

**Minutes of the Bus Meeting which took place in the Folk Hall of Portishead Town Council at
7:30pm on the 29th June**

Present :

Carl Nicholson North Somerset Council Integrated Transport Unit
Lee Murphy North Somerset Council Integrated Transport Unit
Chris Hanson Operations Director First Bus
Karen Nelson First Bus
Cllr Bob Bull Chairman

Plus members of the public & Councillors

Joe Beckley from Stagecoach did not show up.

The Chairman introduced the meeting. This was the 3rd meeting to discuss bus services for Portishead. There would be no formal presentations. It was hoped that NSC would talk about the new bus service plan and government subsidy received by NSC.

Carl Nicholson: NSC have received ~£105.5m of BSIP funding of which ~ £48m will be spent on capital interventions, e.g. bus lanes and ~£47m will be spent across WECA on fare reductions, improving frequency of buses etc. More details will follow. The award has not yet been confirmed so the sums of money are indicative. Hopefully confirmed by mid-Autumn. More details are available on the NSC website. He stated clearly that they aim to re-instate the bus service to Cribbs and on to Southmead. It will be supported. This won't happen until at least next Easter due to the shortage of drivers. They also want to increase the frequency of the X4. Other supporting services will be reviewed. They are seeing post-pandemic growth, both the 57 & 59 are doing well.

Alastair Smith: asked to explain the funding, total or per year? £48m for capital sounded a lot.

Carl Nicholson: The timescale is 3 years from initial award, so 2½ years from now, at the end of which services should be sustainable as they will be more reliable. Problem of cancelling buses caused by lack of drivers.

Lee Murphy: They must provide a fully sustainable service. He confirmed that the Cribbs service is part of the current plan.

Chris Hanson: Their biggest challenge is driver shortage. The current industrial dispute is settled after awarding a 14% pay increase. They are trying to recruit, including women, but the average pay is £27K, less than a lorry driver. Currently 160 drivers short. Are using some agency staff, but it's not very satisfactory. Immediate plans are to improve the reliability of the X5, and the X4 by separating the connection between the X4 and X1 (the X4 becomes the X1 in Weston, so one depended on the other being on time). They have 27 brand new vehicles, reliability of the X4 is improving and they are going to launch a tap-on/tap-off fare system which will automatically charge the best fare. Any contactless debit or credit card can be used. In answer to an online question about problems with buses to Weston College in the morning, this is still on the agenda and he is having talks with Weston College.

Heather Toms: Delighted with the news about the Cribbs service, would like to be involved in any discussions about the route.

Chris Hanson, Lee Murphy & Carl Nicholson expanded on the Cribbs route – there were limitations to possible routes as longer routes needed more buses, people must use it if it is to survive, it will

probably start in Portishead and not Clevedon as there are less likely to be delays if it minimises use of the motorway, it will probably only be on the motorway to cross the bridge, so Jn 18- 19 only. It may go through Lawrence Weston or Avonmouth, not decided. If people want to use the service from Clevedon there is a fast service from Portishead to Clevedon & then change. There may be a hub at Sainsbury's but looking at alternatives with more facilities e.g. bike storage. The bulk of interchange in Portishead is around Combe Road.

David Cook : The bus service is not as good as pre-covid. Why do 2 buses leave Portishead at the same time?

Joint responses: Perhaps one is late. The primary purpose of the X5 is to service Weston College, so it might not be well timed for Portishead. The X5 has to be coordinated with the X2. Having to change buses is a national strategy.

Heather Toms: Questioned why only one bus from the top to the bottom of Portishead. Children need to get on the X4 then wait for the X5 to take them to Gordano School. A long walk with narrow pavements.

Carl Nicholson: the bus from the top to the bottom takes them well within the statutory 2 miles walking distance from the school.

Bob Bull: There is an ongoing programme to improve the safety of pedestrians in the High Street and Clevedon Road.

Sandra Dennis: Lives in the marina area. Although thanking NSC for subsidising the 57, will it continue to be only every 2 hours? She uses it as often as possible to try to ensure it keeps going. They are very reliable, but if only going to collect your pension, having to wait for nearly two hours to get back is not very satisfactory

Lee Murphy: Would have preferred an hourly service, but it is not fully funded. Hoping for a 90 minute service on one route and 2 hours on the other. Hoping to move to hourly. The timing is dependent on the availability of drivers, so may not be until after December.

Lisa Screen: Questioned the No 56 from Clevedon to Portishead. Started in June 2021 when we lost the 88. It is not advertised, no timetable has been published even though lots of people would like to use it. Nobody knew about it which is why it hasn't been used. It could have been profitable.

Carl Nicholson: It has been de-registered so is now free until it ceases. There was not enough demand. May have to revert to Community transport to provide a bus to Walton Bay.

Paul Gardner: If it's not advertised you can't expect people to use it if no-one knows about it. It's no wonder it's being withdrawn.

Carl Nicholson: Explained that it has to be a smaller bus for the route, a 12 seater max and even if it was full, it still wouldn't have made money.

Bob Cartwright: Brought up a number of issues. There are a lot of bus stops in Portishead that are no longer used, which is very confusing. Please put a sticker on those that are redundant. Why has the bus stop next to the Albion outside someone's bedroom window not been moved?

Carl Nicholson : It's temporary and they used a second hand sign. They re-use everything they can, but sometimes even if they look OK they're not re-usable. They have a very small maintenance budget.

Bob Cartwright: What does 'no stopping except local buses' mean?

Carl Nicholson: it is a legal requirement to stop cars stopping at bus stops.

Bob Cartwright: It is difficult to see which buses go from which stops until you get up close.

Lee Murphy: They have started to improve the signage but had to stop because of timetable changes & lots of repairs needed for bus signs due to vandalism etc.

Bob Cartwright: Why is there so much advertising for McDonalds at bus stops?

Carl Nicholson: The old agreement was that firms got free advertising if they maintained the bus shelter. The new agreement will mean that advertisers' revenue will be used for maintenance.

Bb Cartwright: Made the case for buying electric vehicles.

Lee Murphy: The problem with electric buses is their range. Currently only 140 miles but need 180, so need two buses, and much more expensive to buy. The 57 and 59 would need to be a minimum of 35 seats as the buses are used for school runs as well.

Tanya Slatter: There is a problem for students getting from the top of Portishead to Weston College. They are now having to get 4 buses per day which is too expensive.

Carl Nicholson: They are talking to Weston College about providing a discount. Weston College have subsidised student's bus fares in the past, & that may be re-introduced. Re-iterated that the X5 runs at a loss. It needs to be marketed better. He asked Portishead Town Council to publicise the X5 as it has not got a clear future

Heather Toms: Asked for the bus stop opposite to Parish Wharf to be fitted with electronic signage, and for timetable to be fitted lower.

Carl Nicholson: This will be done as part of BSIP.

Stuart Pickles: Will the team of 5 at NSC be expanded when they receive all this money? Five people to fix new timetables to 1200 bus stops is not enough.

Carl Nicholson: Not until the funding is guaranteed, probably in October. But it will become easier once the timetables become stable. They could share resources with WECA.

The Chairman ended the meeting thanking the Bus Company and NSC for their attendance and positive comments about future potential services.

The next meeting will be held in TBC