

Brighton Area Buswatch

Representing local bus users



A branch of Bus Users UK

Buswatch News – March 2017

Approaching gridlock - Congestion is getting worse

This month we highlight the biggest single issue affecting bus services. Recent research by Tom Tom places Brighton and Hove in the top five cities for congestion and it is getting worse each year. This is having a serious effect on bus services in the city which are becoming slower each year. That in puts people off travelling by bus so numbers decline and bus services become less viable and more expensive. In inner London this is already happening, passengers are deserting slower buses for other modes.

The current Valley Gardens scheme could create even more congestion around the city.



Brighton Area Buswatch has withdrawn support for Brighton & Hove City Council's scheme. We do not believe it will help bus users.

The photo above shows congestion at the junction of St Peter's Place and London Road at 5pm recently. It was half term week and the weather was sunny which always leads to more car traffic, even in winter months. The taxi, 5B bus and the cars from the right were all unable to move for several minutes.

This situation is common and under the Valley Gardens scheme we fear it could become much worse. More buses would be passing through. Up to 24 buses an hour on routes 25, 25X, 28, 29 and The Big Lemon UB1 student service would turn right here, weaving through congestion to reach Richmond Terrace and Lewes Road. Buses on these routes currently fork to the right south of St Peter's church avoiding this junction, but that will no longer be possible. All northbound A23 general traffic will pass St Peter's Church on the east side, then turn left into St Peter's Place (just north of the church) and right into London Road or towards Cheapside by Aldi.

We predict problems will also occur at the Church Street junction with Grand Parade where buses will also have to thread through general traffic. While bus lanes will be retained we believe plans to reduce the general traffic lanes from two to one in each direction will result in long tailbacks and more congestion overall and buses will get delayed before they can reach bus lanes. Displaced traffic will try to find alternative roads so there will be more 'rat running' along other streets. The result is likely to be slower, less reliable bus services which is unacceptable.

Last week Brighton Area Buswatch wrote to Councillor Gill Mitchell, Chair of the Environment, Transport and Sustainability Committee at Brighton & Hove City Council. We explained why we cannot support the scheme in its current form. Her response gives us some encouragement that the project team are listening to our concerns. If we can be assured that the introduction of an 'Intelligent Transport System' and other measures to improve traffic management can deliver tangible improvements to bus journey times, we will reconsider our position.

There are good points about the Valley Gardens scheme. It will create some more attractive spaces in gardens currently surrounded by traffic on both sides, producing a linear park effect. It will also improve the environment for pedestrians and there will be better facilities for cyclists. But we doubt whether it can achieve its aim to improve air quality if the roads become more congested. With little likelihood of a decent Park & Ride scheme in the foreseeable future the scope for reducing car journeys originating outside our area is very limited.

There are 45 million bus journeys a year in Brighton and Hove – almost one million a week. This is the highest bus use per head anywhere in the country outside London, three times more than in Portsmouth and many other similar size cities. That is a fantastic achievement, made possible through a successful twenty-year partnership between Brighton & Hove City Council, Brighton & Hove Buses and other bus companies. With the right facilities there is plenty of scope to grow bus use further.

Bus companies are trying to speed up buses with smartcards, mobile phone tickets and are investing in new two door vehicles on the busiest routes (see below). The council must not put these achievements at risk by implementing a scheme which is harmful to buses and bus users. What we need is a comprehensive strategy for improving bus services. We also need new suburban bus links, so passengers don't have to travel through the city centre to cross the city.

Lots of new buses on the way

Brighton & Hove Buses is buying 34 double deck buses this year, its largest annual investment for some time. Most will be two door buses for routes 7 & 49 which should start to arrive in the summer. First to arrive, in June, will be three one door buses for Coaster routes 12/12A/12X. The new buses are the latest low emission Euro VI standard diesel vehicles, which will reduce Nitrogen Oxide and Hydro Carbon emissions by up to 88% compared with the buses they replace. New buses on route 7 will enable the diesel-electric hybrid buses to move to route 2, bringing low emission buses to Rottingdean High Street which has high pollution levels. Good news for tall people too - unlike the route 1 buses delivered last year, the new buses will not have restricted headroom upstairs!

Compass Travel withdraws the 40

We have been informed that service 40 between Brighton, Haywards Heath and Cuckfield (with a few journeys extended to Crawley) will be withdrawn after Saturday 22 April. Compass Travel took over the service from Sussex Bus at short notice last October but the company says it has been losing money. Most passengers can use alternative services provided by Metrobus on routes 270, 271, 272 & 273 where there will be some extra journeys, including a new Sunday service on route 270. Unfortunately, some passengers will face longer waits.

Disabled Access Day

Brighton & Hove Buses and Metrobus are both taking part in national Disabled Access Day. This actually extends over three days, 10-12 March. During that period, companions travelling with a Disabled Concessionary Pass holder may travel free on buses. Normal time restrictions apply. More details on www.buses.co.uk/accessday

Brighton Area Buswatch meetings

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be on **Wednesday 12 April 2017** at 5.15pm in 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 contributions and suggestions. Printed A5 copies of this newsletter are available from Hove town hall reception and a pdf or large print versions are available on request. The next issue is due in mid-April 2017.

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