

Public and Community Transport in the Wellington and Wiveliscombe LCN Area

Ideas for potential improvements and new service provision

The following are ideas prepared by a working group set-up by the Wellington and Wiveliscombe Local Community Network. The working group is chaired by a Somerset Councillor and involves representatives from town and parish councils and local Bus User Groups.

Somerset Council and First Bus/Buses of Somerset managers are invited to provide feedback on these ideas from their perspective, including on the practicality and constraints or opportunities for the adoption of these ideas.

Split current 25 route

First to provide the 25 route between Taunton and Wiveliscombe only, using standard full-size buses as at present; alongside the council expanding use of the college student minibus for Dulverton (X26), so that it provides a complementary service between Wellington and Dulverton.

This should allow a better service frequency on the 25, including to remove gaps in the timetable that were introduced in April 2024* that have adversely altered the route for many users. The proposed minibus route would provide a more suited bus size for services between Dulverton and Wiveliscombe. It would also allow the restoration of services between Wiveliscombe and Wellington, for which demand has been shown by local surveys. This could also provide connections for local parishes to a new Wellington railway station.

It is thought important to maintain the current college service for Dulverton students (X26) and other services currently provided for Dulverton, although the low numbers using these between Wiveliscombe and Dulverton need to be noted.

Suggested timetables for these services are provided (see separate file), which show what we believe could be possible. These envisage that the 25 service would operate on a commercial basis with no council subsidy or at much lower levels than at present if still needed. The removal or reduction of subsidy on the 25 route (operating between Wiveliscombe and Taunton) would allow current subsidy to be provided to an expanded minibus service, providing socially necessary transport between Dulverton and Wellington via Wiveliscombe, with connections to Taunton too (via the retained 25 at Wiveliscombe or the 22 at Wellington, as well as maintaining the direct college service between Dulverton and Taunton).

As noted on the suggested timetable, an additional service may be required to provide sufficiently comprehensive bus times between Wellington and Dulverton in the late afternoon, which may be possible through a school transport provider operating in the area.

School transport buses

Operators of school transport buses be asked to trial a service from Wiveliscombe area parishes to Wellington, initially on 1 or 2 days a week. Our preference would be to provide this service by

* The timetable gaps causing most difficulty for those wishing to use the 25 at these times are the loss of the 9:30 service from Wiveliscombe and stops on to Taunton and the loss of a return service from Taunton at around 4pm. Bus users would also like to see an early evening return service provided from Taunton, such as around 6:45pm.

splitting the current 25 route, as suggested above. However, this idea could enhance a council minibus service between Wellington and Dulverton or provide an initial trial, even if only on part of the route, such as between Wellington and Wiveliscombe.

Times and stops suggested are:

- 9 or 9:30 departure (after school run) with a return leaving 11:30, and then departing again at 13:30 with return 17:00 (so either side of school transport times).
- Stops at Wiveliscombe, possibly at Halse and Fitzhead, and at Croford, Milverton, Spring Grove, Langford Budville and Wellington.

Other options might involve:

- Providing a service for communities on return journeys after school runs, with a return service back provided before the school pick up in the afternoon.
- Offering a service for parishes around Wellington and Wiveliscombe that feeds into both towns (with return), including to encourage and allow connections to the 22 and 25 bus routes.

Wivey Link

Promote the Wivey Link community service alongside Slinky. Also explore any potential for increasing efficiency, including through joint planning or working, or enhancing services.

Somerset's core bus network

Include the 25 route in Somerset's core bus network for transport planning, along with a timetable providing services between 7am to 7pm.

OTHER QUESTIONS

1) Somerset Council - Can contacts please be provided for school bus providers in the Wellington and Wiveliscombe LCN area, including Kingsmead School, to allow the working group to enquire about ideas above with them.

2) Somerset Council and First - Can detailed passenger statistics be provided on the use of the 25 route, including on stop use at times throughout the day and on all days of the week.

3) Somerset Council - Would Somerset Council consider providing a student bus service between Wiveliscombe and Taunton colleges? What might be the main implications, including for the 25 bus route and could it be funded, maybe with contributions from the colleges. Would it be better for students to be served by a dedicated and more reliable minibus service or could the 25 be good enough?

NOTES ON SUGGESTED TIMETABLES FOR SPLITTING 25 ROUTE

The approach adopted to developing the suggested timetables has been:

- A) Aim to be close to existing resources (vehicles and drivers) used on the 25 route and for the separate college transport provided from Dulverton, while also noting that a reduction in the

current Somerset Council subsidy could be needed from April 2025 (as part of the current subsidy only runs to March).

- B) The current 25 route and services are split, so that full-size buses only operate (by First) between Taunton and Wiveliscombe.
- C) A minibus service (possibly operated by Somerset Council) runs between Dulverton and Wiveliscombe and on to Wellington. We envisage this being the minibus currently used for college transport from Dulverton to Taunton, which also now takes other passengers too. The suggested timetable is integrated with the timings of the college services, which are retained.
- D) It should be possible to use a single full-size bus on the revised 25 timetable and a single minibus service provided alongside, which allows both to run on a continuous loop throughout the day (although driver changes on both are expected to be needed).
- E) To allow complete loops on the minibus to fit between the college runs, a little time is saved by using a stop on the outskirts of Bampton (instead of the war memorial), which requires a short walk into the centre.
- F) At the start and end of the day, the 25 bus will need to go on to Waterrow and Bampton, as these are missed by the college services at these times. At Bampton, the 25 can turn, as at present, at the war memorial stop.
- G) Outward and return timetables are suggested for Mondays to Fridays. Ideally, the same timetable would be provided on Saturday (and Sunday too). If this is not possible and it's noted there is no current college minibus service on Saturday, then a reduced 25 timetable may be needed on Saturday and possibly for this to extend to Dulverton, if a complementary minibus service could not be provided on Saturdays. This would also mean no service to Wellington that day. If so, this might be considered in future, once the service is proven during the week.
- H) Somerset Council's bus subsidy on the current 25 route would be mainly used to support the minibus service between Dulverton and Wellington, which also allows connections to Taunton (via either Wiveliscombe or Wellington).
- I) The suggested timetables may need to be further adjusted to allow better efficiency and provide better well-timed services.
- J) The minibus service and timings should work well for those travelling from Wellington to Wiveliscombe and Dulverton, especially for those travelling in the morning or early afternoon and retuning during the afternoon; but the suggested timetable does not work so well for those travelling towards Wellington, when the first service gets to Wellington at 11:30 and the only return afterwards leaves at 14:00. Therefore, another minibus would be needed to provide a return service later in the afternoon (when the service minibus is transporting college students and other passengers direct to Dulverton from Taunton). This may be an opportunity for a school bus transport provider in the area, after completing their school run, or, possibly, Slinky could be used to provide a further return option (maybe just on some days, but ideally throughout the week). Ridlers might be a good option as they are based in Dulverton, where the return bus would complete its run.
- K) If demand is established for the services between Wiveliscombe and Wellington, it may be possible to make further improvements in future.