

Brighton Area Buswatch



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

Buswatch News – September 2020

That seafront cycle lane

Since the last edition of Buswatch News, the A259 cycle lane through the Aquarium roundabout has come and gone. It remains in place between West Street and Fourth Avenue in Hove where the impact was less severe. We all remember the chaos that it created for a couple of weeks in August with long queues along Marine Parade, Rock Gardens, Edward Street and in Old Steine. There was even evidence of increased congestion as far away as Elm Grove and Rottingdean as motorists tried to find alternative routes.

Cycle lanes are welcome but this experience demonstrated what can happen when they are implemented in a hurry. Credit is due to Brighton & Hove Buses who negotiated behind the scenes to demonstrate the serious impact the cycle lane was having on bus services and also to Brighton & Hove City Council leader Pete West who eventually conceded the scheme couldn't just be tweaked a little. With proposals for more cycle lanes under consideration there is increasing pressure from opposition politicians to put schemes on hold.

Valley Gardens bus gates

Valley Gardens Phases 1 & 2 are nearing completion. The new green spaces are looking very smart and have been popular. Walking and cycling between Old Steine and St Peter's Church is now much more pleasant experience. Facilities for buses are not finished as new shelters and real time information signs have yet to appear. Production of the shelters was delayed during lockdown but they are due to be erected in early October. The scheme will be officially opened on 18 September.

However, delays to buses caused by drivers using the west side continue, as reported last month. ANPR cameras have been installed and are apparently working but they don't seem to be making much difference. Motorists continue to turn left at the bottom of North Road instead of continuing to Grand Parade and it isn't hard to see why they do this:



This is the first sign drivers see in North Road. The road markings wrongly direct vehicles to turn left at the next junction for the A23 & A27. In fact they should continue to the second junction at Grand Parade.



At the junction of North Road and Gloucester Place road markings direct 'local traffic' to turn left with no route indication on the other two lanes. There are no roadside direction signs before the traffic lights. But what does local traffic mean? London Road? Patcham? It is very vague. Motorists can turn left here but should then turn left at the first turning to avoid a penalty charge.



The first turning is Trafalgar Street but many confused drivers carry on through the bus gate, perhaps because the small blue signs are less clear than red No Entry signs. If motorists receive a penalty charge notice they will probably appeal on the grounds the signing was unclear.



The road markings at the junction of Church Street and Marlborough Place show 'Bus Taxi Access Only'. This is much clearer and appears to be more effective than signing at North Road.

Big Lemon services remain reduced.

Services 16, 47, 52 & 57 are operated by The Big Lemon under contract to Brighton & Hove City Council which sets the service levels and provides financial support because these routes are unprofitable. Like most bus services they were reduced substantially during lockdown and Government funding was provided to enable services to continue for essential workers. In August the Government announced a package of additional funding for bus operators and local authorities, to enable bus services to return to normal levels in September. Most Brighton & Hove and Compass Travel services are now running at or close to pre-Covid levels. However, there are still some big gaps in Big Lemon timetables because additional Council funding has not been provided. Buswatch has raised this issue with the Council and we will continue to press for full timetables to be restored to these services as soon as possible.

North Street emission statistics explained

A recent press release from Friends of the Earth placed the North Street Clock Tower junction in Brighton the third most polluted location in the country. Its annual audit based on local authority data, recorded Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) emissions of 91, more than double the national air quality objective of 40. This is clearly unacceptable and requires urgent action from Brighton & Hove City Council. A big issue is the long queues of westbound vehicles, mostly buses, waiting at the top of North Street. Not surprisingly vehicles stopping and starting on a hill produce higher emissions. Brighton & Hove Buses and Buswatch have been pressing for changes to the signal timings to improve the flow of westbound buses which would help to solve the problem. The Council has been reluctant to consider this but the previous administration commissioned a study last year.

Fortunately, this situation may not be quite as bad as it seems. Friends of the Earth used 2018 data, whereas the 2020 Air Quality Annual Status Report issued by Brighton & Hove City Council recorded lower NO₂ readings of 77 at the Clock Tower and an average of 46 in North Street during 2019. These figures are still too high but 46 is much closer to the target of 40 and the good news is that readings are going down. These improvements reflect the introduction of Euro VI ultra-low emission diesel buses since 2015 and the latest 'Live and Breathe' extended range electric buses introduced towards the end of 2019.

Unfortunately a story about Brighton having the third most polluted street in England led to local and national media coverage. The reaction on social media was predictable with many people blaming buses, often calling for them to be removed from North Street completely. It was disappointing to see local Councillors referring to the Friends of the Earth report instead of the updated Council data, ignoring the huge investments made by all our local bus companies to reduce vehicle emissions. Another batch of new light blue 'Live & Breathe' buses are due next month for routes 1 & 1A. These will reduce emissions further as they will run in electric mode through the Ultra-Low Emission Zone. In recent years, Brighton & Hove has recorded the highest bus use per head outside London. North Street is pivotal to this success, enabling buses to run through the heart of the City Centre. In other cities buses are often relegated to the edge of city centres or have to use circuitous ring roads making them less attractive. Removing buses from North Street would create hardship for less able users, resulting in fewer bus journeys at a time when we should be encouraging public transport.

Hydrogen bus trial

In August a double decker bus powered by a hydrogen fuel cell was demonstrated to local stakeholders. Brighton & Hove Buses and Metrobus are considering hydrogen powered buses as an alternative to battery electric vehicles because of their longer range. While the technology has been largely proven, the sticking point has been cost, but this is now coming down. So hydrogen powered buses which only emit water vapor and are as quiet as electric buses could be on our streets within a few years.

Valley Gardens Phase 3 consultation

A reminder that the much delayed final consultation is open until **18th September** at <https://consultations.brighton-hove.gov.uk/parking/valley-gardens-phase3/> It assumes the basic road layouts have been agreed, with two way traffic on the east side of Old Steine, traffic lights replacing the Aquarium roundabout and the west side of Old Steine in front of the Royal Pavilion pedestrianised. It also assumes Madeira Drive becomes one-way eastbound (although this road is currently closed) with new traffic lights at the junction of Marine Parade and Dukes Mound.

The main issues for us are:

- 1) The space for terminating buses to stand between journeys at Old Steine is totally insufficient.
- 2) Bus stop locations are less spacious than now. This is contrary to one of the main objectives of the scheme which is to improve facilities for bus passengers.
- 3) Some of the proposed bus stop sites look impractical, such as the westbound stop opposite the War Memorial in the short slip road between Castle Square and St James's Street.
- 4) The northbound bus stop on the east side of Old Steine is very close to the cycle lane. This stop is likely to be very busy so there is a high risk of conflict between cyclists and pedestrians.
- 5) Changing between buses will become less convenient
- 6) Some lane widths are too narrow for buses to pass easily.

Brighton Area Buswatch meetings

In normal circumstances, meetings with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council are held four times a year. We had hoped to resume in October but that will not be possible within current Government restrictions. A further announcement will be made in due course. In the meantime, please send in your comments and we will take them up with the operators or the Council.

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

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