

Public Transport in SWT Task and Finish Group

19.08.20

Attendees: Cllr L Whetlor (Chair), Cllr J Hassall, Cllr D Mansell, Cllr D Perry, Cllr A Trollope-Bellew, Cllr B Weston

1. Appointment of Chair

Cllr Loretta Whetlor was duly appointed Chair of the Task and Finish Group.

2. Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Cllr K Wheatley

Declarations of Interest were received from Cllr Hassall and Whetlor in relation to being a shareholder of the West Somerset Railway.

3. Notes of previous Scrutiny Committees – held in May and June 2020

These were noted.

4. Agree and review Terms of Reference/Scope of the Task and Finish Review

The Scrutiny Committee on 3rd June 2020 had resolved

‘to establish a task and finish group to examine the current provision in relation to public transport in the district and what is required to increase provision and improved modal links including consideration of carbon neutrality.’

- Councillors discussed why each had signalled a wish to serve on this group and what they hoped to achieve.
- Interest was expressed in ensuring the co-ordination between the various modes of transport e.g. bus and rail, canal and river etc.
- Interest was expressed in ensuring public transport was a growing and essential public service.
- The linkage with District priorities of the Climate Emergency and Health and Wellbeing were noted.
- The Equalities aspects of public transport and the access to employment were highlighted.
- Concern was raised over the constantly changing routes which made District Bus Stops redundant.
- A query was raised as to how many of the current routes in Somerset were subsidised, as it was felt the vast majority were in some form.
- Councillors representing rural wards were concerned at the service cuts and how they could look at provision increases, whilst being focused on reasonable aims. Funding was recognised as an issue.
- Suggested avenues of inquiry included Workplace Parking levies and Developers being required to fund Bus Services.
- A question was posed as to what could be done to make public transport a more attractive option, with the role of the Park and Ride a key part of that.

- There was an opportunity for the Task and Finish Group to take a lead on looking at how the District Council could facilitate the integration of Bus and Rail in the District.
- It was suggested that key stakeholders needed to be identified and brought together to examine the key opportunities.
- Concern was raised over the cost of the West Somerset Railway option.
- The timetabling of buses and funding opportunities were also raised as issues.
- It was known that the difficulty in attracting grants for Transport projects was the need to acquire match funding.
- Concern was raised over the information that transport companies provided often not being accessible and only available online. The demographics of those who used public transport often meant this was affecting those who would least likely use the internet.
- The link between road maintenance and investment in buses was a potential line of enquiry.
- It was suggested the Group could look to run a consultation with Bus Users.
- It was suggested the Group could look at other parts of the country to see what other Local Authorities had done.
- The Chair expressed that this Group had an opportunity to collaborate with the County Council and the Bus Company.
- Further investigation of the closure of Taunton Bus Station was discussed and it was felt that this could be warranted.
- The need to change the type of bus for the 28 route to comply with the height required was raised, and a scheme had been passed to the West Somerset Railway by First Group.
- The need for a facility/integrated hub linking the Bus and Train Stations in Taunton was recognised, and this Group could lead on looking at other examples where this had been done.
- The 'Taunton Vision 2002' document would be still relevant to this Group.
- The plans to pedestrianize Taunton was felt to be relevant to the need to understand the Transport infrastructure of the area as a whole.
- The need to understand why the WSR hasn't been able to reach an agreement on Minehead to Taunton was needed.
- Objectives were felt to be to increase provision.
- (It was suggested that) the group's objectives should be to consider what action is within SWT's powers to address the reasons for the under-use, and dissatisfaction of bus users with the current service and associated facilities in order to increase public transport use.

5. Next Steps/Work Plan

It was agreed to invite the relevant officers from the County Council and District to the next meeting.

6. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is proposed to be 1st October 2020.

The meeting closed at 6.22pm