

Brighton Area Buswatch



We are a branch of Bus Users, the national charity representing bus passengers

Buswatch News – July/August 2020

Welcome back to our buses

The Government's message to avoid public transport except for essential journeys has been dropped. People are now asked to avoid travelling at the busiest times if they can. This shouldn't be difficult as buses are only carrying around 35% of the numbers they should be carrying, although with social distancing guidelines they could not run full anyway. Brighton & Hove Buses says the busiest times are now in the middle of the day. The traditional Monday to Friday commuter peaks before 9am and between 4 & 6pm are relatively quiet because so many people are working from home or not working at all.

The challenge for bus operators now is to restore confidence in bus travel and hope that passenger numbers continue to increase. It is significant that while bus use is way below normal levels (and rail travel is even lower), car use nationally has grown to 88% of normal levels according to Government statistics. If this trend of increased car use continues into the Autumn it could lead to much greater congestion and higher emissions.

Buses still the most used form of public transport and Brighton & Hove has the highest bus use per head outside London. Pollution levels fell during the lockdown and Brighton & Hove Buses Managing Director Martin Harris told stakeholders there is an opportunity to 'build back better'. He explained that buses can play an even greater role in the future of mobility, catering for people and journeys that can't easily be made on foot or by bike. Buses are being cleaned to a high standard regularly and there is plenty of information about this on bus company websites. Teams of cleaners continue to board B&H buses as they pass through Churchill Square and Brighton Station to wipe surfaces.

How busy is my bus?

A very useful new planning tool is now available on the Brighton & Hove Buses website, enabling passengers to see how busy their bus is before it arrives. Simply click on the map to find your nearest bus stop and then track the bus you are waiting for. It will show as either 'quiet', 'moderate' or 'busy'. If 'busy' the bus may not be able to take more passengers due to social distancing guidelines. These restrict the capacity of double deckers to between 30 & 36 passengers depending on the bus type, although more can be carried if they are in a household group. At present the vast majority of buses are showing 'quiet' indicating plenty of seats and space to spread out. <https://www.buses.co.uk/how-busy-my-bus>

Valley Gardens Phase 3 consultation

The much delayed final consultation is open until 16 September at <https://consultations.brighton-hove.gov.uk/parking/valley-gardens-phase3/> It assumes the basic road layouts have been agreed, with two way traffic on the east side of Old Steine, traffic lights replacing the Aquarium roundabout and the west side of Old Steine in front of the Royal Pavilion pedestrianised. It also assumes Madeira Drive becomes one-way eastbound (although this road is currently closed) with new traffic lights at the junction of Marine Parade and Dukes Mound.

Buswatch has always been in favour of buses remaining on the west side of Old Steine, serving the three listed art deco style bus shelters, creating a bus hub for easy interchange. However, Brighton & Hove Buses has accepted the road layout proposed in this consultation and as they are the main bus operator, we will support them and seek improvements.

The main issues for us are:

- 1) The space for terminating buses to stand between journeys at Old Steine is totally insufficient. The current plans provide space for about one bus. At least four buses need to be accommodated here, including two 18-metre long bendy buses for route 25. If buses have nowhere to stand, they may have to turn short, dropping passengers at less convenient bus stops much further out. When there is disruption in the city centre, a large number of buses need to be accommodated here. Without sufficient space, buses would become less attractive and some services could become less viable.
- 2) Bus stop locations are generally less spacious than now. This is contrary to one of the main objectives of the scheme which is to improve facilities for bus passengers.
- 3) Some of the proposed bus stop sites look impractical, such as the westbound stop opposite the War Memorial in the short slip road between Castle Square and St James's Street. The Castle Square bus stops for northbound buses appear to have much less space than existing stops outside the Royal Pavilion and there are issues with pavement width and height that need to be addressed.
- 4) The northbound bus stop on the east side of Old Steine is very close to the cycle lane. This stop is likely to be very busy so there is a high risk of conflict between cyclists and pedestrians.
- 5) Changing between buses will become less convenient, Old Steine is the main interchange hub in this part of the City Centre. At busy times hundreds of passengers change between buses here, often switching between routes at the same stop. These proposals disperse the stop locations and will worsen access to the St James's Street area as the busy stop H by Sainsbury's Local will go. This will particularly impact on those with mobility issues as we know a high proportion of St James's Street bus users are in this category.

Valley Gardens congestion worsens as car drivers ignore bus gate signs



As reported last month, the first two phases of the Valley Gardens scheme are nearing completion. Buses and taxis are now using the west side (Marlborough Place and York Place) in both directions between Church Street and St Peter's Place with other traffic directed to use the east side (Grand Parade). New directional signs have been erected, but as shown in the right photo they are very small and are being widely ignored by car drivers. This is creating long delays for buses, especially in the late afternoons. Buswatch predicted this situation in discussions with the Council during the planning stages but they dismissed our concerns.

Why so many cars are using the west side is a little difficult to explain as the east side lanes are usually free flowing in the afternoons and regular commuters tend to find the fastest route. Traffic lights at St Peter's Place/London Road prioritise the east side route so car drivers would actually get through the area quicker, leaving the west side route for buses, taxis and local traffic as intended. It could be that Satellite Navigation systems need updating and are wrongly directing motorists.

Northbound through traffic needs to be clearly directed to use the east side of St Peter's church with much bolder signing. Direction signs at the North Road junction are poor and confusing and ANPR cameras are not working. The Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) indicates these cameras were supposed to be effective from 2nd July. The 'Bus Gate' road markings need to be explained as they do not appear to be well understood by motorists (perhaps because there are no other examples of bus gates in our area).

Better bus information soon

Out of date timetables on bus stops, covered up by stickers will soon be updated to show current bus times. Brighton & Hove Buses which provides panels for every bus stop and shelter in the City Council area have begun replacing the old display sheets but it will take a few weeks to complete as there are 3,000 bus stops involved. Most services are running at slightly reduced frequencies compared to pre-lockdown times. Full timetables are available on bus company websites.

The 13X is back

From Saturday, 1st August the scenic 13X route will be running at weekends between Brighton and Eastbourne via Birling Gap and Beachy Head. There are three journeys on Saturdays, leaving Brighton Station at 0910, 1240 and 1610, returning from Beachy Head at 1118, 1448 & 1818. On Sundays the 13X run every 30 minutes during the daytime. Don't forget the Breeze Up to the Downs services 77 to Devil's Dyke, the 78 to Stanmer Park and 79 to Ditchling Beacon which also run at weekends.

Changes at Brighton & Hove City Council

The Green Party is now the largest single group on the Council, taking control from Labour on 23 July. This followed two resignations and the suspension of the former Chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability (ETS) Committee, Councillor Anne Pissaridou. The ETS Committee will now be chaired jointly by Green party Councillors Pete West and Amy Heley. The new leader of the Council is Phelim Mac Cafferty. This change is not expected to result in significant transport policy changes as the Green party had been supporting the previous Labour administration.

Transport for the South East

This is a strategic organisation recently set up which has representatives from local authorities and local business leaders. It has submitted a bid to the Government to make TfSE a 'statutory sub-national transport body'. In plain English that means it would have direct control over many local transport issues, especially where they concern investment. One of its objectives is to improve bus services for passengers and provide alternatives to car travel. It also aims to co-ordinate the delivery of region-wide integrated smart ticketing and implement road charging schemes linked to clean air zones. <https://transportforthesoutheast.org.uk>

Brighton Area Buswatch meeting

In normal circumstances, meetings with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council are held four times a year. Meetings are currently suspended but we hope to be able to reconvene on **Wednesday 14 October** at our usual venue, Brighton Town Hall. Our meetings are open to everyone, but space will be 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.

E mail: brightonbuswatch@gmail.com. Phone: 01273 620215



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Brighton Area Buswatch is a branch of Bus Users www.bususers.org