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Brighton, Hove and the
surrounding areas

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Franchising feasibility:

Council Leader Bella Sankey has called for a feasibility study into Brighton's bus services becoming franchised; in a model similar to London, Manchester and Liverpool. The move could be made in conjunction with local authority reorganisation in both East and West Sussex, which may lead to bus services operating under a single mayor. Labour's Bus Services Act 2025 gives all local transport authorities in England new powers to franchise bus services, without needing the approval of the Secretary of State.

However, some of the positives such as a unified bus network, can already be seen in the city, and the cost of maintaining a franchised system also needs to be considered. It has been suggested that London's bus services are subsidised to the tune of £1.2 *billion*, perhaps 300 times our local support! But unlike Brighton, bus usage in London is falling! Also other northern cities have received exceptional government grants. While there is plenty you could do with considerable money (including cutting fares), there is no sign our councils would gain such exceptional funding. Without this, it would be a case of- if the council chooses to improve one bus service, it would need to cut another service; and in doing so, risks killing the goose that lays the golden egg. Also there are statements within council's Local Transport Plan, which raises concerns over what the council plans do with its control of bus services.

It is thought that many advantages of franchising could be obtained by further developing the current Enhanced Partnership model, which has helped towards us being the most used bus service outside London. It is our view, that we seek further cooperation with all parties to further the excellent work already being done for passengers, outside of a franchising model. This includes ticket integration and simplification, way-finding and image.

Night services increased

A greatly improved night bus network starts on the morning of 14th April. Following requests from locals and the university, the N48 offers a brand new night bus serving both East Moulsecoomb and Lower Bevendean. A new N29 service will also operate between Brighton and Lewes. These will be the first new night services since COVID, and the latter replaces a discontinued N29 between Brighton and Uckfield. Both routes will start from the Royal Pavilion bus stop and operate hourly, nightly. The two services will run at opposite times each hour; which out of term-time, provides a consistent 4 buses-an-hour along the Lewes Road corridor.

From the same date, the N1 will no longer serve Brighton Station, but will instead extend beyond Churchill Square to serve Woodingdean via Whitehawk. This follows an increase in the service last year when an fourth round trip was added, so offering a 24/7 all-night service. The N7 is re-timed to work in tandem with route N1 between Arundel Road and North Street, better serving the Royal Sussex County Hospital.



In addition, from June – routes N12 & N14 are expected to operate seven days a week. Brighton & Hove Buses requires a modest level of funding from the Local Authority Bus Grant, but these routes are expected to become fully commercial in future. Further changes to Coaster services are also expected at the same time.

April service changes: Other changes to services will take place from Monday 13th April: Services 1 & 7 – are re-timed to provide a more consistent frequency along the Eastern Road corridor, the service 13X will run every 30 minutes on Sundays, and be extended to serve Eastbourne Pier. Service 77, 78 & 79 'Breeze' services will see their enhanced summer timetables enacted, including later return journeys.

New coach route announced: Route 998 started on the 1st April; running from Brighton to Milton Keynes, calling at: Gatwick Airport (both terminals), Heathrow Airport (Terminal 5 and Central Bus Station) & Luton Airport DART. Operated by Spirit of Sussex, for Flixbus – this new coach service operates daily and will be the first to operate from the new Stroudley Road coach stop at 03.05, 04.55, 13.30 & 16.05. However information on this is inconsistent. Flixbus also operates route 066 (Brighton – Gatwick – Stratford – Trumpington – Cambridge).

Electric buses on test: Electric times ahead; with the introduction of the first of 29 fully electric buses for Brighton & Hove Bus. The Conway Street depot has been partially rebuilt to accommodate the new buses and infrastructure. These new buses are destined for route 7 (13 buses), 8 buses for route 6 (representing an increase to a 12 minute service) and 5 buses for the 5, 5A & 5B group of routes, for their partial conversion. These buses can be seen on test within the city, mainly on route 7.

Fare changes: Fare caps on Brighton and Hove Buses' cheaper fares will finish after the Easter holidays, following a small reduction in the government support grant, which has been previously been spent subsidising bus fare. These supported short and medium hop journeys currently costing £1.30 and £2.60 respectively. These will increase from Monday, 13 April. At the time of writing, it is not clear what these new fares will become. The £3 National fare cap will remain until mid 2027. Some of the remaining bus grant, will be spent on subsidising season tickets brought at the North Street travel shop (matching the cost of buying them online) and maintaining the 'Breeze Up to the Downs' services 77, 78 & 79. About 200 young care leavers will be given free bus passes. In addition, from the 30th March, changes were made to some other bus fares/ticketing, including raising the city weekly Tap On-Tap off fare cap- to £29.80, and the abolition of many return fares.

Route 18 decision due: With financial issues; and concerns over reliability issues- on the service 18; Buswatch awaits with interest how the route will be organised to address these concerns. It is likely, as discussed at the recent St Luke's Resident's Association meeting, that the '18' will be merged with another bus route, but further information is not available, as not everyone has been approached.

World Public Transport Day: Friday 17th April is World Public Transport Day and we intend to celebrate it too – with ideas forthcoming. A poster campaign 'ONE DAY - MILLIONS OF JOURNEYS.' is being used to promote the event.

Marathon Day changes: Brighton's full marathon takes place on Sunday 12th Apr 2026, with significant changes to service within the city, leaving some areas without a bus service for a large part of the day. Please check website and apps. for further details. Buswatch is monitoring this with interest.

Buswatch meeting: The next Brighton Buswatch meeting takes place on **15th April 2026 at 16.00 – at Rooms 2 & 3 Brighton Town Hall.** Space is normally limited, but interest is gathering; so please e-mail Buswatch or message via Brighton Buswatch Facebook group if you would like to attend.

Buswatch Newsletter is produced and edited by Brighton Area Buswatch. Contributions and suggestions are always welcome.