this popular service (attached). The meeting was pleased and surprised to learn that more people are paying their fares than using bus passes.

2. First Bus

William Neal (Planner, First South) pointed out that he covers all the South West and maintained that Dorset has better reliability than other areas. He apologised for the times when reliability slips and conceded that bus users need better information at bus stops and elsewhere. He welcomed suggestions made at the meeting adding that WATAG knows the area much better than him. He welcomed comments direct to him at william.neal@firstbus.co.uk

Leanne Rowland-Bright agreed with her colleague and stressed that the problem when breakdowns occur is that the engineering team work from Weymouth so can take an hour to get to the vehicle and provide replacement. Weather also has big impact, she said, citing the fact that the X53 couldn't run on the coast road on Tuesday 27th January and the X51 could not go via Martinstown X51 due to flooding.

PH commended the drivers in the current spell of bad weather. Leanne assured GT that First are receiving adequate notification of the numerous roadworks locally, particularly in the coast road.

3. General

Nigel Ewens said the only way to bring change is through political engagement. The West Country is growing at twice the national average and there seems to be no link between population growth and funding. United action from TAGs and the involvement of the local MP are the way forward..

DR said that the DC meeting on the day of the meeting had agreed for a public consultation in July and asked if any buses will come up from Cornwall as First Bus withdraws and whether there was any chances of introducing electric buses.~

As there was no further business, the meeting close at 20.00.

The next public meeting (GM-130) will be held at Mountfield. Date: tba.

Update Report for WATAG from Bridport Town Council:

West Bay Weekend Shuttle: a half hourly shuttle service between Bridport town centre and West Bay centre

- 1,497 rides for summer timetable period
- 2,384 rides for autumn timetable period
- 3,881 total
- Individual riders not captured
- This has proved an exceptionally highly regarded service.

Following the initial time-consuming period of setting up the service, it has settled in terms of project support needed and this now largely entails promotion of service and discussions about the future.

Whilst we never expected fare revenue to be high, it covers about 20% of the costs of running the service. Bus passes are not the greater proportion.

The initial summer timetable was for Saturday and Sunday afternoons into the evening until 10pm. However, Sunday evenings did not have a high take up and most usage is Saturday daytime. For autumn we amended the timetable to start earlier on a Saturday and provided a shorter daytime service on Sundays. Passengers still wanted to get into town earlier on a Saturday whilst the market was taking place so for the Jan – April 26 timetable we brought it forward an hour.

The project manager regularly rides the bus to engage with users and monitors comments on social media. Usage is mainly older residents using it to shop and using Bridport eateries. Teen usage has dropped in winter months, possibly because they were using it to go to beach in holidays. Two passenger surveys, last one November. The response has been nothing but positive with a universal 10/ 10 for the service.

We have a dedicated driver, Steve, who has helped contribute to the community feel of the service as he is warm, friendly and helpful and knows the regulars by name.

Future

This initiative originally came from United Diversity Bridport (now West Dorset Commons) who were not able to be the accountable body at the time of the application. BTC agreed to be the accountable body for the pilot and have agreed to extend the project management of the WB1 until October 26 whilst West Dorset Commons are finalising fully constituting themselves as an organisation and could then become the accountable body.

The timetable for the extended period will be finalised in February but with limited funding available it is likely to be a Saturday service with an extra Sunday service during the summer holiday. This reflects usage and passenger demand.