

# Brighton Area Buswatch

A branch of Bus Users (formerly Bus Users UK)  
representing local bus users

## Buswatch News – October 2019

### New buses are just the ticket!

Brighton & Hove Buses has a strong record of investing in new buses. In recent years they have regularly improved their fleet with low emission buses with better passenger facilities such as next stop announcements, USP points and free Wi-Fi. It is easy to take these facilities for granted until you travel on a bus in another city.

However the latest buses represent a complete step change. The thirty blue/green/turquoise (opinions differ!) double deckers now running on routes 5, 5A & 5B operate in almost silent electric mode through the Low Emission zone which covers North Street and Western Road. Acceleration and braking is incredibly smooth and the buses have plenty of power to get up hills. We are told bus drivers love the new in-cab CCTV screens which replace wing mirrors giving a much better view with fewer blind spots. Bus batteries are recharged through an on board diesel engine and by regenerative braking; there is no need to connect them to an electricity supply.

The interiors feature a completely new colour scheme and there are large screens for next stop information, with an extra sign opposite the wheelchair space for the first time. One set of seats upstairs has a table so families and groups can sit together. There is a destination screen on the offside although there is no rear window on the lower deck and the rear destination display is restricted to a route number. This is apparently due to the need to provide battery space. Externally each bus promotes the new 'Live & Breathe' campaign dedicated to climate change and emphasising local issues. This includes 60 bespoke local images created by local artists and the tradition of naming each bus after a deceased person with a local connection is maintained.

These buses are slightly shorter overall so they have fewer seats than those they replaced (64 instead of 71 overall) which is disappointing. This is more noticeable downstairs due to the extra door. Upstairs the heating/cooling fans can be rather noisy. Maybe there's too much grey panelling inside, which with dark coloured seats creates a colder feel than red seats, but this is a subjective view and the colour grey is fashionable at the moment.



I am Grateful to Becky Reynolds for this photo of a brand new 5A stuck passing a truck, with parked vehicles in the opposite side, in Old London Road Patcham, something that happens far too often these days which delays buses and makes them less reliable.

Last week around 60 guests were invited to take a tour of Brighton in one of the new buses. We visited Dorothy Stringer school to see its Eco School project and Moulsecoomb Forest Garden which runs outdoor activities for people with learning difficulties and kids who struggle in conventional classrooms. Brighton & Hove Managing Director provided a commentary and answered questions. He confirmed the company's ambitious target of achieving a zero emission fleet by 2030.

## **Valley Gardens Phase 3 Funding approved**

The Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) released £6 million towards the cost of Phase 3 at its meeting on 17 October. The City Council will be required to fund the remaining £1.8 million. The LEP report gives a construction start date of February 2020 with completion in March 2021 which seems optimistic. Considerable lobbying took place before the 17 October meeting by groups opposed to the present scheme, but the LEP said the Council had met the funding criteria and approved the proposals although it said the scheme offered low value for money.

The Valley Gardens Forum which represents local businesses and residents presented an alternative scheme. This puts buses on the west side of the Steine by the Royal Pavilion which Buswatch strongly supports. Their plan retains the aquarium roundabout in front of the Palace Pier which would facilitate U turns and permit two way traffic in Madeira Drive, reducing the impact at Dukes Mound. These issues are of less of a concern for bus users but we do not agree with the forum's idea to turn Pool Valley coach station into a cycle hub. National Express has said it doesn't want coaches to use Pool Valley in future, but only because it has such poor facilities. It would be far better to keep coaches there and provide decent facilities. Conservative Councillors previously voted against the Council's Phase 3 plans and Councillors Joe Miller and Robert Nemeth are calling for a full economic impact assessment of the scheme. Their motion will be considered at the full Council meeting on 24 October.

Buswatch now finds itself in a difficult position. We have always opposed the Council's Phase 3 plans, because they would result in less space for buses and scattered bus stop locations around the Old Steine. A lot of passengers change buses here so interchange between buses would become more difficult. However, Brighton & Hove Buses has given the Council's scheme qualified support. With funding approved substantial changes are less likely, so we have to decide whether to accept Phase 3 and work with B&H Buses and the Council to secure improvements to bus stop arrangements. Your views are welcome.

The Council has promised further consultation with local stakeholders through a 'Task and Finish' group but this has yet to happen.

## **St James's Street petition**

In the September edition of Buswatch News we made the case for keeping buses in St James's Street. A petition is being presented to the Full Council meeting on 24 October to pedestrianise or part pedestrianise St James's Street. The petition also suggests new art installations and a rainbow crossing. It urges the Council to implement a consultation to see if pedestrianisation is a possibility.

We support a consultation to look at ways of making the street more welcoming, but it must take account of the wider needs of bus users as well as local businesses and residents. The bus stop outside Morrisons is the 4<sup>th</sup> busiest bus stop in the city, used by around 2 million passengers a year. It is the second busiest stop for passengers using disabled or elderly concessionary passes. Many of these people live in poorer areas, such as Whitehawk, Craven Vale and Bristol Estate. They rely on convenient buses to take them to and from the shops, many of which could stand to lose customers if the bus stops were removed. We have written to the Council to outline our concerns.

## **Taxi's move to the back of Brighton Station**

From Monday 11th November the main taxi rank at Brighton Station moves to the rear of the station accessed from Stroudley Road. This should reduce congestion around the front of the station, particularly in the evenings when queuing taxis often block Surrey Street and the bus station area. This means longer and more expensive journeys for people going south so it may not be a popular move. However, buses should benefit!

## **Tap On Tap Off is here**

Don't forget you can now use contactless bank cards on Brighton & Hove Buses by simply tapping on as you board. When you leave the bus tap off on the black box (but wait until the green light comes on or it won't work). It will calculate the appropriate fare and cap it at the One Day Saver rate if you make several trips. You can check your journeys at [contactless@buses.co.uk](mailto:contactless@buses.co.uk) We are told over 9,000 passengers use this system each day and there is a big publicity campaign to increase these numbers.

## Brighton Area Buswatch meeting

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be in **January 2020**. The precise date should be confirmed next month. Meetings are open to all, but space is 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. We welcome your contributions and suggestions. The next issue is due mid-November 2019.

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