

**DT11 TRANSPORT ACTION GROUP (TAG) - MEETING IN RESPONSE TO
DCC'S CUTS TO BUS SERVICES AND THE RURAL BUS SERVICE REVIEW**

**Notes and Action Points from a meeting held in the DT11 Forum office on
Monday 18th January 2016 at 4 pm.**

1. **Welcome**. Nic welcomed everyone to the meeting, and thanked DCC transport managers for attending to speak and respond in person.

a. **Present**. Nic Nicol (Chair), Julie Wigg (DT11 CREW), Amanda Evans (DCC Community Engagement Officer DT), Andy Shaw (DCC – Service Manager DT), Nigel Hodder (PING), Bobbie Church (Bryanston PC), Tim Christian (DCT), Ian Gray (DCT), Bob Crutchfield (Damory), Hugh De longh (NDDC), Pam Eaton (South Tarrants PC).

b. **Apologies**. – Erica Pretty (POPP), Margo Kirk (Bus2Go).

2. **Initial Response and Outcome**.

a. The Chairman began by saying how the man in the street sees DCC's last minute requirement to find substantial savings from sparse rural transport services in order to stay within budget and meet statutory requirements as appalling management. The least privileged and disadvantaged in isolated communities lose what to them are essential services, with the consequence of more rural deprivation, as a direct result of government incompetence. The bus companies require 2 month's notice to implement a change of service. For the cuts to be effective from 1st April, a Bus Services Review ending on 8th February is therefore a forgone conclusion - clearly the cuts are going to be made. He emphasised that the aim of the meeting is to jointly identify potential solutions.

b. The meeting came to the conclusion that flexible community bus services, where local champions identify a clear requirement and obtain committed users who ring in beforehand to use the service, appears to offer a very credible solution for many discretionary bus users. DCT's PlusBus pilot schemes run on this basis have been successful and should be funded to continue until April and beyond. Parish Councils have a key role to play to identify requirements, local champions and users. Services like Bus2Go require more resources to expand a highly valued community outing service. The expansion of car schemes depends on a resource of scarce volunteers, but schemes work very well in some areas. Bus company representatives highlighted the inequities of 'concessions' which pay only a percentage of the full fare to the company. Community bus and car services cannot offer concessionary fares.

c. DT11 has given out well over a hundred hard copies of the service review, with more requests coming in. Maximum effort is being made to get people who use the buses to complete the review

3. **X12 – Loss of Daily Service Between Blandford and Salisbury.**

a. School children in Sixpenny Handley and Pimperne will be affected by the cut. Though under used, the service provides key access to big city amenities in Salisbury, including hospitals, colleges, train station, major retail outlets, theatre, culture and other attractions.

b. Andy confirmed that its very unlikely the X12 will be saved, but this is a decision to be made by DCC's Cabinet once the results of the consultation are in. Only statutory requirements are certain to be met. The point of the survey is to prioritise the areas to concentrate Community Transport efforts. They have to save £500k; cutting the X12 gives a substantial saving. Passenger numbers are low north of Blandford. The consultation will help to establish what is discretionary and essential travel. He further stated that all discretionary services are under threat.

c. Amanda said that a community solution is the only way forward. There are 7 schemes available in the affected area and these schemes could give them more choice than a once a week bus. There is additional funding available to set up car schemes through POPP. Julie pointed out that although the availability of funding has been well advertised, no one seems interested in setting up community car schemes - volunteers cannot and should not be relied on to fill the gaps left by the removal of public services.

d. Andy suggested incorporating other community ideas such as 'virtual hitchhiking'. Hugh said this had been considered in the past but the issues of personal safety and insurance are real problems.

e. There was a discussion about the inequities of the 'concessions' system which does not reimburse the bus service provider with the full cost of the fare. Community schemes are not able to offer this facility.

f. Bus2Go provides an exemplary service in getting people out and about on social, recreational and tourist trips. Bus2Go pays to use DCT minibuses and drivers to take people on such trips which have become very popular. Greater resources would enable them to expand the service.

4. **325 – Loss of Thursday Only Service: Gussage St Andrew, Farnham, Chettle, Tarrant Hinton and Gunville, Stubhampton, Pimperne and Blandford.**

a. The additional loss of the 325 service leaves Pimperne without a bus service - but, ironically, with a new bus shelter and a bus depot. Nic read a short statement from the leader of Pimperne Parish Council deploring the cuts and insisting that an alternative be found to enable people, as an absolute minimum, to get into Blandford on a daily basis.

b. Bob said that Damory is looking at this and suggested that a service might be provided on an outward or return journeys to the depot in Pimperne. DCT's PlusBus scheme is also likely to be cost effective on this route.

c. The option of robbing Peter to Pay Paul was discussed. Andy said transferring savings was not an option; any saving made from a reduction to one service would go towards meeting the budget deficit, not into a service that was being cut elsewhere.

5. 320 – Loss of Friday Only Service: Tarrant valley, Ashley Wood, Shapwick and Wimborne.

- a. Pam suggested a community car scheme to replace the 320 service, but appreciated it's difficult to find people to volunteer, especially in her area where there are many elderly and many young people who are working, and therefore few potential active volunteers.
- b. Amanda suggested contacting Helen from NORDCAT.

6. PlusBus Pilots. Tim described the 4 x PlusBus pilots that started in November 2015 and are due to stop at the end January 2016. DCT's minibuses are used in the downtime between school runs, picking up between 9 and 10 am and returning midday. The concept is aimed at the areas in most need. Parish Councils have a key role here to identify requirements, provide a local champion who can identify users and get people to commit to using the service. Customers ring in the day before to use the service

- a. DCT has been running a scheme through the Tarrants which provides a door to door service for £5. Some people are put off by having to book. However, if this is the only option then people might get used to a new way of 'catching a bus'. Nigel suggested linking with community car schemes – this may help people get to the pick-up points. Tim thought this was a good idea.
- b. Tim pointed out that it can't provide more than one service on a given day and that it is dependent on users booking to use it. He has asked DCC for details of the feedback from the consultation as soon as possible to give them an opportunity to continue services, rather than there being a gap. Hugh asked Andy if DCC have any community funding they might be able to offer to DCT to continue pilot schemes until April 2016. Hugh also asked how much of the £25k community transport fund is still available. **Andy said he would investigate and report back.**
- c. DCT will launch a PlusBus service from Winterborne Kingston to Blandford thanks to a grant from the Hall and Woodhouse Community Chest.

7. 400 – Loss of Tuesday Only Service: Ashmore, Farnham, Tollards Royal and Salisbury. The 400 service route is another candidate for a PlusBus or alternative community scheme.

8. 317 – Partial Loss of Thursday Only Service: Stalbridge to Blandford Forum.

The 317 service is shown in the 'Routes Identified for Review' as losing connections in Stalbridge Weston, Stourton Caundle, Bishops Caundle, Lydlinch Droop, Woolland, Ibberton and Belchalwell. Paragraph 7 above applies.

9. Recommendations.

- a. Our first priority should be to encourage bus users to complete the survey. We must also make it clear to DCC, to our MP and local councillors at all levels, that cuts will impact on the most vulnerable people in rural areas, and those who use public transport to get to education, training or employment. There are clear limitations to the extent to which community car and bus schemes can replace public transport services.
- b. All agreed that the outcome of the review should be used to drive the delivery of discretionary services and to decide where priority should be given for the expansion of community schemes.

c. DCT's existing PlusBus pilots should be funded to continue at least until April. Where there is a clear requirement, additional pilots should be launched to replace services removed as a result of the cuts to public transport. Parish Councils should take a lead to encourage parishioners to join community based schemes.

d. It was acknowledged that DCC should give a much higher profile to promoting and funding community transport schemes.

10. AOB.

a. Hugh said different TAGS should be looked at to see how they do things (particularly as we're all facing the same problems) and asked if we can use PING to get an overview. **Nigel said he would investigate.** (PING: POPP Interactive Neighbour Car Group. The network provides a Good Practice /Networking opportunity for the POPP funded schemes. The group now encompasses any community car and Bus2Go scheme in the county.)

b. Hugh is in the process of arranging a meeting with other North Dorset TAGs.

11. **Date of Next Meeting.** The DT11 TAG will reconvene when the outcome of the survey and the extent of cuts has been decided. Nic thanked everyone for their contributions.

M Nicol

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