

Brighton Area Buswatch

Representing local bus users



A branch of Bus Users UK

Buswatch News – August 2019

We need to keep buses in St James's Street

Over the years there have been many calls for St James's Street to be pedestrianised. It is a busy and vibrant street with a wide variety of shops, cafés and bars. Local businesses are keen to promote it as a destination for visitors. Full pedestrianisation has been suggested again. It seems an obvious improvement, but there would be big disadvantages for bus users which need to be considered.

Some have suggested only the Old Steine junction is needs to be closed – which would stop buses getting through - but allow delivery vans and all other vehicles to gain access via the side streets which need to remain open. That would eliminate buses and reduce overall traffic but do probably do little to reduce emissions. Nearly all the buses in St James's Street are modern ultra-low emission vehicles and a few are already electric – with many more likely to follow.

Brighton & Hove Buses tells us the bus stop outside Morrisons is the 4th busiest in the city and St James's Street bus stops are used by an estimated 2 million passengers a year. Of these around 500,000 are using disabled or older people's concessionary passes. St James's Street is served by around 28 buses an hour on routes to Whitehawk (1), Woodingdean & Rottingdean (2) Brighton Marina (7) Queens Park (18) Bristol Estate (37/37B) Saltdean (47) and Ovingdean & Woodingdean (52). Most buses also serve the Royal Sussex County Hospital.

Morrisons is a huge draw, being the only large supermarket in this part of the city. Many of those who use this bus stop live in the poorer areas of Brighton such as Whitehawk, Craven Vale and Bristol Estate or they are travelling to the hospital and they may have mobility issues. Buses bring thousands of people into St James's street every day, and taking them home, to the hospital or to the Marina. Removing buses from the street would inevitably hurt some businesses - it would be a case of biting the hand that feeds them.

If buses were banned from St James's Street, they would have to use Edward Street (like the 1A) or go via the seafront to Rock Gardens. The nearest bus stop in Edward Street is outside the old Amex offices, a long uphill walk. Otherwise passengers would have to walk back to North Street. It would result in over 30 buses an hour turning right from Old Steine/Pavilion Parade into Edward Street. Under the current Valley Gardens Phase 3 proposals, these buses would be sharing the road on the east side of Old Steine with all northbound traffic, creating more delays for everyone.

If St James's Street buses ran via the seafront, they could in theory use the existing bus stop K opposite the Sea Life Centre, a shorter walk from Morrisons. However, this stop is already very busy with coast road services and it is doubtful whether it could handle the extra services. There is another bus stop in Old Steine near Subway, stop Z, which is nearer and little used but it is unclear whether this would be available if Valley Gardens Phase 3 goes ahead.

The seafront route is also longer which will add extra time and could require extra buses to maintain timetables; this would increase costs (and possibly fares). The route most at risk is the Queens Park 18 where drivers already struggle to keep to its tight timetable. At our July meeting, Brighton & Hove Buses Managing Director Martin Harris admitted that the 18 currently makes a loss; Morrisons is easily the busiest stop on the 18 and removing it would make the service less attractive and could make it even less viable.

We believe there is a strong case to keep buses in St James's Street and the needs of bus users must not be ignored. Without buses, many people would be unable or unwilling to shop there and some businesses would suffer. A similar situation in Oxford has recently been resolved with buses being allowed through a pedestrianised area at a very slow speed; perhaps this should be considered instead.

Plans to speed up buses put on hold

Brighton & Hove City Council's Local Transport Plan has a budget of £180,000 allocated to bus network infrastructure improvements in the current financial year (to March 2020). Two years ago, Brighton & Hove Buses put forward four quick win schemes for new bus lanes and nothing has happened. We are told they have been incorporated into the Council's 'Bus Network Review' which looked at a number of potential highway improvements to assist buses. This was completed over a year ago and never published. We are now told the Bus Network Review will form part of the next Local Transport Plan but this is unlikely to be approved before spring 2020. Halfway through the 2019/20 financial year it is still unclear how the Council intends to spend the £180,000.

'Tap On Tap Off' coming soon

Starting next month, Brighton & Hove & Metrobus passengers will be able to use Contactless debit and credit cards like an Oyster card, by just tapping in as they board, without the need to tell the driver their destination or collect a ticket. When they leave the bus, they tap off using one of the new card readers, (as they would, leaving a train station), otherwise they will be charged the maximum single fare for the route they are travelling on.

Perhaps the best aspect of the new system is that there will be a cap at the One-day Saver fare, once this amount has been paid, all further journeys that day will be free. So there is no need to decide whether to buy a single ticket, a City Saver or a Network Saver but the same card must be used for each transaction. However, it will usually be cheaper to use a Key Card or an M ticket. These cannot be used on a pay as you go basis.

Brighton & Hove and Metrobus are the first UK bus operators to use Tap On Tap Off on a large scale. The hope is that it will speed up buses and make buying a ticket much simpler, reducing delays at bus stops. Tap On Tap Off is only for people travelling on their own as an alternative to paying cash. Passengers paying in a group will still need to buy tickets from the driver as they do now.

Bus service changes from 22 September

The main change is the introduction of an all-day service on route 5B to the Universities at Falmer. 5B buses from Hangleton to Hollingbury will be extended to Falmer every half hour during the daytime on Mondays to Fridays, with a revised route through Coldean.

Routes 14 & 14C will be revised with more buses running direct via Marine Parade as 14. The 14C serving the Royal Sussex County Hospital will become hourly, half hourly at peak times and 14C buses towards Peacehaven will use Arundel Road after Lidl, serving the main coast road stop at Marine Gate. They will no longer stop in Roedean Road.

There will be fewer midday buses to Ringmer and Uckfield on route 29B. Few passengers were using the 29B journeys beyond Lewes and more resources are needed to improve reliability on busier journeys. The frequency between Brighton and Lewes will remain every 10 minutes, then every half hour to Ringmer (28) or Tunbridge Wells (29). There will be more buses on Sunday afternoons.

Routes 1 & 1A towards Mile Oak will use Wellington Road in Portslade instead of St Andrews Road, (1 & 1A buses already go this way towards Whitehawk). There will be new school services 96, 96A & 98 between Hove or Shoreham and King's school, Hangleton starting on 2nd September. Further details should be available shortly on the Brighton & Hove Buses website www.buses.co.uk

Brighton Area Buswatch meeting

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be at 5pm on **Wednesday 16 October** in Brighton Town Hall. Meetings are open to all, but space is limited so please contact Buswatch at the address below if you wish to join us.

Buswatch News is produced and edited by Andrew Boag, Chair, Brighton Area Buswatch. We welcome your contributions and suggestions. The next issue is due mid-September 2019.

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