

Brighton Area Buswatch



Working in partnership with Bus Users, the national charity representing bus passengers

Buswatch News – June 2022

Bus Service Improvement Plan

Lower fares could be on the way for some bus users as Brighton & Hove City Council decides how to spend the £27.9 million Government grant it has been awarded for its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The award covers three years and requires a new Enhanced Partnership Agreement to be set up with bus operators by 1 July. Buswatch is pleased to be part of the new partnership which will enable us to raise and discuss issues on behalf of bus users.

The Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee on 21 June, approved a report outlining a number of specific ideas, which now have to be agreed with the Department for Transport (DfT). These include:

- **More bus priority measures**, which could include bus lanes along the A23 between Patcham and Carden Avenue and between Stanford Avenue and Preston Circus, a new westbound bus lane on the A259 between Lower Rock Gardens and Brighton Palace Pier and an extended eastbound bus lane between Roedean Road and Greenways roundabout.
- **Fares reductions and simplification** with free travel for accompanied children and young people as well as fares reductions and simplification of fares for young people, including price capping. Free fares at all times for all young people was rejected as the cost would be very high and the DfT made it clear it would not support policies that could not become self-financing when Government funding ends. Some adult fares could be reduced, especially in outer areas where Buswatch has highlighted short journeys which can be more expensive than prices for longer journeys within the Centrefare area. Contactless, mobile, Key card and cash fares could be simplified and capped at the same low price to make it simpler to find the best value ticket.
- **Improvements to supported services**, these are mostly services operated by The Big Lemon and Compass Travel which generally run hourly during the daytime. Sunday only route 57 could be replaced by services 47 & 52 running daily. Brighton & Hove route 21A could be increased in frequency to improve connectivity in East Brighton and there is the possibility of a new express route from the west of the city, perhaps based on existing peak hour only service 55.

Government funding has not yet been received by the Council but is expected shortly. Our concern is that some of these proposals appear to compete with the Council's Local Cycle and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to encourage active travel. We have already seen cycle lanes take priority with the A23 scheme and the Marine Parade bus lane (which has been on the cards for several years) now competes for space with plans for a new two way cycle lane. In London where some bus lanes have been replaced by cycle lanes this has contributed to a decline in bus use and big cuts to services have recently been proposed. The Mayor of London has recently announced that a temporary cycle lane in Euston Road is to revert to a bus lane after bus journey times increased significantly. Brighton & Hove City Council should learn from this experience.

Buses are one of the most sustainable travel modes and should also be regarded as an active travel mode as all bus journeys involve walking to and from the bus stop. Buses are also the most inclusive form of active travel given that all buses are fully accessible. In the Brighton & Hove City Council area buses were carrying almost one million passengers each week before the pandemic and are well on the way back to achieving those levels again.

Bus service recovery plans by B&H Buses

The Governments covid Bus Recovery Grant finishes at the end of September and there has been speculation nationally that bus services may face significant cutbacks. Brighton & Hove Buses told us it was currently running about 92% of pre-covid mileage and carrying around 80% of pre-covid passenger numbers, although this figure was increasing, slowly. With passenger numbers down that means revenue is also down. The new BSIP grants outlined above, cannot be used by bus companies to top up their income.

The company told Buswatch it hopes to be able to restore passenger numbers to pre-covid levels over the coming year and our understanding is that there are no plans for significant reductions to services this autumn. There may be some frequency changes, but it seems most services will continue at similar levels. That will partly depend on the availability of staff, especially drivers, who are hard to recruit and retain at present.

Our local bus companies have done remarkably well to keep services running while those in other parts of the UK have suffered quite hefty cutbacks in some places. Worthing seems to have suffered most locally, Stagecoach has reduced frequencies on a number of services, including the 700 to Brighton which now runs every 12 minutes instead of every 10 minutes, while the local Pulse service now runs every 15 minutes instead of every 10 minutes. The Stagecoach 17 service between Brighton Horsham was every 30 minutes before the pandemic but is now running every 60 minutes. Elsewhere in East and West Sussex, Compass Travel is reporting passenger numbers back to normal but that fewer concessionary pass holders are travelling, and we are told driver availability is tight.

Could route 23 be extended along the A259?

One of the issues that often comes up at meetings and on social media is the poor links to Brighton Marina from the east. The 47 & 52 provide limited services from Woodingdean, Ovingdean, Saltdean and Rottingdean but there is nothing from Peacehaven or Newhaven, apart from the 14B on Sundays only. Buswatch has suggested extending route 23 (Universities – Lewes Road – Queens Park – Royal Sussex County Hospital – Brighton Marina) along the A259 to Saltdean, Peacehaven and possibly Newhaven.

This would also provide direct service from the coast road to Lewes Road and both Universities for the first time. It would enable the 14, 14B & 14C to be combined into one service (14) simplifying those routes, with all buses running direct along Marine Parade. The 23 already serves Eastern Road and the hospital so there would be no loss of existing links. Unfortunately, this proposal is not included as a BSIP funded proposal, by Brighton & Hove City Council but it was included in the East Sussex BSIP. East Sussex County Council told us they are considering providing financial support for a 23 extension along with many other proposals for bus service improvements in East Sussex. However it is likely to be a few months before a final decision is made. We would be interested to hear your views on this.

Big Lemon goes completely electric

The company managed to run all its public bus services with zero emission electric buses for the first time on Thursday 16th June, which was also Clean Air Day. Big Lemon CEO Tom Druiitt said it was touch and go for a while as they waited for a spare part to arrive from Ireland to turn up in time to allow the other electric buses to be re-charged during the day, to make sure they kept running.

Our photo shows The Big Lemon CEO Tom Druiitt (right) congratulating his staff for their successful efforts to make the day a success. The Big Lemon also sponsored the second electric vehicle rally from London to Brighton on Saturday 25 June. Seventy vehicles made their way to Madeira Drive, including three Big Lemon buses, electric cars, vans and a solar powered car. An electric plane even made an appearance.



Printed timetables will be back soon

In April we reported that Bus Times, the free bus timetable book issued twice a year between 1987 and 2019 would not be published again. Times have changed and most people are now getting information on-line. However, there are plans to continue to provide printed information. I have been shown sample timetables with maps for each route which will be available in the autumn. Copies will be available inside buses and at One Stop Travel in North Street. There will also be a new printed bus map with a frequency guide and copies of this should appear inside buses, quite soon.

Brighton Area Buswatch meetings

The next public meetings with Brighton & Hove City Council and bus company managers will be on Wednesday **6 July** at 4.30pm in rooms 2 & 3, at **Brighton Town Hall**, followed by Wednesday 12 October. Numbers are restricted so please e mail Buswatch at the address below if you would like to attend or raise an issue.

Buswatch News is produced and edited by Andrew Boag, Chair, Brighton Area Buswatch. Contributions and suggestions are always welcome.

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



brightonbuswatch.org



Working in partnership with Bus Users www.bususers.org