

Brighton Area Buswatch



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

Buswatch News – June 2020

Getting back to normal, or ‘new normal’



Buswatch News is back with your local bus news. Firstly, a big thank you to all the bus workers who kept essential services running for NHS and other key workers during the lockdown. I saw this drawing in the window of a property while passing, hence the reflections. I'm sure it conveys the views of many people.

With more shops re-opening, Brighton & Hove City Centre is beginning to come back to life after three months of lockdown. During that time bus services were severely reduced and most people followed the advice to stay at home.

With the Government still recommending people to avoid public transport except for essential journeys, it could be several months before services return to full pre lockdown levels. Dawn Badminton-Capps, Director of Bus Users England, has expressed her concerns: "As towns and cities re-open, messages about transport from government and local authorities have prioritised car use, and, in some cases, even incentivised it. Encouraging car use, even as a short-term measure, could see congestion and pollution rise to higher levels than those seen before the health crisis. It could also prove impossible to reverse as bus services that are no longer used may be lost for good." We can only hope the Government will modify its messages soon. Buses are the most used form of public transport in the UK and Brighton & Hove has, for several years, had the highest bus use per head outside London.

Much has been done to keep bus passengers and drivers safe, with enhanced cleaning regimes and social distancing measures. Our local bus companies have all done a great job, maintaining essential services and keeping passengers informed through their websites and social media. Brighton & Hove Buses increased bus service frequencies on 1 June to around 80% of pre lockdown levels and Stagecoach doubled the frequency of its 700 Coastliner service to run every 15 minutes.

At present buses are only carrying around 20-25% of pre lockdown passenger levels. Social distancing requirements mean buses can only carry around 30 passengers and that number assumes some passengers sit together because they are from the same household. All Brighton & Hove buses are double deckers at the moment. The Big Lemon, Compass and Stagecoach still use single deck vehicles with some seats sealed off on quieter routes and they appear to be coping. 'Sorry Bus Full' signs will be displayed when the capacity has been reached.

There is plenty of helpful guidance on the Brighton & Hove Buses website www.buses.co.uk/coronavirus so there is no need to repeat it here. This also covers its enhanced cleaning regime and no change policies to reduce cash handling. Similar guidelines apply to other local bus companies. All bus companies are encouraging contactless payments including The Big Lemon where this facility was not previously available. Mobile tickets, key cards and scratchcards remain available too.

Face coverings on buses

A reminder that face coverings became compulsory on all public transport in England from 15 June. Again, there is plenty of helpful advice on the Brighton & Hove Buses website regarding exemptions and explaining why bus drivers don't have to wear them.

Where next? More radical plans are needed.

Brighton & Hove City Council has a Covid-19 response City Transport Action Plan which was agreed at its Policy & Resources Committee. Some quick fix improvements to assist social distancing were implemented before shops opened on 15 June, including widened pavements in Western Road outside Waitrose, in Church Road Hove, London Road between Aldi and Oxford Street and in St James's Street. In London Road the northbound 5, 5A & 5B stop has been moved beyond the traffic lights to join the bus stop for out of town routes 17, 270, 271, 272 & 273 by KFC and Subway. The pavement here is very narrow and there is no room for a shelter or a real time information sign, so some widening is needed.

Madeira Drive has been restricted to pedestrians and cyclists. A new cycle lane suddenly appeared in Old Shoreham Road last month. While this has been welcomed, it is disappointing not to be a bus and cycle lane. When traffic levels grow again there are fears it could create more longer delays for eastbound buses turning right on routes 5 & 5A at the Sackville Road junction.

Buswatch would like to see more radical changes to benefit bus users. Southampton is already planning to restrict its City Centre to buses, taxis and cycles only. Brighton & Hove Buses recently consulted us on a number of ideas which we fully support, as do Compass Travel, The Big Lemon and other community groups. These include diverting northbound A23 traffic between St Peter's Place and Preston Circus via Cheapside, Fleet Street and New England Road. That would restrict the London Road shopping to buses, taxis, cyclists and pedestrians making it a quieter, less polluted and generally more attractive. It is something that could be implemented very quickly as a trial with temporary signage.

Another suggestion is to reduce traffic through the Clock Tower junction by restricting Queens Road to buses, taxis and cyclists south of North Road and to pedestrianise the top of West Street. This would reduce traffic levels and improve the environment for pedestrians at this busy junction, creating a pedestrianised route linking Churchill Square and Western Road with Duke Street and The Lanes. It should also reduce emissions from buses as traffic light phases could be simplified, so buses would spend less time waiting for a green light.

The Environment, Transport & Sustainability (ETS) Committee is considering some of these proposals at a virtual meeting on 23 June. A Council officers report for this meeting proposes to restrict southbound traffic in Queens Road but stops short of pedestrianising the top of West Street due to the need to provide vehicular access to Queen Square. The report also recommends a new eastbound bus lane on the A259 between Roedean school and Greenways roundabout which is welcome. This scheme was first proposed two years ago as part of a Bus Network Review. We are relieved the pedestrianisation of St James's Street is not recommended as this would be detrimental to bus users. Not mentioned in the report is the diversion of northbound A23 traffic away from London Road shops, mentioned above. **We urge the Council to reconsider this proposal, so it can be trialled and assessed while traffic levels are lower.**

Valley Gardens update

Perhaps the noticeable change in Brighton over the past three months has been progress on the Valley Gardens scheme where work has continued through the lockdown. Phases 1 & 2 have reached the stage where turf is being laid and footpaths in the gardens are being surfaced. The whole area looks much better.

Buses are now using the west side of the gardens in both directions with temporary stops at St Peter's Church and North Road (southbound). Shelters and real time information displays should appear soon. However, the original intention for a new northbound stop between Church Street and the King & Queen pub has been dropped, for the time being at least.

New signing will make it clear the west side of the gardens (Marlborough Place, Gloucester Place and York Place) is reserved for buses and essential local traffic only. Some 'bus gate' road markings are already in place. When the traffic regulation orders have been agreed, these restrictions will be enforced through ANPR cameras.

Progress on Phase 3 plans between Edward Street, Old Steine and the Palace Pier have been slow due to the lockdown, according to the Council. A new consultant is being appointed. One of their responsibilities will be further engagement and consultation with local stakeholders and the public to help finalise the design. The scheme is now due for completion in Autumn 2022. Buswatch will aim to ensure the best possible facilities are provided for bus users. It looks increasingly unlikely the Council will agree to further changes to the proposed road layouts, so the bus stops and listed bus shelters outside the Royal Pavilion will probably be lost. Buswatch will concentrate on seeking the best use of the 'final layouts' for bus users, ensuring buses can still turn around and wait at Old Steine when there is disruption in the City Centre.

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.

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