**Brighton Area Buswatch**

**Representing local bus users**

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**Part of Bus Users UK**

**Buswatch News – July 2016**

**Bus driver shortage leads to cancellations**

Brighton & Hove Buses is experiencing a driver shortage which is causing several cancellations each day. We have received complaints and others have responded on social media with tales of long waits, often for services that should run frequently. Some late night buses have also been affected.

I was interviewed on the Danny Pike show on BBC Sussex on 11 July along with Mike Best, Commercial Director at Brighton & Hove Buses and Mark Turner from the GMB Union which represents some drivers.  I emphasised that ad hoc cancellations were creating real hardship, especially for people living on the edge of the city where services are less frequent. This was not helped by the mobile phone app showing cancelled buses as a fixed time (like 15:26), instead of counting down the minutes to arrival.

Mike Best apologised to passengers for the delays and cancellations and paid tribute the drivers who were helping to maintain a decent service by working overtime. He explained the reasons for the driver shortfall and the measures being taken to get services back to normal quickly. It takes up to six weeks to recruit and train new drivers so arrangements have been made to hire drivers from other local bus companies. Route 7X between Brighton Station and Brighton Marina will be operated by Compass Travel buses from 18 July and route 77 to Devil’s Dyke will be operated by green and cream Seaford & District buses from 23 July. The good news is that Seaford & District plans to use open top buses and heritage vehicles at weekends so passengers will be able to travel to Breeze Up to the Downs on an open top bus again this year. Fares will remain the same and all Brighton & Hove tickets will be valid on these services.

Our members and supporters had the opportunity to quiz Mike Best about the situation at our meeting on 13 July. He has driven buses himself recently and experienced how difficult it was for drivers to keep to time when the bus in front was missing. This exacerbates the waiting time for passengers and often leads to another bus catching up, so two buses run together after a long gap, which is very annoying. Hopefully the measures outlined above will restore confidence in the bus service during the busy summer months when buses are often full. We will be monitoring the situation closely and welcome comments from bus users who have experienced difficulties recently.

**Catch the Bus week success**

This is organised each year by Bus Users UK and several events are held around the country to encourage people to try bus travel. Brighton & Hove Buses parked a new bus at Churchill Square on 6 July and I was invited to attend along with Claire Walters, Chief executive of Bus Users UK and representatives from local bus companies. Dozens of bus users and non-bus users came along to express their views and sample one of Brighton & Hove’s new two door buses.

**Paddle Round the Pier**

The annual Paddle Round the Pier event took place on 2nd and 3rd July to raise money for several local charities. The very colourful Brighton & Hove bus promoting the event bus was parked by Hove Lawns. Visitors were given the opportunity to have a message displayed on the destination screen in return for a contribution to the collection box. Thanks are due to Victoria Garcia and her team for arranging this special display for us.



**Another North Street closure ahead?**

Bus services in North Street could be disrupted again later this year. The surface needs to be repaired which could mean closing or partially closing the road again. It is just over a year since the last time the road was disrupted when the westbound bus stops were moved, creating big delays on some days.

**Valley Gardens update**

The City Council is proceeding with plans for the Valley Gardens scheme between St Peter’s Church and Old Steine. We were told at our meeting that modelling work is complete and a report would be presented to the relevant Committee meeting in October outlining the proposed scheme. We have expressed concerns about the impact of reducing space for general traffic because buses could become delayed in longer queues. There are fears buses could be held up if general traffic lanes are reduced from two lanes in each direction. While the Valley Gardens scheme will retain bus lanes it is likely these will have to be shared with local access traffic.

**More Space for buses at Brighton Station?**

Brighton and Hove City Council is in discussion with GTR which runs Brighton station and taxi operators about ways to reduce congestion at the front of the station. This could lead to more space being made available for buses. Councillor Gill Mitchell the lead member for Transport told our meeting serious consideration was being given to moving the taxi rank to the rear of the station. The risk here is that some taxis would continue to set down passengers in roads the front of the station creating a new traffic problem.

**Compass Travel to retain an hourly Sunday service to Horsham**

Good news for users of the 17 between Brighton and Horsham. Last year Stagecoach increased the Monday to Saturday service from hourly to half hourly. Now Compass Travel which runs the Sunday service has doubled the Sunday frequency to hourly and says this is a success so it will continue.

**theSussexBus.com cuts fares in Brighton**

Passengers using SussexBus services between Patcham and Brighton now benefit from lower fares. A £1.80 single fare is now available from Patcham Black Lion to anywhere in Brighton on routes 33, 40 & 40X saving up to 60p on the Brighton & Hove and Metrobus fares. There is also a £2.90 return fare. Remember these discounts are only available on SussexBus services and these days the hourly 33 only serves Brighton on Saturdays. These changes were actually introduced last month but Sussex Bus does not communicate with us and no longer sends a representative to our meetings, so we could not publicise them earlier.

**Brighton Area Buswatch meetings**

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be on **Wednesday 12 October 2016** at 5.15pm in Brighton Town Hall. Meetings are open to all members and supporters but please let us know in advance if you wish to attend as space is limited.

**Buswatch News is produced and edited by Andrew Boag, Chair, Brighton Area Buswatch. We welcome your comments and suggestions. Printed A5 copies of this newsletter are available from Hove town hall reception and a pdf or large print versions are available on request.** **The next issue is due mid-August 2016.**

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