

Brighton Area Buswatch

Representing local bus users



A branch of Bus Users UK

Buswatch News – July 2019

Summer bus services struggle to cope



Fine weather has finally arrived and so have the visitors. This year there seem to be more foreign language students than ever. Students are welcome and it is good they are using buses, but when they arrive in groups of 30+ at the busiest times they create real problems for regular bus users. Extra buses would help but bus companies have told us in the past that student travel times often to vary from day to day. Maybe, but the photo above was taken just after 5pm which is always a busy time. Surely extra standby buses could be parked at Old Steine in the evening peak and slotted in as required? We have often suggested this in the past.

The improved 13X Sunday timetable has been an immediate success, providing a 30-minute frequency to Birling Gap, Beachy Head and Eastbourne. Many of these buses are full or almost full. Visitors tend to wait for 13X buses, which works well as it frees up seats on the regular 12 & 12A services for residents. However, delays often occur when traffic is heavy on the A259 or there has been an incident, which results in buses terminating at the Sea Life Centre. This is very frustrating for passengers who get turned off the bus and for those waiting for buses in the City Centre. There have been frequent delays on the Regency routes 28/29 to Lewes, Ringmer and Tunbridge Wells too, mostly due to roadworks. We are urging Brighton & Hove Buses to have better contingency arrangements when these long routes are disrupted to help passengers get to their destination.

Valley Gardens update

The Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee met on 25 June, chaired for the first time by newly elected Labour Councillor Anne Pissaridou. Valley Gardens was on the agenda for event issues, but no changes were proposed to road layouts. So there is still no certainty about whether Phase 3 will proceed as planned or whether it will be changed. The Valley Gardens Forum which represents local residents and businesses in and around Old Steine has been very active with its objections and made representations to the meeting. Buswatch and the VG Forum both agree buses should be on the west side of Old Steine in front of the Royal Pavilion, in both directions. This would avoid a five-lane highway on the east side with narrowed pavements. It would also allow more space for bus stops, retaining the listed art deco style shelters for their intended use. A lot of passengers change buses at the Old Steine and this arrangement could create an excellent bus hub.

Following the ETS meeting on 25 June, the Council agreed to mediate with the Valley Gardens Forum which has been threatening legal action over the consultation process. It has also agreed to set up a 'Task and finish' stakeholder group and Buswatch expects to join this group.

Fare deals for young people

Once again this summer, Brighton & Hove Buses is promoting a £7 weekly Saver ticket for young people with a Bus ID card. Tickets must be bought on-line. This follows a suggestion made by one of our supporters. A 10% discount on Bus ID Annual Savers for under 18s is now available through the East Sussex Credit Union for those with a Young Savers Account.

Don't forget the best fare deals for everyone, like £9 for a family M ticket (£10 on-bus). For those travelling alone a Network Saver costs £5 as an M ticket or on a Key card, £5.20 as a scratchcard, but £7 on the bus. Paying in advance saves money and helps to speed up buses.

Quicker Key Card top ups

It now takes just five hours to top up a Key Card and be able to use it, instead of the day before. Passengers who want to use a discounted ticket straight away can buy M tickets on their mobile phone. M tickets are the same price as Key cards and are becoming increasingly popular.

Watch out for 'Tap On Tap Off' coming soon – enabling Contactless users to be automatically charged for each journey (with a daily cap at the Saver price), without requiring a ticket. More details next month!

Bus timetables catch up with the 24-hour clock

Brighton & Hove bus timetables will be displayed in the 24-hour clock from September. Rail and air timetables have used the 24-hour clock for many years and many smartphones and digital devices routinely use it.

A trip on the 47 to Hangleton and West Hove.

Last April The Big Lemon changed the 47 which previously ran from East Saltdean to Brighton Station. It now extends beyond Brighton Station to Seven Dials, BHASVIC, Old Shoreham Road, Knoll Estate and Hangleton, terminating outside West Hove Sainsbury's. This replaces route 56 (which no longer runs) and part of routes 16 & 66 providing some useful new links from the Hangleton area to the Royal Sussex County Hospital and Brighton Marina. The service is contracted to Brighton & Hove City Council which provides financial support and fares are the same as on Brighton & Hove Buses with all Saver tickets, Key Cards and M tickets valid, but not contactless cards.

I recently made an afternoon journey from Kemp Town to West Hove to experience the route. The white single deck bus turned up a few minutes late, but Steve the friendly driver immediately apologised to me and to everyone who boarded. There were about seven passengers on board, some got off at Old Steine and one boarded there, but rather surprisingly no one else joined us until we reached Old Shoreham Road where the 47 is the only regular bus service. Before April, Old Shoreham Road only had a bus service every 75 minutes but it has now returned to hourly at the same easy to remember times past each hour. The new cross city links are clearly useful as some passengers who were on the bus at Kemp Town stayed on until Hangleton.

The 47 seems to follow a very convoluted route through residential Hangleton which is difficult to understand unless you know the area, but it serves roads not close to the frequent 5, 5A & 5B services while connecting with them at the Grenadier. The 47 runs both ways along Hangleton Valley Drive providing those residents a regular hourly service to Brighton for the first time. After that we reach the Hangleton Link Road and are then non-stop to the last stop Sainsbury's where had a quick chat with the driver and thanked him. It seems a pity the route doesn't continue a little further, as Portslade town centre is only a few minutes away with its rail station and a wider variety of shops. However, the busy level crossing often creates delays and the 16 provides an alternative link from Hangleton to Portslade avoiding the level crossing.

I was a little disappointed the bus wasn't one of the Big Lemon's new electric buses, but the plain white diesel bus (an Optare Solo for those who know their bus types) gave a smooth ride and was very quiet inside. The driver was excellent, welcoming every passenger on board and allowing one lady to sit down while he drove on and she sorted out some change to pay her fare. The company is clearly trying hard to retain and gain new customers by creating a friendly image and we wish them well. A recent and very welcome development is that Big Lemon services now appear on real time information signs around the city.

Finally, a plea to The Big Lemon CEO Tom Druitt – it would really help your image if buses were all painted yellow and carried the name 'The Big Lemon' on the outside; the ones I saw that day were painted white, yellow and red and all were totally anonymous. You have a good brand, don't hide it!

Brighton Area Buswatch meeting

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be at 5pm on **Wednesday 24 July** in Brighton Town Hall. **Please note that this is one day earlier than the date announced in error at the end of our April meeting.** Meetings are open to all, but space is limited so please contact Buswatch at the address below if you wish to join us. The following meeting is on Wednesday 16 October.

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-August 2019. E mail: brightonbuswatch@gmail.com. Phone: 01273 620215



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