

Brighton Area Buswatch



We are a branch of Bus Users, the national charity representing bus passengers

Buswatch News – December 2020

Season's Greetings from Brighton Area Buswatch



A deserted North Street is the setting for this photo taken on the last day of Lockdown with one of Brighton & Hove Buses latest extended range hybrids on its way to Whitehawk on route 1. There are now 54 of these buses operating in electric mode through the low emission zone in North Street and Western Road. B&H is intending to extend the range of these buses to reach St James's Street and the Royal Sussex Hospital in zero emission mode. Similar buses on route 5 should also be running in electric mode through Valley Gardens and the London Road shopping area very soon.

Emissions in North Street and around the clock tower junction have been falling since 2015. This corresponds with the introduction of the first batch of buses that meet Euro VI emission standards, which reduce Nitrogen Dioxide levels by up to 90% compared with some older vehicles. Brighton & Hove Buses has produced a very informative video explaining the benefits of the new buses which is available [here](#).

A Car free city centre but no Park & Ride

Brighton & Hove City Council has very ambitious plans to create a car free city centre by 2023 as part of its Local Transport Plan 5 (LTP5). Details of how this could be achieved are being kept under wraps but we have been told Brighton Area Buswatch and bus companies will be involved in the plans and there will be a public consultation in 2021. LTP 5 aims to achieve a carbon neutral city by 2030 by reducing car use, facilitating the use of zero emission vehicles and promoting public transport.

Our main concern is how car use can be substantially reduced without a Park & Ride scheme. This has been dismissed by the current administration which believes Park & Ride does not discourage people from using their cars and could have a detrimental impact on existing bus services. They use the example of the Withdean P&R scheme which is badly located in a residential area and is too small to justify a dedicated bus service. It bears no comparison with the large car parks found on the edge of cities like Oxford or Canterbury which are served by fast and frequent express bus services. A better example locally would be the Mill Road Park & Ride where on match days (when capacity crowds are allowed) there are express buses to and from the AMEX, minimising traffic congestion around the stadium. This car park is so popular it usually fills up over 90 minutes before kick-off time. Mill Road is adjacent to the A23 & A27 and can be accessed without using residential roads. It is difficult to see how the AMEX would cope without Park & Ride facilities. Perhaps the Mill Road facility could be expanded and opened daily with an express bus service to the City Centre? This should at least be investigated.

The City Council and Friends of the Earth point to past research which highlighted some negative aspects of P&R, but recent findings by Transport Focus, an influential pressure group, were much more positive. This showed that up to 98% of users were pleased with P&R facilities, saying they made travelling easier and less stressful and offered good value for money. So, it is clear there is huge public support for Park & Ride; people will leave their cars on the edge of the city if the alternative facilities are good. Who wants to crawl along congested urban roads worrying about where they can park?

The City Council admits it has no control over most city centre car parks because they are run by private companies, so if there is no Park & Ride some people will continue to drive into the city centre, clogging up roads, creating unnecessary emissions and delaying buses. We saw what can happen if crucial road space is suddenly removed last summer – it created gridlock! Hopefully lessons will be learnt in the new proposals to avoid a repeat.

Park & Ride provides an attractive alternative but it should not be the only option. Better bus priority measures can attract more people onto buses, encouraging their use for the entire journey. This has been shown along the A259 through Rottingdean and Peacehaven where bus use increased by over 60% after bus lanes were introduced and the 12X limited stop bus service between Brighton & Eastbourne has been an outstanding success. People from outside Brighton can also be encouraged to use trains more when visiting the city, especially at weekends. Many stations outside the city have car parks which are little used at weekends.

How is your bus service?

Most bus services returned to near normal levels at the end of August and, with the help of Government funding, services remained at those levels during the November lockdown. Compass Travel and The Big Lemon are running full pre-Covid timetables as is Stagecoach on the 700 but the 17 to Horsham is hourly instead of half hourly. Brighton & Hove Buses says it is running around 90% of its standard service levels, but that hides some significant variations. The majority of daytime services are running at the same frequencies as this time last year. With social distancing, double decker buses are restricted to carrying about 30 passengers, down from between 70-80 pre-Covid. Fewer people have been travelling and extra buses have been provided at school times so this has not been a major issue. In the late afternoons several buses are running full. This is not a problem on the busiest routes when there is another bus in a few minutes but some areas are beginning to suffer.

The Elm Grove and Queens Park areas are particularly badly affected. Services 18, 21, 21A, 22 & 23 are all running to reduced timetables, some being 50% lower than pre-Covid. The number of B&H buses serving the Pepper Pot in Queens Park has dropped from 10 buses an hour to just 6. Of those the 21A & 23 are only hourly so not being able to get on the first bus can lead to a very long wait. Some extra journeys are being provided at busy times but the best solution would be to return to normal pre-Covid frequencies. Buswatch is pressing for this to happen. If you have experienced difficulties due to full buses and long waits anywhere in our area please get in touch, preferably with dates and times and we will take up the issue with the bus companies.

Christmas and New Year buses

Christmas Eve, Thursday 24 December: Saturday service finishing by 2200

Christmas Day, Friday 25 December: No service

Boxing Day, Saturday 26 December: Special services, daytime only.

Sunday 27 December and Monday 28 December: Sunday service

Tuesday 29 December – Thursday 31 December: Saturday service

Friday 1 January: Sunday service

This is a brief summary. Full details at [buses.co.uk](https://www.buses.co.uk)

Kids go free on Brighton & Hove Buses on Saturday & Sunday 19th & 20th December when accompanied by an adult (up to 3 per adult).

Thank you

Finally, a big thank you to all those involved in providing bus services over the past year, especially bus drivers and other behind the scenes staff who have kept services running and ensured our buses are spotlessly clean. Hopefully 2021 will bring some relief and a return to normality.

Brighton Area Buswatch meetings

In normal circumstances, meetings with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council are held four times a year. Meetings will resume when restrictions are lifted. In the meantime, please send in your comments and we will take them up with the operators or the Council.

Buswatch News is produced and edited by Andrew Boag, Chair, Brighton Area Buswatch. Contributions and suggestions are welcome.

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