

Brighton Area Buswatch

Representing local bus users



Part of Bus Users UK

Buswatch News – August 2015



A Compass Bus 37 at Brighton Station.

The blue strip in the windscreen explains that Brighton & Hove Key Cards and M tickets are valid. Excellent, but what a pity the wording is so long and so small!

Meadowview and Bristol Estate services saved from big cuts

The 37 will have a new timetable from 14 September. Daytime services are largely unchanged but there will be a much reduced evening and Sunday service. This follows negotiations between Compass Travel which operates the service and Brighton & Hove City Council. Compass Travel took over the former 37 & 38 services from Brighton & Hove Buses last April and combined them into one cross city route linking Meadowview and Coombe Road with Lewes Road, London Road shops, Brighton Station, North Street, Kemp Town, Royal Sussex County Hospital and Bristol Estate.

While there were some teething problems (reported in Buswatch News last month), the service is now running reliably but usage has failed to meet expectations. As a result the service was losing money and Compass decided it could not continue to operate it beyond mid September without financial support. The City Council agreed to support the service as an emergency measure until April 2016. Without this the 37 would have been withdrawn completely leaving Meadowview and Bristol Estate with the hourly 37B which has no evening or Sunday service. This agreement means there will be no need for further changes from November when Council funding for evening services was due to expire. Unfortunately the evening service from 13 September will drop from two an hour to Meadowview to one bus every 75 minutes throughout. The Sunday daytime service will be halved from every 30 minutes to hourly between Meadowview and Bristol Estate.

I was invited to meet Chris Chatfield, Managing Director of Compass Travel who stressed his commitment to running the 37 and other bus services in Brighton and Hove. He explained the 37 was running at a substantial loss. As a purely commercial service that loss had to be addressed urgently. We discussed a number of ways in which more people could be attracted to use the service to make it more profitable. People have told Buswatch that Compass buses often pass people waiting at bus stops unless they are hailed, even at busy places like the Hospital. Many seem to be unaware that cash fares are the same as on Brighton & Hove Buses and they can now use Key Cards and smartphone M tickets, as well as Saver tickets and concessionary travel passes which have always been accepted. The 37 serves some of the busiest roads in Brighton so Compass buses should be carrying far more 'short hop' passengers along Lewes Road and through the City Centre. We hope that by working together with all bus companies and with the City Council we can address these issues and make the service more sustainable long term.

Two new 40X timetables

Wait 55 minutes and get two buses within 5 minutes. This is the crazy situation that will apply on route 40X from 1 September. It is the unintended consequence of a decision by the local NHS Trust to award a short term contract to Metrobus to operate the 40X which links Brighton's Royal Sussex County Hospital with the Princess Royal Hospital in Haywards Heath. The present 40X operator, theSussexBus.com does not intend to give up and has decided to run a competing service with concessions for hospital staff and patients. It has timed its buses to run five minutes ahead of the Metrobus service to try to win more custom. The SussexBus.com service will follow a more slightly quicker route than the Metrobus 40X by omitting Wivelsfield.

The best news is that theSussexBus.com will be introducing an hourly Saturday service whereas Metrobus service only runs Sundays to Fridays (as specified in its contract). Metrobus and theSussexBus.com have a history of competing with each other in Burgess Hill and Crawley with mixed results. Running buses five minutes apart may not be in the best interests of passengers but it does mean more buses overall. We doubt whether direct competition on the 40X can continue for more than a few months. The risk is that both bus services become less viable and prone to cutbacks. It could also open the debate as to whether bus services should be franchised to prevent wasteful competition, which has become a big issue in some parts of the country.

Council review of bus services

Brighton & Hove City Council has launched a review of supported bus services. These are the routes it subsidises because they are socially necessary but not commercially viable. Most are tendered by the Council on four year contracts which expire in 2016. Routes affected are the 16/16A, 37, 37B, 47, 52, 56, 57 & 66 plus school services 72, 74, 75, 76, 76A, 91, 95, 95A, and 'Breeze up to the Downs' services 77, 78 & 79. Breeze services also receive funding from the Government and National Trust. The Council would like to know the views of users and prospects for the future. Given that Council funding is likely to be under severe pressure for the next few years it is important bus passengers make their views known. Brighton Area Buswatch will be pressing for improvements and trying to identify alternative sources of finance to make these happen. More details on the Council website www.brighton-hove.gov.uk or by contacting Public Transport Officer Richard Johnson on 01273 292480 or email to transport.planning@brighton-hove.gov.uk. The consultation is open until 30 September.

East Sussex service changes

There are some changes in the Lewes area from 14 September. Lewes Town Council is providing funding for improved town services which were cut by East Sussex County Council last April. This means the Compass Bus 127, 128 will now run half hourly again to Nevill, Landport, & Malling Estates, while the 129 will run hourly in the mornings to Spences Lane and Winterbourne areas. Route 261 will run between East Grinstead and Uckfield only, operated by Seaford & District instead of Compass Bus. Compass will run a replacement 122 from Berwick to Lewes. The once a week Community Transport service from Rodmell to Brighton (130) is withdrawn.

Valley Gardens scheme remains stalled

We await a decision by the new Labour administration at Brighton & Hove City Council on changes to this major scheme. A leaked report from Brighton & Hove Buses was recently made public in the Brighton & Hove Independent. It expressed concerns about Council plans to redirect traffic into Brighton away from the A23 and questioned the feasibility of keeping general traffic out of bus lanes, where access would be required for local residents and businesses.

More Bus(y) buses

Two more colourful buses have hit the streets in recent weeks. They are part of the Brighton & Hove Bus company's 'Get On Go Somewhere' campaign launched in May with the Brighton Festival Fringe bus. The latest additions are the Beach bus which features a giant 99 ice cream cone, a seagull and Brighton rock and the South Downs bus. The Beach bus is named after Andy Durr a Councillor and former Mayor who helped to revive Brighton seafront in the 1990s. The South Downs bus was partly inspired by Sussex artist Eric Ravilious whose work in the 1920s and 30s included many South Downs themes. Inside, the bus has a poem by Tennyson and there are wildlife pictures inside and out. The heritage seat covers are the same as used on London Transport buses in the 1950s and 60s, when green LT services extended as far south as Horsham and Forest Row. More details of the buses are available on www.buses.co.uk.

Key Cards and M tickets extended

Don't forget buses on supported services in Brighton and Hove operated by Compass Bus and The Big Lemon (16/16A, 37, 37B, 47, 52, 56, 57 & 66) now accept Key Cards and M tickets. Key cards can be purchased on line at www.buses.co.uk or at One Stop Travel in North Street or Conway Street bus garage in Hove. M tickets are purchased using a smartphone and can be stored or validated immediately.

Brighton Area Buswatch meetings

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be on **Wednesday 14 October 2015** 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 comments 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 September 2015.

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



brightonbuswatch.org



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