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Stalbridge Town Council Transport Report 2018

Not an easy year to be a Transport Representative. I have continued my close relationship with Sherborne Transport Action Group which aims to improve transport provision for the people of Sherborne and surrounding places. Through its excellent work I was put in touch with a representative of First Bus Time Tables. This proved useful until First Bus gave up its buses during the day and now only provides early morning and late buses to Yeovil and Wincanton.

However, the timetable we were provided with by First Bus and Damory in this period gave us many problems. Both companies tended to return from Yeovil at much the same time, arriving in Stalbridge within minutes of each other, the nothing for two hours. The real gems of this system were that it was only possible to get from Stalbridge to Templecombe by changing buses at Henstridge and waiting for 40 minutes for a connection, and buses took us from Stalbridge to Yeovil but at lunchtime only brought us back as far as Henstridge Ash. Many buses had few passengers as a result.

The Community Office organised a travel survey and replies made it clear that the bus provision we had did not meet our needs. However, by the time it came out its findings were academic; the time tables had been cut drastically to First Bus early and late and the customer friendly South West Coaches at two hour intervals during the day. We still have a reliable service to Blandford but direct services to Gillingham and Dorchester no longer exist. South West Coaches has now surrendered the contract for the X10, which is being retendered with effect from 24th June.

Details of Community Transport schemes are available from the Community Office. The covered bus stop at the Ring is not used and it is a long way for people in Thornhill Road to walk to Station Road or Jarvis Way to a bus stop.

The underlying anxiety for Stalbridge of course is that our purpose built surgery is expected to close later this year and many patients will have to rely on this thin bus service to get to neighbouring doctors’ practices.

Bus passes, started ten years ago, still continue, though some payment is required for travel before 9.30. Oliver Lewin the MP for West Dorset said he thought that changing the scheme would be a political `hot potato` but, all the same, he is pursuing the need for change with the Secretary of State.

As ever, Transport Representatives have firmly not been consulted over bus provision. I spent most of my working life in industry and bus transport is the only industry I have ever met where the requirements of the customers are not referred to or sought.

Rail Travel

Exeter – Waterloo line

The Community Office is always well stocked with time tables for this line. Local groups are trying hard to improve it, notably:

SERUG - Salisbury – Exeter Rail Users’ Group.

This organisation has secured support from the 10 MPs on this route which hopes to reinstate the double track between Dinton and Tisbury, cutting out delays, and also hopes to split or join trains at Yeovil Junction. This could increase capacity and promote new services.

Blackmore Vale Community Rail Partnership.

This organisation, opened last March, brings together local people and businesses covering stations between Crewkerne, Yeovil Junction, and Gillingham to promote this line and improve facilities.

South West Trains (SWR)

This railway which runs our Waterloo – Exeter line has had its dismal record of delays and unreliability discussed in Parliament.

It is to have a government funded probe into its performance, chaired by Sir Michael Holden, an expert in railway operation.

Conclusion

I can only hope that next year I shall have a more cheerful picture to paint for you.

Joy Rabbetts, Transport Representative to Stalbridge Town Council,

May 2018