

Demand Responsive Transport Q&A

The Chew Valley Area Forum, Climate & Nature Emergency, Sustainable Transport Group (CVAF C&NEWG) have been working with B&NES & WECA for the last 2 years to try to get improvements to bus services in the Chew Valley and we are now having weekly joint meetings with transport planners in B&NES/WECA to help ensure that local people get the maximum support in transitioning to new services. Below is our best effort to give clear information about the emerging situation with bus changes. We hope this helps people understand why we are where we are now. We will update it as things evolve.

What is Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) and how will it work

More will emerge about how DRT will operate in the Chew Valley but for now, if you know about Uber, think something like Uber Share or a shared taxi but with fixed pick up points and with the aim to connect you to existing bus services for the bulk of your journey rather than taking you the whole way.

You would order a lift by phone, app or website, at least an hour ahead of when you need it, and it takes you from your local bus stop or possibly a new 'virtual' stop (by a local church, or other landmark if there is no bus stop in your area) to the nearest viable bus service for your onward journey.

This is likely to be the 376 on the A37/39 in most cases, linking people to Bristol and Wells or to services that run to Bath, Keynsham or other towns.

If there is no viable linking route, DRT will take you to the nearest bus stop to your destination. For instance if you live in Bishop Sutton and want to go to Chew Magna, it would take you from one to the other.

You are likely to share the lift with others going a similar way, and you will pay a public transport fee for the service.

Is DRT a permanent service now or a trial?

DRT is funded by Bus Service Improvement Plan funding and this is for 2 years from 3rd April. The service needs to become commercially viable within this time in order to be considered for future funding beyond this. **We MUST use it in every community to make it commercially viable within 2 years, or there will be NO public transport in the Chew Valley.**

The virtual platform also gathers information cumulatively across time, that will be used to consider what services will be needed in 2 years time when the funding for this trial ends. **If your community doesn't use it the system will assume there is no public transport need in your Parish.**

Why is Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) being introduced?

The WECA Mayor and the Leader of North Somerset Council made a successful bid to the government's Bus Service Improvement Plan fund, which gives money for new and innovative bus provision. It cannot be used to maintain existing routes or to set up replacement routes that

are essentially the same as previous routes. WECA has been researching DRT for some time and watching closely its successful use in Europe and in the UK. WECA is convinced that this new way of running public services will be more effective, particularly in rural areas, at getting people on to buses with both financial and environmental benefits.

Can you tell me how the DRT app and website works?

The DRT services across the WECA region will be served by the same IT platform and app. That means you will be able to plan journeys across the whole region. It will also include all the information about fixed route services so that you can plan a journey to include a mixture of DRT (order a lift) and fixed route services.

Once you have planned your journey and ordered your lift (at least an hour ahead) you will be able to track the progress of the DRT vehicle to your nearest bus stop using the app.

What if I am not on the internet and don't have a smartphone?

Although most people will probably want to use the app on their smartphone if they have one, the service will also have a back office call centre that you can ring to plan and book your journey. The only drawback of this is that you will then not be able to follow the real-time progress of the vehicle towards your stop, but you will be given an expected time of arrival that is accurate at the time when you book.

How far in advance can I book my journey?

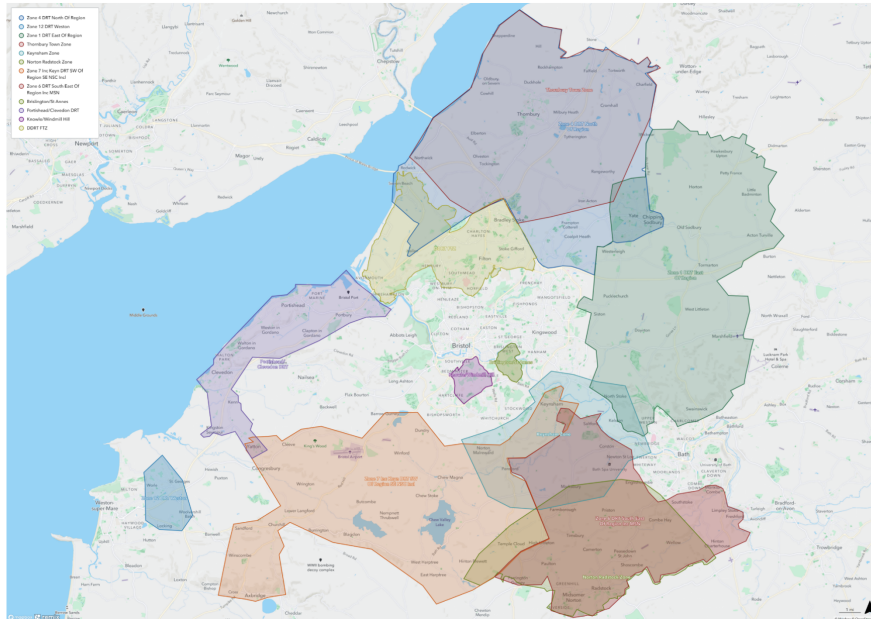
The exact information about this will be released later, but the contract with WECA means you will have to book at least an hour ahead, and if you do the service is required to deliver.

What area does DRT cover?

WECA is rolling out DRT across rural areas across most of the rural areas in Bristol, B&NES, South Gloucestershire and North Somerset.

The Chew Valley area falls mainly into Zone 7 (light orange) on the map but there are also overlaps with the Keynsham zone (blue), the East of region Midsomer Norton Zone (red) and

the Norton Radstock Zone (green).



Who is running the DRT service?

The service provision will vary by region. Although the provider for the Chew Valley (Orange) Zone 7 has been decided this information is not in the public domain yet as precise contracts need to be put in place. We will update this once we are able

What vehicles are being used for the DRT service?

The company providing the service has agreed to a minimum of x3, 16 seater minibuses to operate across Zone 7 (the Orange area within which Chew Valley falls). However, they can choose to employ different vehicles (larger or smaller) if they choose, provided they meet the requirements of their contract to provide a lift from stop to stop which has been booked at least an hour ahead.

Will DRT wait for you to make an onward bus connection or for your bus connection to arrive at the DRT pick up?

There will be a short stay at a stop to wait for you to arrive or if you are on a scheduled service that is running a few minutes late, but drivers will not be able to wait for long if they have other pick up scheduled. This will be one of the challenges of the system that bus operators and DRT operators and WECA will be working hard to make work. Improving the reliability of buses on bus corridors such as the A37/9 is one of the active intentions of all providers in this scheme.

Does DRT have any predictable routes?

Initially there will not be any predictable routes but as people start to use the system its virtual platform records usage and builds a picture of when and where vehicles are most commonly

taken. So in time it may fall into regular routes for school runs for 6th formers, for instance and remain much more random at other times. This is a good reason to use DRT for regular journeys.

How do we know this system will work?

We won't know until we try it. As with any new system there are bound to be teething problems in the first month or so, and our group will be collecting data about successful and unsuccessful journeys so that we can ensure WECA is aware.

Part of the rationale of keeping the 672 operational until June is to allow for some initial glitches.

Because it is a virtual platform it can also gather data that will help the service provider to fine tune their offer over time. This is one reason why it is really important to take the plunge and use the service, so that it knows there is demand in your area and it picks up on pinch point issues..

DRT is already working in other rural areas in the UK (the Highlands of Scotland, the Welsh valleys, semi-rural Cambridgeshire for example.) The app that is being used is also tried and tested in other areas, and data for the WECA region is already being fed into the system.

What happens if the system doesn't work?

CVAF C&NEWG will be gathering data about problems with specific booking and passing these to B&NES & WECA on a regular basis.

You can email jch.221@gmail.com or phone 07900 641 839. Please note this will be simply to gather data, we will not be able to problem-solve the issue in real time.

In the short term WECA will fine the service provider for not keeping to the agreed contract. This is a powerful incentive for the company to get the offer right.

In the longer term, if it has not become profitable within 2 years it is likely to be withdrawn. This could leave the Chew Valley with no public transport services. So we need to make it work!

CVAF C&NE Sustainable Transport Working Group

This information was accurate on 26/1/23

More up to date information can be found here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/858992922045608>