

Brighton Area Buswatch

A branch of Bus Users
the national group representing bus passengers

Buswatch News – February 2020

Brighton's increasingly shabby coach station



In 2014 Buswatch News highlighted the state of Pool Valley coach station. Six years on the situation has got worse with cars and vans regularly parking on the paved waiting areas. A few years ago, Stagecoach moved the 700 bus out and last year National Express told us they want to abandon the coach station in favour of pick-ups on the street in Old Steine.

The current facilities must give an appalling impression to visitors. Coach users deserve better. Abandoning Pool Valley for an on-street location is not acceptable for a major visitor destination like Brighton. What we need is a decent coach station here in Pool Valley with proper covered waiting facilities for passengers, toilets and somewhere to buy tickets or a coffee. There is plenty of space to do this. National Express have built brand new coach stations in other cities. They have produced plans for Pool Valley in the past, they should revive those and get together with Brighton & Hove City Council to provide better facilities in Brighton.

Disabled passes to be valid at all times

From 1 April time restrictions on the use of disabled bus passes will be removed so holders will be able to use them 24 hours a day. At present they cannot be used on weekdays between 4am and 9am. A three year deal has been agreed between Brighton & Hove City Council and Brighton & Hove Buses. The change will be funded from parking income. Disabled passes are valid on all local bus operators, Brighton & Hove, Metrobus, Stagecoach, The Big Lemon & Compass Travel.

Valley Gardens Phase 3 update

Brighton & Hove City Council has signed a £6 million funding agreement with the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). This means the Council can now proceed and implement the scheme around the Old Steine. A significant change is that the LEP has lifted the completion deadline, previously set at March 2021. It is now expected that work will begin in spring 2021 so there will be a gap between the completion of Phases 1 & 2 (now under way, due to be completed this spring) and the start of Phase 3 next year.

An afternoon on the 5B

The cross city 5/5A/5B group of routes are amongst the busiest on the Brighton & Hove Buses network, carrying 7.6 million passengers a year. The three services provide a combined frequency of every 5 minutes between the Hove Park Tavern and the south end of Preston Park at Stanford Avenue. I began my journey from Barnet Way, one stop from the Hangleton terminus in Hardwick Road following a walk along the Dyke Railway trail. This follows the old railway line to Devil's Dyke that closed in the 1930s. There is a footpath over the A27 by-pass leading to Devil's Dyke Road with views over the South Downs and towards the coast. This walk is recommended and a particular advantage at this time of year is that the footpath is mostly paved so boots are not necessary. At weekends it is possible to walk to Devil's Dyke Road and return to Brighton on the 77 bus.

There is no real time information sign at the Barnet Way bus stop so I checked my phone app which showed a bus less than one minute away. Alas it didn't appear. Perhaps I had just missed it, or maybe it didn't run, but when I checked the app again the next bus was shown as due in 7 minutes at 1413. That bus turned up precisely on time and I was able to get a good seat upstairs. It was one of the 30 new hybrid buses and the on-bus information screen informed me that the 1243 departure from Hangleton had been cancelled but there was no mention of the 1403. There needs to be a way of deleting out of date messages from the Twitter feed. Once on the move we picked up passengers at most stops. At The Grenadier the 5, 5A and 5B all serve the same stop, along with the Big Lemon 47, providing up to 13 buses an hour into Central Brighton.

After the Grenadier the 5B follows Hangleton Road and Neville Road, passing Waitrose and the Greyhound Stadium before crossing Old Shoreham Road at the Hove Park Tavern where we are joined by the 5 and 5A routes. In fact, one bus from each route was right in front of us so we were part of a convoy of three, suggesting the 5 & 5A were running late. Fortunately, the bus stop real time displays were showing subsequent buses due at regular intervals. There had been a demonstration in the city centre earlier so maybe that was the reason for three buses running together. The Coleridge Street stop in Sackville Road is close to Conway Street bus garage where buses often change drivers and that was the case for us, but fortunately it didn't lead to a significant delay and we left exactly on time at 1430.

Traffic lights at the junctions with Portland Road and Blatchington Road can slow progress but we were lucky to get straight through, not bad for a Friday afternoon! With a 5 directly in front, we didn't spend much time at bus stops in central Hove. Palmeira Square is where the new hybrid buses are programmed to switch to electric

mode for the Low Emission Zone. Unfortunately, our bus (fleet no. 301) remained stubbornly in diesel mode throughout the Low Emission Zone, although the engine did cut out at bus stops and traffic lights. Most of the new buses do seem to run in electric mode so hopefully someone from B&H can rectify bus 301. Nevertheless, even in diesel mode these buses comply with Euro VI emissions which substantially reduces nitrogen dioxide particles compared with older vehicles.

Several passengers left the bus and more boarded at Old Steine making good use of the two doors. We then headed off through the Valley Gardens roadworks, remaining on the east side with general traffic. This feels strange as Grand Parade has been one-way southbound for several decades. A few days afterwards southbound buses were re-routed to the west side (Marlborough Place). Northbound buses will also use Marlborough Place after the road has been resurfaced, with new bus stops added between Church Street and North Road by the King & Queen pub.

The London Road shopping area is busy despite the recent closure of the Co-op supermarket and Boots. In fact, London Road has been regenerating in recent years, with new residential developments around New England Road, student accommodation taking over the old Co-op department store building and the Aldi store which is always very busy. So despite a few store closures London Road remains an important shopping destination for people living in north Brighton.

A few minutes later we pass under the huge railway viaduct and reach the bottom of Preston Park. Here the 5 & 5A continue along A23 Preston Road to Patcham while the 5B turns right into Stanford Avenue and left into Beaconsfield Villas. According to estate agents the Victorian properties here are much sought after by families (if they can afford them), with some of the best schools nearby. It is now mid-afternoon and 5Bs in going the opposite direction have become very busy. The reason becomes evident as we turn into Surrenden Road passing Dorothy Stringer School and Varndean sixth form college. Only a few students boarded our bus for the relatively short trip to Hollingbury and we continue to Braybon Avenue, descending the steepest hill on the route. At the bottom we reach Carden Avenue which is close to Patcham High School where we pick up a few more passengers. Hollingbury is an area developed mostly during the inter-war years with a mixture of council and private housing.

The 5B continues to Crowhurst Road, terminating outside the Asda superstore. Our bus arrived one minute early at 1518, 65 minutes after leaving Hangleton. Ten years ago, the 5B timetable allowed 56 minutes for this journey but traffic congestion and passenger numbers have increased since then. Some 5B's now continue beyond Hollingbury to Coldean, Varley Park and Sussex University and I covered this section in an earlier report.

The new 'extended range' hybrid buses give a smooth and comfortable ride and the seats around the table upstairs were popular. They have the usual USB charging points and free wi-fi too. With their striking blue livery and 'Live and Breathe' campaign messages they really stand out. One of the B&H buses spent some time in the Republic of Ireland before delivery. The National Transport Authority was clearly impressed as it announced its intention to order 600 similar buses!

New discounted bus tickets for Apprentices

Brighton & Hove Buses and Metrobus are now offering discounts of around 25% for apprentices. To qualify, apprentices need to take their enrolment, confirmation letter or student ID card to One Stop Travel in North Street, Conway Street offices, Crawley, Gatwick or Redhill travel shops. Then they will be issued with a student rate Key Card.

Brighton Area Buswatch meeting

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be on **Wednesday 22 April 2020** in Brighton Town Hall, Committee Room 1. 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.

Contributions and suggestions are welcome. The next issue is due mid-March 2020.

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