

Brighton Area Buswatch

Representing local bus users



A branch of Bus Users UK

Buswatch News – October 2016

Cheaper car parking is not the answer

Media reports of a fall in day visitor numbers have led to several people suggesting car park charges in Brighton & Hove are too high. Yet traffic congestion in the city is getting worse. Everyone knows this. Travel times are getting slower whether in a car or on bus. At our last meeting, Brighton & Hove Buses told us overall daytime journey times have increased by 13% over the past eight years. This means more buses are required to maintain timetables – so costs increase and fares have to go up. On cross city routes 5, 5A & 5B which pass through several traffic hotspots, running times have increased by 18% in just five years, so a journey from Hangleton to Patcham now takes 65 minutes compared with 55 minutes before 2011.

Reducing parking charges would encourage even more cars onto our streets, making congestion worse and buses slower. If buses become less reliable even more people will use cars and the spiral of congestion will simply get worse and worse. We must invest in our bus network with more bus priority measures and a proper Park & Ride facility to discourage people from driving into the city centre. Bus companies can do more too; they should employ staff at the busiest stops to keep buses moving through and to give information to passengers, so those unfamiliar with the bus network don't delay buses (and other traffic) by asking drivers lots of questions.

Bus lanes work as this picture shows, with a long line of car headlights on the A259 at Saltdean while two buses sweep past at 8am, capable of carrying 80 passengers on each bus.



Valley Gardens and North Street

The final version of the first stage of the Valley Gardens project is expected to be submitted to Brighton & Hove City Council's Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee on 29 November. This is a major scheme proposing big changes to road layouts between St Peter's Church and Edward Street/Church Street with the aim of establishing attractive green spaces in areas where current access is poor. We have been invited to workshops over the coming days to see and comment on the latest plans. Our concerns will centre on the impact on buses which we understand will be allocated dedicated bus lanes on the west side of the gardens, with general through traffic confined to the east side. However, some general traffic will need to use the west side for access. It is likely general traffic on the east side will be restricted to one lane in each direction which could reduce the capacity of the road, leading to more congestion. It will be interesting to see how these concerns are addressed. More comments next month!

Meanwhile it appears North Street will have to be dug up again soon for repairs to utility pipes below the surface. This could take up to a year. The impact on buses could be huge, if it requires full closures and happens at the same time as Valley Gardens scheme. Fortunately, interested parties are all talking to each other so hopefully the works can be co-ordinated to minimise delays. Over a hundred buses an hour use North Street in each direction.

Compass Travel takes over Sussex Bus

Worthing based Compass Travel took over the services of Sussex Bus (trading as theSussexBus.com) from 1 October. The takeover appeared to take place at very short notice as Sussex Bus had only de-registered its bus services a few days earlier, without giving the statutory 56 day's notice to the Traffic Commissioner. This action usually indicates a company in financial difficulties but there has been no suggestion that was the case here. We understand negotiations between the two companies had been taking place over a number of weeks.

Compass Travel is a well-respected independent bus company and this change should be good news for bus users. The mostly elderly Sussex Bus fleet was not included in the sale and Compass managed to acquire a number of modern buses at short notice, including a few brand new vehicles. Sussex Bus drivers were able to transfer but Compass has still been struggling to provide full cover. As a result, route 40X (Hayward's Heath, Princess Royal Hospital – Brighton, Royal Sussex County Hospital) is being sub-contracted to Seaford & District with green and cream single deck buses. The 40 (Brighton – Haywards Heath - Cuckfield) is operated by Compass Bus with some buses painted in colours of previous owners for the time being. Period tickets issued by Sussex Bus will continue to be valid until they expire. However free travel for hospital staff and outpatients will not be available on the 40X. It remains available on Metrobus routes 271 & 272 which provide similar links and receive financial support from the NHS Trust.

In due course we hope the 40X and 271/272 timetables will be better arranged. At present hourly 40X buses between Haywards Heath and the Royal Sussex County Hospital are timetabled five minutes ahead of 271/272 buses followed by a 55-minute gap. This was clearly intended to give Sussex Bus a commercial advantage over Metrobus, but it wasn't in the interests of passengers. An even interval service should be possible, providing buses about every 30 minutes.

Update on the 21, 21A and 23 timetables.

Last month we reported on cuts to the timetables on these services. Since then discussions have taken place with Brighton & Hove Buses and a number of suggestions for improvements have

been put forward. Unfortunately, the reliability of the 21 & 21A service has not improved. Bunching and gaps of up to one hour (on a 20-minute frequency) have been recorded in the late afternoon, which is unacceptable. On route 23, predictions we made last month of more buses being full up have been borne out by observations and feedback from local users. We have suggested running extra buses between Queens Park and the Universities during term time to overcome this problem and provide a more attractive service.

Rockinghorse Charity bus launched



This is the latest Brighton & Hove bus painted to support the local community. Rockinghorse is a local charity set up to support sick children. It is the chosen Charity of the year for Brighton & Hove Buses and Metrobus. Rockinghorse is the official fundraising arm of Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital. The bus is named Dr Trevor Mann who set up the baby unit 50 years ago. On the bus is Ryan Heal, Chief Executive of the Rockinghorse charity.

New discounts for carers

Brighton & Hove Buses is now offering discounted travel for people with a Carers Card. They can now travel at student rates. There are also new discounts for people with disabilities or special educational needs. For full details go to www.buses.co.uk or call into One Stop Travel in North Street or the B&H head office at 43 Conway Street, Hove.

Changes to Bus Users UK

Bus Users UK is undergoing a major restructuring. Brighton Area Buswatch is to become 'a branch of Bus Users UK'. This means we will comply with the objectives of the national group and in return we have been promised more support. The alternative was to become an 'affiliate' which would have given us more freedom on policy matters but we did not feel this was necessary. Supporters of Bus Users UK will no longer be required to pay an annual subscription and the quarterly magazine will be replaced by monthly e bulletins.

Congratulations!

The autumn awards season is upon us again. At the recent National Transport Awards event in London, Brighton & Hove City Council won in the Best Local Transport Authority category. At the same ceremony Victoria Garcia from Brighton & Hove Buses was highly commended for her work to improve accessibility. The Big Lemon Bus company won three awards at the Brighton & Hove Business Awards and went on to win the transport category at the People Environment Achievement (PEA) awards. Fantastic results!

Looking back 30 years

Exactly thirty years ago, all bus services outside London were deregulated. From 26 October 1986 any company with a bus operators licence could apply to run a commercial bus service wherever it wanted to, setting its own times and fares. It became the responsibility of local Councils to procure bus services not commercially viable but considered socially necessary. The Government owned National Bus Company which ran Southdown and Brighton & Hove Buses was to be privatised and the blue Brighton Borough Transport buses were heading the same way. 'Bus Wars' immediately broke out in some towns and cities, with streams of elderly buses competing for custom. Minibuses running every few minutes became fashionable for a while and were very successful in attracting new custom on services like the 7. Head to head competition on main routes was feared locally but the impact was limited to a few services. Yet it still occurs occasionally as recorded above, with two operators currently competing between Haywards Heath and Brighton.

Those interested in what happened and why are recommended to read Roger French's excellent book 'Pride & Joy', published in 2010. Roger will be giving a talk about buses over the past thirty years to the Southdown Enthusiasts Club on 29 October at Portslade Town Hall. Doors open at 6pm and there is a £3 entry charge.

Brighton Area Buswatch meetings

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be on **Wednesday 18 January 2017** 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-November 2016.

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