

Brighton Area Buswatch

Representing local bus users



Part of Bus Users UK

Buswatch News – May 2014

Crazy Paving in Queens Road!



Queens Road



Western Road

The left photo shows the new pavement 'tree beds' at the top of Queens Road outside the Ibis Hotel, installed as part of the Brighton Station Gateway scheme. Brighton Area Buswatch was involved in planning this scheme along with Brighton & Hove Buses. One of the main objectives was to increase the pedestrian space by narrowing the road width. However these tree beds (which were not discussed in planning meetings) use all the extra pavement space to create an obstruction! The contrasting photo taken in Western Road shows how little space trees need.

The tree beds are positioned where terminating buses set down passengers, very close to the pavement edge. Bus drivers will have to open their doors in the middle of the road if they can't park between the tree beds. This will disrupt traffic and disabled users, parents with buggies and elderly passengers will find it difficult or impossible to step off buses.

We are told the tree beds had to be raised above pavement level because of obstructions beneath, but the surrounding bricks are the same grey colour so they have already become a trip hazard for pedestrians. The temporary barriers are there to prevent further accidents. Smaller square shaped tree beds have now appeared on the opposite side of the road but these are surrounded by loading bays and cycle racks so they make much more sense.

A tree lined boulevard is a lovely idea but these large tree beds are inappropriate. We urge Brighton & Hove City Council to reconsider them while the contractor is still on site. Then the pavements can be widened for pedestrians and bus users as originally envisaged.

Fares news – The Discovery ticket has arrived

First some really good news – A new one day 'Discovery' ticket has been launched to replace the Explorer ticket. It is valid on all local bus operators, including Stagecoach, for a fixed adult fare of £8.50 or £12.50 for a family ticket covering up to two adults and three children. This should overcome the problem of Explorer tickets being sold at different prices by each bus company and not being valid on Stagecoach South buses. In the meantime some Stagecoach fares were increased on 27 April.

Sadly there appears to be no progress towards acceptance of Key Cards on supported bus services operated by Compass Bus and The Big Lemon in the Brighton area. Brighton & Hove Buses has developed the smartcard technology and is willing to make the system available to other operators. It is now down to Brighton & Hove City Council to implement. The Council gave a commitment to introduce this facility two years ago and the delay is unacceptable.

Art Fare on Brighton & Hove Buses

Brighton & Hove Buses has been working with students from the University of Brighton and together they have launched Art Fare, an exhibition of art on buses during the Brighton Festival Fringe. A number of buses, including most bendy buses on route 25 have been decorated with artwork by students. These include photos, spoof notices, front window displays, and decorations with balloons and cushions. Look out for Phoebe, a travelling angel who has been entertaining passengers on buses between Brighton and Newhaven.

Burgess Hill bus users surgery on 28 May.

Sussexbus.com is arranging a bus users surgery to enable passengers to ask questions about their buses and find out information about the services available. It is being held by the bus stops in Church Road between 7.30am and 6pm on Wednesday 28 May. Compass Bus and Metrobus have been invited and a representative from Brighton Area Buswatch will be in attendance during the afternoon, so come along and say hello.

Bus Users UK AGM in Edinburgh

The annual meeting with our parent group was held in Edinburgh on 17 May. Lothian Buses which runs most local buses and gave an excellent presentation to our meeting. They kindly supplied delegates with free Day tickets so I was able to travel around the city the day before the meeting. The population of Edinburgh is around twice that of Brighton & Hove yet Lothian Buses have the cheapest city wide fares in the UK with a flat fare of £1.50 and a day ticket costing £3.50. The company is owned by Edinburgh City Council and three neighbouring councils. Despite low fares it has just announced record profits for its owners and passenger numbers are at a 25 year high.

There are there are several similarities with Brighton & Hove Buses. Both are award winning companies which run frequent services with smart, modern buses. There is plenty of information available about services and tickets, including smartcards and M tickets. Many bus stops have real time displays although I didn't find them as clear to read as our local signs. Some of our members expressed dissatisfaction with the exact fare (no change) system but it certainly reduces delays at bus stops, helped by the well advertised and very simple fares structure.

A long awaited tram service is being introduced on 31 May, several years late. It was rather frustrating to see lots of shiny new trams on test without being able to travel on them!

A trip on Stagecoach Coastliner service 700 service to Southsea

As reported last month, the Coastliner service was revised from 4 May. Buses from Brighton no longer run through to Portsmouth and Southsea. A change of buses is required at Littlehampton and again at Chichester, while those travelling through Portsmouth will have to change again to reach Southsea where the Clarence Pier terminus is no longer served.

One week before the change I decided to take the plunge and travel all the way from Brighton to Southsea, a journey of over four hours. My bus turned up on time, having left Old Steine at 1005. Fortunately it was double decker so I made my way upstairs to the front seat for a grand view. The journey towards Worthing was fairly uneventful but it was a sunny Saturday morning and there were some fine sea views through Hove and between Lancing and Worthing. We picked up quite a few passengers on the way and I noticed buses towards Brighton were particularly busy. At Worthing our drivers changed over and after a few minutes we were on our way again through suburban Worthing and on to Goring and Rustington. Our progress was slow but punctual. Compass Bus is campaigning against the introduction of 20mph speed limits in Worthing. With frequent stops and heavy traffic I would say most of my journey through Worthing was within that limit anyway.

One aspect particularly noticeable to me throughout West Sussex was the absence of yellow bus stop markings and raised kerbs for wheelchair access. At many stops passengers had to step into the road between parked cars to hail the bus. This is hardly the way to attract new bus users, especially in an area with a high proportion of older people. Stagecoach has invested in modern fully accessible buses, which is commendable, but these are of little benefit if passengers can't get to the kerb.

Beyond Littlehampton the road opens up and the route becomes slightly more rural with some fine views over the countryside. There was large new housing development at Flansham Park which will get an improved service in future. Bognor Regis was busy with Saturday shoppers and quite a few boarded our bus to go to Chichester. By now we are inland, heading away from the coast. Chichester has a thriving market and it was here I cheated slightly by getting off the bus to stretch my legs (tip - the upstairs front seat isn't good for tall people!). I walked from the Market Place to Chichester Cathedral where I picked up the same bus ten minutes later! In that time it had gone down to the bus station and back up to the Cathedral in a U shape. I had planned a half hour break in Chichester but when I saw the same bus approaching the challenge of completing the journey all on one bus was too great. The front seats were taken but seats further back had much better legroom and ventilation. Soon we were approaching Hampshire, around three hours after leaving Brighton and not long after that the Spinnaker tower in Portsmouth became visible in the distance. The service has speeded up along faster roads as we headed into Havant where the bus took a short break at the bus station.

The 700 then continues to Hilsea and Portsmouth where our progress slowed again in the urban environment. In fact we crawled through the North End Shopping area but after that bus lanes helped us avoid queues on the main roads towards the City Centre. The Commercial Road shopping area looked uninspiring and in desperate need of investment so I stayed on the bus to The Hard Interchange. This area seems to have an identity crisis as the nearby shopping centre is called Gunwharf Quays and the adjoining rail station is called Portsmouth Harbour but the bus station is called The Hard Interchange! I presume there is a historical reason for this as Portsmouth buses have traditionally terminated here. Apparently the bus station is getting a complete facelift shortly.

The final leg of the journey to Southsea, Clarence Pier is one of the most scenic parts of the whole route with spectacular views across the Solent to the Isle of Wight, and a vast green open space. Sadly the 700 no longer goes to Clarence Pier and a further change of bus is needed in Portsmouth to reach it.

My bus was on time throughout and well driven by careful and courteous drivers. Nevertheless it is not hard to see why Stagecoach decided to split the route. The day before I made my journey central Brighton had been brought to a standstill due to the road subsidence on the seafront while the following day there was a large demonstration in Brighton creating serious disruption. Roadworks have plagued the service in recent years and made it extremely difficult to provide a reliable service over such a long route. Few people make long journeys and when services are frequent, changing buses at the same bus stop isn't difficult. I returned to Brighton by train which took one hour and twenty minutes – exactly three hours less than the bus.

Do you use the revised Coastliner service? If so we would be interested to hear your own experiences and we will raise issues at our next meeting with bus companies in July.

Next Meeting

The next meeting with bus companies and Brighton & Hove City Council will be on Wednesday 9 July at 5.30pm in Hove Town Hall. Meetings are open to all members and supporters but please let us know in advance if you wish to attend as space is limited.

Buswatch News is edited by Andrew Boag, Chair, Brighton Area Buswatch. We welcome your comments and suggestions. Printed copies of this newsletter are available from Hove town hall reception. The next issue is due in mid June 2014.

E mail: brightonbuswatch@gmail.com



Phone: 01273 323075

brightonbuswatch.org



Brighton Area Buswatch is part of Bus Users UK bususers.org