

PURBECK COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP STAKEHOLDER GROUP AND AGM MEETING

HELD BOTH IN PERSON AND VIRTUALLY VIA TEAMS

ON 22 OCTOBER 2024



Present:

Mike Whitwam (MWm - Chairperson), Cllr Beryl Ezzard of Dorset Council, Wareham Town Council, and Friends of Wareham Railway Station (BE - vice Chairperson), Steven Booth (SB - Community Rail Officer), Mick Stone (MS - Secretary) of Swanage Railway, Jenni Jones of Community Rail Network (JJ), Alex Brocklesby of National Trust (AB), Paula Aldridge of South Western Railway (PA), David Budd (DB) of Wareham Town Council, and Cllr Andy Hadley of BC&P Council (AH).

Apologies: Andrew Ardley of South Western Railway (AA), Jaime Rockhill (JR) of Network Rail, Frank Roberts of Swanage Railway (FER) Claire Wood of First South Buses (CW), Nick Ward of Purbeck Transport Action Group (NW), Emma Scott of Dorchester Town Council (ES), Cllr Derek Beer of Dorset Council (DB).

Agenda Item 1 - Chairperson's Welcome, Introductions, & Opening Remarks

MWm welcomed all to the meeting and introductions were made for this hybrid meeting. SB was thanked for his efforts in enabling the meeting to take place at a new venue. MWm went on to explain that, unfortunately, due to a hospital appointment, FER was unable to attend, but had written a brief report which the Chair would introduce on Swanage Railway's behalf.

Agenda Item 2 - Notes of the Stakeholder Group Meeting held on 17th April 2024

There were no questions or points of accuracy.

Agenda Item 3 - Funding Report

SB advised that core funding had been received for the current financial year from both SWR and DC. Applications had been made to both SWR CCIF and CRDF in the current financial year, as well as other SWR funds. The CRDF application in respect of landscaping works at Wareham had been successful.

Work was progressing on a three year Business Plan, which would enable applications to other funding sources to proceed in due course and longer term strategic goals.

BE had a specific question about water butts at stations and funding for them. PA advised that she was still awaiting the go ahead for these and apologised for the time it was taking. Butts had been approved in principle, though. At this point PA advised that CCIF funding would be available for 2025/26. The formal announcement was expected in November.

Agenda Item 4 - CRO's Report

SB had prepared a report which was tabled at the meeting. He initially showed the Dorchester video, in particular aimed at those stakeholders who had not seen this before. The video had been nominated for and won an award (Best Communication and Education Award) at the recent SWR conference at Woking.

SB highlighted the very successful first Try The Train event, run in conjunction with SWR, and Volunteer Centre for Dorset and Muntsey's Community Based Learning and Activity Centre in Portland. He explained that he wanted to do more of these events. AB was impressed by this event and asked for more detail of how it worked. She knew 4 or 5 organisations who would welcome the opportunity to take part in any future event. PA cautioned that SWR had a limited number of Community Ambassadors who could enable such events. She thought that PCRPP might be able to organise 2 x such events per annum.

SB went on to talk about the meeting which had been held the day before about local bus services in Purbeck in 2025/26. The meeting had involved local stakeholders, including PTAG and DCT. SB noted the difficulty in getting sustained year-to-year funding - it really needed a longer term funding settlement. In 2025/26 the local bus service would be called 'Purbeck Shuttle 200'. BE underlined the need for funders to step forward, and asked about the possibility of BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan) funding in the future. JA advised that this was not currently available to DC. He asked whether enough had been made of the 'SpringWatch' series when publicising the 2RN service in 2024.

SB continued by referring to the event at Corfe Castle station during Community Rail Week in May, attended by South Wessex CRP as well. This was to promote the work that community rail do, volunteering and highlighting SR events.

News was awaited on the application to the CRDF for a 'parklet' for Beryl Bikes at Dorchester South. This prompted a discussion about other Beryl Bike issues, including in the BC&P area. AH relayed their own experiences and compared notes with AB about experiences at Studland. (Post meeting note: the parklet application has been successful).

SB was keen to progress artwork vinyls on station waiting shelters, and pointed out that there were opportunities at Wool and Dorchester South in this regard. Stations in the area had been successful in the Stations in Bloom awards.

Finally, SB said that we would be sending round a list of projects being considered for going forward, for stakeholders' comments.

5 Swanage Railway Presentation

MWm repeated the explanation for FER's absence ie that he had to attend a much-delayed hospital appointment that afternoon. The written report provided by FER included a request for guidance on what type of Swanage to Wareham service Stakeholders expected in future years, when funding became available. Was it to be primarily aimed at tourism, or was it to be for commuter etc traffic? This question prompted much discussion. The Dorset Council representatives present (JA, BE, and KF) all underlined that the purpose of DCC and PDC providing the capital funding for the resignalling project ten years earlier was to enable a commuter type service, not just for tourists. AB also expressed the view that a commuter service was needed locally for children and young people in particular to get from Swanage to the Conurbation and vice versa, transport being the number one barrier for them. The view was expressed that a two tier fare pricing strategy might be needed to reflect the needs of local people. BE asked if BC&P might also be able to help with funding in due course, as well as other parties. MS explained that the previous Government's Restore Your Railway scheme, to which Swanage Railway had applied, had now been cancelled. Whether the present Government might introduce a future scheme along those lines was not yet clear, but MS warned that they must not be allowed to lose sight of the scheme, hence visits by the 2 x new MPs for the area had been arranged, to brief them. MWm added that he thought that costs could be reduced by SR forming its own Train Operating Company. AH added his own thoughts on the difficulties faced by students at Poole's colleges in getting there from the Purbeck area. Indeed, he advised that he had been part of earlier proposals for a rapid transport scheme in the area 25 years ago. He talked about the Dorset Metro proposal, which Western Gateway was progressing with Network Rail. The level crossings at Wareham and Poole were key barriers to be overcome.

PA asked about proposals for joint ticketing in 2025. AH pointed out that City Cruises had now changed hands and was Coastal Cruises. RW explained about the difficulties MoreBus had had in 2024 with the recognising of the QR code, and this would not be allowed to happen in 2025. Indeed, RW expected MoreBus to issue the tickets themselves in 2025. RW went on to ask about the possible inclusion of SWR in the 2025 joint ticket offer. The problem perceived was that this might make the basic ticket price too expensive - perhaps SWR could be an add-on, rather than a direct participant?

Updates from Stakeholders

MoreBus - RW advised that the recent order by Go Ahead Group for electric buses did not unfortunately include any for local area. There was a need for improvements in the local charging infrastructure; lessons would be learnt from operation of electric buses in Salisbury and the Isle of Wight. MWm asked about the potential for hydrogen buses - RW thought re-fuelling would be an issue. MWm had asked Perenco if they might be able to provide fuel, but unfortunately not. RW continued by referring to the £2 bus fare cap, which was widely expected to be increased at the forthcoming budget. Who knew what the impact might be? MoreBus had made an objection to the Ferry Company proposals for increased charges and would be working with like-minded partners going forward on the issue.

Dorset Council - JA thanked PCRp for insights into how it works in partnership. He was keen on the interchange of knowledge and expertise between stakeholders. He re-iterated his support for Swanage to Wareham services aimed at commuters and tourists. He had very limited transport funds at present and, like others, had no idea what the outcome of the Budget might be for DC. He had a meeting with Western Gateway coming up shortly, which would give him further insight into sub-regional thinking on transport issues.

Purbeck TAG - TS advised that PTAG was continuing to input to local and regional consultations wherever it could, including on speed limits on village roads and the bid for electric buses. Most recently, the Group had been working on 'Quick wins' for DC's transport policy. As far as the Friends of Wool are concerned, there is disappointment that the funding for the Beryl Bikes would soon lapse. More positive was the 'bus' design planter supplied by MoreBus which had been very eye-catching and would hopefully re-appear in 2025. A new footbridge was to be supplied by NR before very long.

National Trust - AB talked about the Masterplan Consultation for Studland and the next 50 years. This included consideration of transport within the Purbeck area and access to it. Also, nature recovery. A local bus service, taking in Durlston and Kimmeridge, was being discussed, for inclusion in the Rural Mobility Pilot when that came forward. A Business Plan for development of Purbeck Park was also under consideration. She expressed concern that initiatives for integrated sustainable transport links established during 2023 were not progressed during 2024. This was purely down to lack of funding. AB was keen to work with both PTAG and PCRp to develop these proposals.

SWR - PA thanked SB for his efforts over the last year, and also to the station adoption groups at Wareham and Wool. Their enthusiasm and participation was very important to SWR. The Woking CR conference had been well attended, and this was shortly to be followed by the SWR Stakeholder Conference in the second half of November. The current SWR contract expires in May 2025, but the CR core funding is in place in SWR's Business Plan with DfT. However, PCRp like other CRPs should ensure they have other funding in place going forward. She hoped Project funding would also be available in 2025/26. SB pointed out that his employment contract was one year only, and that it might be helpful if a multi-year deal could be offered in future.

CRN - JJ gave a full report on the latest news and information from a CRN perspective. Especially important to note was the new Value of Community Rail report which had as its headline that CR is worth nearly £18 in value for every £1 invested in it. There was still funding available in CRDF and Small Grants funds, so hoped stakeholders would get their bids in. CRN's link with the Scouts was worth investigating to see what could happen locally.

Friends of Wareham - the very recent addition of signs at Wareham warning of the dangers of trespass on the railway was very much welcomed. She was pleased to say that the Friends had won an 'Outstanding' award at Stations in Bloom. She reminded the meeting that the Purbeck Shuttle 200 proposal needed help and support, and finished by commending the station staff at Wareham, who were making a big difference in terms of a welcome to customers.

BC&P Council - AH said that his Council was with PCRCP in spirit. Local bus patronage seemed to be 'bucking the national trend'. Beryl Bikes and scooters were helping with non-car usage. The Dorset Metro was a key longer-term scheme. Finally, he mentioned the progress with the Cordite Way footpath at Holton Heath.

Network Rail - JW thanked BE for her support for the new signage at Wareham. He referred to a meeting which the Wessex Route Director had recently had with SR and that some positive outcomes might arise. NR and SWR were working together with proposals for Railway 200, as was SR. The new shadow GBR was starting up. SB referred to the new Dorchester Stations (South and West) Strategic Plan now being in place. NOTE - the meeting concluded at 16.00hrs and some items on the agenda were not specifically covered.

Date of Next Stakeholder Group Meeting and AGM - to be advised

MS - 30 October 2024 V2

ENDS

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