

Brighton Area Buswatch

Representing local bus users



Part of Bus Users UK

Seasonal Greetings to all our supporters

Buswatch News – December 2014

Why your bus isn't being shown



Regular bus users will be aware that the electronic real time information displays ('RTI signs') at bus stops haven't been working reliably lately. There have always been problems related to poor radio signals at some locations and with individual buses not showing up at all, but more problems have arisen in recent weeks. RTI screens have been going blank much more often or are showing an actual time instead of counting down in minutes. If an actual time such as '5B Hollingbury 15:42' is shown, the time is taken from the published timetable which means the system is not picking up the bus location. So when that time is reached the display line will disappear irrespective of whether the bus has arrived. There have also been problems with some incorrect destinations being shown and some odd scrolling messages. All very frustrating!

All RTI signs are in the process of being upgraded by a contractor with new GPRS based software to detect the position of approaching buses more accurately. This has caused quite a few teething problems. The contractor is now in the process of handing back individual signs to the City Council which owns them. The Council has told us it won't accept any sign until it is satisfied it works properly. So hopefully things will improve soon and the new GPRS based equipment will prove more reliable than the previous radio based system, which is over 12 years old. Brighton Area Buswatch will continue to monitor the situation.

Key cards to be extended to more bus services

Good news at last – agreement has finally been reached to enable Key Cards to be used on supported bus services 16/66, 37B, 47, 56 & 57 operated by Compass Bus and The Big Lemon. Smartcard readers will be installed in buses next spring. This follows a long campaign by Brighton Area Buswatch. We will continue to press for the introduction of a smartcard covering all bus services in Brighton & Hove including Stagecoach and theSussexBus.com services. We are told this is now feasible with existing card readers. Each bus company would be re-imbursed for each journey to an agreed formula.

East Sussex bus cuts – Some services saved

At a full meeting of East Sussex County Council on 2 December a majority of Councillors voted against implementing bus cuts. This surprise but welcome outcome is a considerable achievement for the Lewes 'Love Your Bus' campaign and some local Councillors who strongly opposed the cuts.

Unfortunately it is not the end the matter. A final decision will be made at a Cabinet meeting on 16 December by a small group of Councillors who all supported the cuts. It seems bizarre that this meeting can overrule a vote by the full Council. If you are concerned please join the protest outside County Hall in Lewes at 9.20am, ahead of the 10am Cabinet meeting on the 16th.

Following discussions between East Sussex County Council and local bus companies a number of services in the Lewes area will be run commercially without subsidies. This is welcome but it is certainly not a victory. In most cases the commercial operation is based on a reduced frequency, often half the current level of service. This should save money although exactly how much is not clear in the massive 272 page report prepared for the 16 December meeting. We urge East Sussex County Council to provide top up funding to enable current frequencies to be maintained. Routes involved are the 121, 123, 125, 126, 127, 128 & 143 which are all operated by Compass Bus. Despite strong opposition a huge 30% fares increase is still planned, which will discourage fare paying passengers from using these services. It is not clear whether this increase will apply to the commercial services listed above where fares will be set by Compass Bus.

Brighton & Hove Buses has announced it will continue to run evening services on routes 28 & 29 to Ringmer, Uckfield and Tunbridge Wells commercially from April 2015. There will some timetable changes but the general level of service will be unchanged. This is good news which Brighton Area Buswatch pressed hard for.

East Sussex County Council has responded to our feature in Buswatch News last month. They tell us the number of passengers shown using services in their recent consultation assumed each passenger makes two journeys, so numbers carried on individual buses can be higher than total passengers recorded on each service. They also point out that some journeys are much busier than others.

Congratulations!

Two of our local bus companies won awards at the prestigious UK Bus Industry Awards last month. Worthing based Compass Bus which operates several services in our area was runner up in the category 'Best Independent Operator'. Metrobus won two awards including 'Top Bus Garage' for Crawley garage, which operates routes 270, 271 and 273 into Brighton. Brighton & Hove City Council won a bronze award in the 'Local Authority Bus Project of the year' category for the Lewes Road improvement scheme.

How do our bus fares compare?

With increases in rail and London bus fares announced recently, fares are in the news. There is a commonly held belief that bus fares are expensive in Brighton and Hove compared with other places. Many people claim fares are high because privately owned bus companies are only interested in profit.

Bus services outside London were de-regulated in 1986 and bus companies running commercial services set their own fares. Brighton & Hove Buses is part of the Go Ahead group which has been steadily increasing profit targets for its UK bus operations. Stagecoach is another highly profitable transport group with bus services all over the country. It has just won a contract with Virgin to run the East Coast rail line from London to Edinburgh.

Bus companies refute the claim they are solely motivated by profit. They say their main aim is to improve services because it leads to more passengers carried which benefits everyone. They claim to re-invest most of their profits to provide new vehicles and improve services and point out that healthy profits mean over 98% of bus journeys in Brighton & Hove are run without Council subsidies. Few other areas in the UK achieve anywhere near this level of commercial viability.

By contrast London's regulated bus network makes a substantial loss. It is controlled by Transport for London which tenders each route individually. Contracts are awarded private companies including Go Ahead and Stagecoach which include a profit element. Fares are set by the Mayor of London with the aid of Government grants (not available outside London) to offset the losses, although the level of subsidy has roughly halved in recent years. Revised fares start on 2 January 2015 with an average increase of 2.5%.

To extend the comparison fares on Reading Buses are included. Like Brighton, Reading is a prosperous area within commuting distance of London. Reading Buses is a highly regarded bus company which won in two categories at the recent UK Bus Awards. It is owned by Reading Council which only requires it to break even and make a small profit if possible. Bus use in the town is high and a comprehensive commercial network is provided with a very modern bus fleet.

Adult fares	Brighton & Hove Buses (City Saver area)	Stagecoach 17 & 700 (Brighton, Hove & Shoreham)	Transport for London bus services * (using Oyster card)	Reading Buses (urban area)
One journey	£2 or £2.40	£2.15	£1.50 Pay As You Go	1.90
One day ticket	£4.10 Key card £4.70 on bus	£3.70	£4.40 Pay As You Go £5 in advance	£4.30
Weekly ticket	£18 Key card £22 scratch card	£12	£21	£16 on bus £14.50 on line
Monthly ticket	£66 £62 by direct debit	£44	£80.60	£55
Annual ticket	£510	£465	£840	£575

* From 2 January 2015. All prices displayed on bus company & TfL websites December 2014. Other fares may be available. Some monthly prices are 4-weekly.

There are no cash fares on London buses and Reading Buses drivers do not give change. London bus fares include Croydon trams but not Underground or rail travel for which higher prices are charged. The cash fare for one journey on London Underground is £4.80 within zones 1 & 2 which reduces to £2.30 (zone 1) or £2.90 (zones 1 & 2) with an Oyster or contactless payment card.

While the Brighton & Hove single fares are considerably higher than the flat rate of £1.50 in London, many tickets are more expensive in London - especially when Underground travel is included. The Brighton & Hove annual ticket easily beats both London and Reading.

Stagecoach has some of the lowest fares in our area but these only apply on services 17 between Brighton & Patcham & Coastliner 700 between Brighton & Shoreham. Outside Brighton Stagecoach fares can be considerably higher. A one day ticket on Stagecoach buses in Worthing costs £5.20 making it the most expensive in our survey.

Reading Buses has the lowest priced weekly ticket although its urban area is smaller than the Brighton & Hove City Saver area. A network wide weekly ticket on Reading Buses costs £22.50 whereas Brighton & Hove's weekly prices apply anywhere. This means people in Hangleton and Hollingdean pay the same as those travelling to Eastbourne or Uckfield.

Fares charged on Compass Bus and The Big Lemon services tendered by Brighton & Hove City Council are set by the City Council to reflect fares charged on commercial services. Key cards and M tickets are not currently valid but regular passengers can buy period tickets at comparable prices.

Comparisons are not straightforward as fares have become more complicated with far more options these days. It really depends what ticket you buy in each area. Perhaps the biggest surprise is the high cost of monthly and annual tickets in London. Prices in Brighton and Reading appear to show that fares on good quality bus networks are similar with or without profit targets set by parent companies to satisfy shareholders. We welcome your views.

Brighton Area Buswatch meetings

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be on Wednesday 21 January 2015 at 5.30pm in a new venue, Brighton 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 produced and 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 and a pdf version is available on request. The next issue is due in mid January 2015.

E mail: brightonbuswatch@gmail.com. Phone: 01273 323075



brightonbuswatch.org



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