

Brighton Area Buswatch



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

Buswatch News – November 2021

Local Transport Plan 5 (LTP5): Does it meet the needs of bus users?

Brighton & Hove City Council has been seeking views on its transport plans. LTP5 sets out the Council's vision and priorities for transport and travel to 2030. It recognises the Climate Emergency and aims to create a Liveable City Centre where people will be encouraged to give up their cars in favour of active travel options or public transport. The consultation period has now closed and Buswatch has submitted its response.

Our view is that the main aims are commendable but in some respects they don't seem particularly radical and they could do more to promote public transport. It is unclear what incentives or restrictions there will be for people to change their behaviour. Reducing the need to travel seems to be a priority which is a strange aim for a city whose economy relies heavily on attracting visitors. An expanded Ultra Low Emission Zone for all vehicles is proposed but maybe it is too late to be effective? The Mayor of London has said that 80% of vehicles entering the recently expanded ULEZ in the Capital already comply. Perhaps a more pressing concern is what will happen when more people have electric vehicles? Will they be allowed to go anywhere, clogging up our City Centre streets? There appear to be no proposals to reduce the number of city centre car parks.

The plan says the use of public transport will be encouraged for longer journeys, but short journeys are essential too; Buses are an inclusive mode. Some bus passengers have mobility issues and cannot walk far; In bad weather buses are often packed with short riders, many of whom would otherwise walk or cycle. We are lucky to have an extensive network of high frequency cross city services which provide tube type services along main roads, enabling people to hop on and off and change buses with ease. Unfortunately LTP5 doesn't seem to fully appreciate the essential role buses have achieved in this city, which has led to more bus journeys per head than anywhere else outside London.

The main priority for buses should be reduced journey times achieved through significant new bus priority measures. The savings from this could be used to reduce fares which many people feel is the biggest issue. That in turn would lead to more people travelling by bus instead of car for journeys around the city. That would be a win-win outcome.

Mobility Hubs and Strategic Mobility Hubs are suggested where people can switch between modes. They sound very much like Park & Ride which Brighton & Hove Buses have always supported and the Council is at last considering, albeit reluctantly. To be effective and catch out of town motorists these hubs need to be on the edge of the City. A hub at Brighton Marina for example would be too close to the City Centre. It could just encourage people to drive there through congested Rottingdean instead of using the frequent bus services along the A259 into Brighton.

A Greater Brighton Mass transit between Brighton, Shoreham & Worthing is proposed. This seems a strange choice given that there is already a train service which takes less than 30 minutes between Brighton and Worthing. Improvements eastwards towards Saltdean and Peacehaven which do not have rail links, would be a better priority in conjunction with East Sussex County Council's plans, outlined below.

In conclusion we support the plan but feel that more radical measures are needed to encourage bus use and achieve the 2030 carbon neutral target. We look forward to working with the Council and bus companies on measures to achieve this.

Coast Road Night buses must return soon

Last month we reported that the N12 & N14 night bus services from Brighton to Peacehaven, Newhaven and Eastbourne, which have been suspended since March 2020 would return when the driver shortage eased, and this was regarded as high priority by Brighton & Hove Buses. The company says the driver situation is improving so we were surprised to be told at our recent meeting that there are no plans to restore these services this year.

All other night bus services returned several months ago, albeit with slightly fewer journeys than before. The N25 to the Universities is running every 10 minutes. Stagecoach has restored the N700 to Worthing and Goring. So it feels very unfair that the N12/N14 have not returned, especially as they were well used in the past. The Coaster service 12 is one of Brighton & Hove's busiest routes and recent observations show that many late night 12s are leaving Brighton almost full, especially at weekends.

Research in London showed that up to 50% of night bus journeys were work based. That proportion is probably lower here but even so there will be those working for essential services or in hospitality who need night public transport, in addition to clubbers. There is also the safety issue, those who cannot afford taxis or Ubers may have to walk some distance to get home and be at greater personal risk.

The pre-Christmas period is a particularly busy time for night buses. We urge Brighton & Hove Buses to reconsider and resume night services along the A259 as soon as possible. If they cannot staff it themselves there may be other local bus operators who could help out on a temporary basis.

East Sussex plans Demand Responsive Transport to replace existing bus services

As reported last month Brighton & Hove City Council has prepared a Bus service Improvement Plan (BSIP). This has now been submitted to the Department for Transport which is a requirement before Government money can be awarded to enable bus service improvements. East Sussex CC and West Sussex CC have also submitted BSIPs and copies are available on respective websites.

The East Sussex BSIP is very ambitious and contains some impressive targets for improved bus services. There is an expectation bus usage will improve to 15% above pre Covid levels by 2024/25. Major bus routes providing inter-urban links would be improved. A Bus Rapid Transit scheme is proposed for the A259 corridor east of Saltdean which would support new housing developments. The main services between Brighton, Lewes and Uckfield could be increased in frequency with four buses an hour to Uckfield. A much improved half hourly service could run from Lewes to Hailsham. Currently just five buses a day run on this route (143).

This BSIP is particularly notable for proposing the introduction of Demand Responsive Transport (which East Sussex CC refers to as Digital DDRT) schemes in some areas, including Lewes, Seaford and Newhaven where they would replace some existing bus services. Users would book a bus trip in advance like booking a taxi, either online or by phone and state their destination. The main advantage is that passengers could be picked up in minibuses close to their homes and taken to their destination. Buses could arrive within a few minutes. The aim is to improve accessibility and provide services at times which suit customers, replacing bus services that are currently relatively infrequent and run at fixed times over set routes. It is certainly a bold idea, but we have a number of concerns:

DDRT may work well in sparsely populated rural areas where bus services are few and far between, but in small towns it can have several disadvantages:

1. People used to a regular bus service would have to book a journey in advance instead of turning up at a bus stop a regular time. A recent experiment by The Big Lemon in Hangleton showed that people did not like having to book a bus and usage fell. A fixed route was soon restored.
2. DDRT buses would divert to serve other customers so journey times would vary, not good if you have a train to catch or a hospital appointment.
3. Concessionary passes might not be valid. The County Council would decide but there is no legal requirement for them to be accepted on DDRT routes.
4. The cost of providing DDRT services is high. Around 50% of the cost of running a bus service covers driver wages. So, it would be difficult to reduce costs without cutting wages and that would make it hard to recruit drivers.
5. DDRT schemes require significant subsidies which would be susceptible to cuts each time Council budgets are reviewed. Many existing DRT schemes around the UK have ceased after a year or two.

Bus Industry expert Roger French (who used to run Brighton & Hove Buses), has studied DRT schemes around the country and recently wrote in his [blog](#) "I've yet to find a scheme that works in the interests of passengers and provides a better service than a fixed timetable bus route".

Farewell Martin

This month we say goodbye to Martin Harris. He retires this month after a long career in the bus industry, having been MD of Brighton & Hove Buses since 2013.



Martin's dedication to charitable causes has been outstanding with the special liveries on buses promoting local charities and events such as Paddle Round the Pier, Pride, Albion in the Community, and the Brighton Housing Trust. In this photo he is clearly enjoying addressing a crowd at an event for Action on Hearing Loss in 2016. Reducing emissions has become a much more important issue. There are now 54 buses capable of running in electric mode through the City Centre.

There have been major changes to the way we pay for our journeys since 2013. First we had the Key Card, then the mobile phone app and now Contactless with Tap On Tap Off. Cash payments to the driver now account for just 5% of transactions.

Martin has been a strong supporter of Brighton Area Buswatch, attending many of our meetings over the years. He has always been keen to hear our views and those of our supporters. Even when people have been critical, he took them seriously and offered detailed, honest explanations. We wish Martin a long and happy retirement.

Brighton Area Buswatch meetings

Thanks to Brighton & Hove City Council, we have been able to resume our public meetings with bus companies and the Council. The next meeting is arranged for Wednesday 12th January, at 4.30pm in rooms 2 & 3, **Brighton Town Hall**. Further dates in 2022 are 16 April, 6 July and 12 October. All on Wednesdays with a 4.30pm start time. Numbers will be strictly limited 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 welcome.

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