

Brighton Area Buswatch

Representing local bus users



A branch of Bus Users UK

Buswatch News – October 2017

Valley Gardens scheme - Our Appeal to Councillors: Vote NO on 28 November

The Valley Gardens road scheme returns to Brighton & Hove City Council's Environment, Transport and Sustainability Committee on 28 November for final approval. A year ago Councillors on the same Committee praised and approved the proposals unanimously, without raising any serious concerns.

Brighton Area Buswatch has consistently opposed current proposals for the Valley Gardens scheme. We believe they will increase congestion which will create more delays for buses, resulting in slower journeys and less frequent services. This scenario is already happening in London where badly planned road schemes have led to a serious decline in bus use. Londoners have the Underground as an alternative; we don't have that luxury. We know talks have taken place between the Council and Brighton & Hove Buses to try to mitigate some of the effects. As a result, bus lanes will remain throughout the construction period and there may be a few new bus lanes added on approaches to the City Centre.

The closure of North Street has demonstrated very clearly that the worst congestion in central Brighton occurs at weekends, not during the week. Yet the Valley Gardens proposals are solely based on Monday to Friday traffic flows to comply with Department for Transport guidelines.

Our Secretary Peter Elvidge has studied various traffic schemes in the city over many years. Here is a summary of his review. The full report is available on our website www.brightonbuswatch.org with maps showing how the proposals could be improved.

As our supporters will no doubt be aware, the executive group has long been concerned about Brighton Council's proposals for Valley Gardens- the main corridor between St. Peters Church and Edward Street (which carries buses and traffic from the Lewes Road, Ditchling Road and the A23, towards the seafront- and is arguably the most important traffic artery into the city). We have a number of issues with the proposals- including the fact the council is narrowing sections of general traffic down to a single lane, in each direction.

People may say we will still have the bus lanes, so what is the problem? We have previously seen general traffic narrowed down to single lane and this caused extensive delays to buses beyond the bus lane. It also contributed to the first fall in bus usage in recent history. Part of the problem is the council has based its traffic modelling at a quieter time of year (a mid-weekday in October), so does not take into consideration much heavier traffic levels at weekends, in the summer and other busier times of year. With junctions said to be close to 100% of capacity at this quieter time of year, this can only mean significant delays to buses at what could be called 'normal busier' times. Buses will not only suffer from direct traffic queues beyond the bus lanes, but more importantly from traffic seeking alternative routes. Sometimes a small increase in traffic can cause a disproportionately substantial increase in delays, and bus unreliability.

There are additional major issues:

- Problems with the Grand Parade/Church Street right-turn junction means southbound traffic flow could be worse than halved. We do not believe the council understands the repercussions of its proposals*
- There are likely to be problems with bus lane enforcement (which risks causing substantial delays), especially as general traffic is legally allowed to use parts of the 'bus lane'.*
- There are likely to be problems at the St. Peter's bus stops, not helped by repositioning the taxi rank almost opposite the bus stops.*
- Problems already occur at the St. Peter's Church/London Road traffic signals. This could be made worse by the proposal forcing Lewes/University services to turn right here. This will also add to journey time.*
- Traffic turning right in the single lane sections risks causing significant tailbacks to northbound traffic. Obviously a breakdown or roadworks along this section, will bring bus services to a near standstill.*
- There are a number of other issues. We do not want to follow London where traffic schemes have been blamed for falling bus usage. We are concerned the proposals risk seriously undermining our currently successful bus service.*

The Executive group has seen greater unity in its concerns over the proposal, than virtually any other issue. With many years' experience of traffic issues, I have taken the lead in explaining our concerns. This was done in a comprehensive letter sent to members of the Environment, Transport and Sustainability committee members, the project's coordinator and other people (including our local MPs).

As totally abandoning the scheme is unlikely, I have also enclosed an alternative (broadly supported), that not only answers all the group's concerns, but would actually be beneficial to bus services (with some positive ideas for pedestrians and cyclists as well). Overall, a substantial improvement over the present appalling proposals.

I attended the last Transport Partnership meeting, where I was able to express the group's disappointment over the current proposal, the lack of progress on our concerns, and the fact that there was an alternative. I also attended a meeting outlining how the council proposes to introduce the scheme. Thanks partly to the main bus company, the council should be praised for its attempts to reduce delays to buses during the construction process. However, a number of issues remain for

later stages of the scheme, which could further increase delays to bus services. One of the alternative scheme's advantages, is it should substantially reduce delays during the construction process.

For further details of our concerns, and the diagram (in two parts), please visit our website - www.Brightonbuswatch.org.

Peter Elvidge 4th October 2017

Lewes Road/Elm Grove and North Street roadworks

The second stage of the roadworks at the junction of Lewes Road/Elm Grove/Union Road began on 28 September when four-way temporary traffic lights were installed. There was major disruption to all traffic for the first few days. Buses were turning short of their destinations at Old Steine or Lewes Road bus garage, leaving many passengers with just the 49 to Churchill Square (and most of these were terminating at Palmeira Square instead of continuing to Portslade). Fortunately, the situation eased after a few days as car drivers found alternative routes. The four-way traffic lights with fixed time phases have now been changed to three-way phases connected to the traffic light control centre, so green times can be adjusted remotely. Most buses are now running through to their intended destinations and timekeeping has improved.

The North Street diversions are working reasonably well – at least during the week. Weekends are another matter though, with delays occurring most afternoons which can have a knock on effect for several hours afterwards. We understand the North Street repairs and resurfacing works are progressing well. That said, two months seems a long time to resurface one street. Many people have noted that there is often no sign of any activity during the daytime.

Bus Network Review

Brighton & Hove City Council has commissioned a Bus Network Review. Consultants will look at how bus service punctuality can be improved and what measures could be implemented as quick wins or in the longer term. Buswatch welcomes this review and we are eager to help in any way we can. If bus users have any ideas, please contact us and we will take them forward on your behalf. We are told there will be a final report which will be a publicly available document.

Sunday 17 now operated by Sussex Coaches

Last month we reported that Sussex Coaches had applied to run a Sunday service between Brighton & Horsham to replace the Compass Travel service. The Sunday service began as planned on 17th September. Buses leave Churchill Square for Henfield, Partridge Green, Cowfold and Horsham at 1100, 1300, 1400, 1600, 1700 and 1840 (the last bus continues beyond Henfield by request). Buses leave Horsham for Brighton at 0930, 1030, 1230, 1430, 1530, 1715 and at 1815 to Henfield only. The company distributed timetables widely in and around Horsham and Henfield and early indications are that the service is well used on some journeys. But it needs more support to keep running as it receives no subsidy.

The Big Lemon takes over most Council supported services.

With just a few days notice, contracts for Council supported bus services 16/66, 47, 52, 56 & 57 were awarded to The Big Lemon. Compass Bus had operated these services for the past five years and did a good job, but competitive tendering meant they lost out this time. The Big Lemon hired some former London buses from a dealer and recruited sufficient drivers to begin on 17/18 September. Unfortunately, there were some timetable changes which were not able to be publicised in advance. New timetables were distributed to passengers by the bus company and the Council and bus stop timetables were quickly updated. Please be aware that the printed edition of Bus Times contains the old timetables.

Brighton & Hove awards

Congratulations to Brighton & Hove Buses for winning the prestigious Bus Operator of the Year award at the National Transport Awards in London on 12 October. It is easy to criticise bus companies when we are waiting a long time for a bus, but there is no doubt Brighton & Hove is one of the best. Most of us enjoy frequent bus services operated by modern low emission vehicles with well trained, courteous staff. Brighton & Hove Buses all display next stop information, real time information is available at many stops and on the phone app and all buses now have free wi fi with USB points in many of them. The company engages willingly with us and actively supports many community groups and disability organisations.

Particular credit goes to long term bus driver Phil Hadley who was commended at the awards. His colleagues joked that he receives so many commendations they are weighed not counted! Also commended was Special Constable Jamie Jackson who patrols our local buses. His post is paid for by Brighton & Hove Buses in partnership with Sussex Police. Following this success, Brighton & Hove Buses is now planning to pay for a parking enforcement warden who would be employed by the Council's contractor to help keep main bus routes clear of illegally parked vehicles.

Brighton Area Buswatch meeting

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be at 5pm on **Wednesday 17th January 2018** in Brighton Town Hall.

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 2017.

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