

# Brighton Area Buswatch

Representing local bus users



Part of Bus Users UK

## Buswatch News – December 2015

*Seasonal Greetings to all our supporters*



### Looking ahead to 2016

Last month we reported that bus usage in Brighton & Hove had declined after a twenty year period when it had bucked the national trend and increased every year. The outlook for 2016 is certainly brighter but there are many challenges ahead. Disruption caused by roadworks should not feature so heavily partly, due to there being fewer major schemes planned (apart from Valley Gardens), and also because the City Council has implemented a self financing permit scheme to charge utilities whenever they dig up a road. The permit scheme can also place restrictions on working hours to reduce traffic delays at busy times and there is the prospect of legal action if a utility company leaves a site unattended for long periods. Initial indications show that the scheme is working well and it has been copied by several other local authorities.

The Real Time information signs are finally working reliably again at most bus stops although the information displayed for smaller bus companies is still variable. Bus companies are able to use the improved GPRS system to track where buses actually are and this helps them to plan timetables which better reflect traffic conditions.

Challenges in 2016 will include funding for supported bus services provided by Brighton & Hove City Council. These are all due to be retendered in the spring. Other issues include preparatory work along the Valley Gardens corridor, improving air quality in the City Centre and the impact of the i360 along with road repairs along the seafront. We look forward to working with all interested parties to try to ensure bus services don't suffer unnecessary delays during the year.

## Potential changes ahead for concessionary pass holders

Brighton & Hove City Council is considering reducing the hours in which concessionary bus passes can be used. At present they are valid from 9am until 4am on Mondays to Fridays and at any time at weekends. To save money these times could be reduced to 9.30am to 11pm. These are the national minimum times that already apply in East Sussex and West Sussex. While few concessionary pass holders travel late at night, this is not the case in the mornings. Stand at any bus stop just before 9 and there will be someone waiting for the first bus with their pass in hand. Older people like to shop early in the day and half an hour could make a big difference. Someone attending a hospital appointment at 10am could find it difficult to get there within half an hour and if a change of bus is required the cost of setting out earlier to catch two buses could be over £4.

If you are affected and oppose this change, we urge you to contact your local Councillor. The anticipated cost savings are quite small and are based on the numbers of journeys made. If there the number of trips does not decline, because people simply travel at different times, the Council will save very little, but the inconvenience and cost to pass holders could be substantial.

## Brighton & Hove Buses wins top awards

Congratulations to Brighton & Hove Buses which won three awards at the Bus Industry Awards event in London last month. These prestigious awards recognise excellence throughout the bus industry and are much sought after. Gold Awards were won for 'Top City Operator', also for the 'Putting Passengers First' a project led by Victoria Garcia which covered a number of accessibility initiatives including 'Helping Hand' and 'Dementia Friends' and the introduction of audible 'next stop' announcements on every bus. There was also a bronze award for Engineer of the Year which went to Frank Classen from Conway Street depot. Compass Bus was nominated in the Category 'Best Independent Operator' for the second year running. Brighton & Hove Buses also won the Most Sustainable Business award at the annual Sussex Business Awards.

It would be easy to make cynical comments about these awards at the end of a year in which bus services in our area were not at their best. However they demonstrate the commitment of bus companies to improve their services, not just by making them more reliable, but through making bus travel easier for all groups of users. They also show that working closely with local authorities and other stakeholders can help to secure better conditions in future so confidence can be restored bus services can be expanded again.

Managing Director Martin Harris and his team can be proud of their achievements. Throughout the year they have maintained close connections with Brighton Area Buswatch and other groups, sharing information and being refreshingly open when discussing problems. I recall attending a packed and very lively meeting in Woodingdean at the beginning of the year where local residents, Councillors and the local MP were highly critical of their bus service. Martin and his colleagues listened carefully and promised improvements. His team consulted local people and introduced several changes including more buses on Woodingdean services. Hopefully this sort of commitment will continue in future.

## Routes 2 Work

Brighton & Hove Buses and East Sussex Credit Union (ESCU) have joined together to introduce a new scheme which enables a new Key Card holder to spread the cost of buying an annual ticket. Under the scheme a Key Card ticket holder with an annual ticket would be charged £490 instead of £540 which reduces the weekly rate to less than £9.50 a week. Employers can sign up to a scheme which enables free bus travel for new staff for the first month at no cost to the company. The aim is to encourage new employees to travel to and from work by bus and to continue to enjoy a discount after the initial promotional period.

## New Horsham night bus N8

A new night service is operating between Brighton and Horsham on Friday and Saturday nights. The N8 service is operated by Sussex Coaches. There is one journey from Horsham Bus Station at 9.45pm and two return journeys from Brighton, calling at West Street, Churchill Square, North Street and Old Steine. Buses start from West Street at 12.55am and 3.17am and also serve Henfield, Cowfold and Southwater.

## Changes to train times

Train timetables on the Brighton main line to London changed on 13 December. Regular commuters will know that during the first week the service was pretty awful but hopefully it will settle down soon. Many local bus timetables are designed to provide train connections (which assume trains run on time!). If you would like to see changes to bus times to improve connections please get in touch with us or contact bus companies directly. Don't forget there are no direct trains to London from 10pm 24 December until 4 January due to engineering works at Purley. Passengers will have to change at Three Bridges and take a replacement bus service to East Grinstead for another train, taking around two hours to reach London from Brighton.

## Brighton Area Buswatch on TV and Facebook

See more about Brighton Area Buswatch and our activities through my recent interview with Latest TV's Mike Mendoza, which is now available from our Facebook page. Issues discussed include bus service reliability, bus fares, bendy buses, improving bus links to the Universities and possible changes to concessionary travel times. Our Facebook page has now achieved 350 likes, fifty within the past two months alone! While this is a small number compared with many commercial sites it is a significant achievement for a community group. A big 'Thank you' to all those who have chosen to follow us on Facebook. We look forward to increasing our activities in 2016.

## Brighton Area Buswatch meetings

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be on **Wednesday 20 January 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 in mid January 2016.

E mail: [brightonbuswatch@gmail.com](mailto:brightonbuswatch@gmail.com). Phone: 01273 620215 (new number)



[brightonbuswatch.org](http://brightonbuswatch.org)



Brighton Area Buswatch is part of Bus Users UK [bususers.org](http://bususers.org)