

Brighton Area Buswatch

Representing local bus users



Part of Bus Users UK

Buswatch News – June 2015

WE NEED OUR BUS LANES

Newly elected Labour Councillor Daniel Yates has launched an on line petition calling on Brighton & Hove City Council to reduce the hours of the Lewes Road bus lanes, opening them up to all traffic at certain times of day. Councillor Gill Mitchell, Labour's new lead member for Transport, has assured us bus lanes will not be scrapped. This is very reassuring but bus lanes must remain effective or they will be of little value. Councillor Mitchell told the Transport Partnership meeting the Valley Gardens scheme is on hold pending a review to ensure it delivers the right benefits and doesn't worsen traffic congestion. Bus lanes are an essential element of the Valley Gardens scheme which must be protected from use by other vehicles.

Here are a few facts in support of bus lanes in Lewes Road, many of which apply to bus lanes in other parts of Brighton & Hove:

- Brighton & Hove has the highest bus use per head of population anywhere in England outside London. This is a fantastic achievement and good bus priority measures have made this possible.
- Bus routes serving Lewes Road carry over 16 million bus journeys each year – that is over 50% more trips than in the entire city of Portsmouth which has a similar population to Brighton & Hove.
- Over 60% local residents who responded supported the Lewes Road bus lanes during consultation
- More people travel along Lewes Road by bus and bike than by car so it makes sense to give them priority.
- One double deck bus can carry 90 passengers in the space of about three cars. Bendy buses can carry 120 or more, so they are very efficient users of road space.
- Both Universities are expanding with the University of Sussex aiming to attract 1,000 extra students each year. If even a small proportion of these use cars traffic conditions could worsen significantly. Bus lanes enable students and staff to reach Universities easily.
- Experience from London shows that restricting the hours of bus lanes creates confusion for motorists as most traffic regulations apply 24 hours.
- Brighton is a 24 hour city – the N25 night bus runs up to every 10 minutes along Lewes Road, so the bus lanes are in use at all times.
- Major events at the Amex Stadium involve Park & Ride buses which rely on bus lanes to speed them through traffic.

The past few months have been very difficult for buses due to extremely disruptive roadworks which have often taken longer than planned. As a result bus use in the City has fallen for the first time in twenty years. We must reverse this trend and get back on track with improvements to keep Brighton & Hove moving. Bus lanes are vital to achieve this.

If bus lane times are restricted, services are likely to suffer. Here are some risks:

- Buses could become less frequent and less reliable
- Fares may increase because fewer people travel to support the services
- Evening services could be cut as these are often subsidised by profitable daytime buses
- Congestion and pollution will get worse if more people use cars, so overall traffic levels will increase
- Marginal bus services may become unviable, resulting in complete withdrawal unless the City Council funds a replacement service.
- Taxi journeys will become slower and more expensive because taxis use bus lanes too

Poor air quality has been mentioned as a reason for opening up bus lanes to reduce traffic queues. Clearly this will not be achieved if bus users transfer to cars and overall congestion increases. Bus companies are currently investing in low emission vehicles but money for new buses has to come from profits from bus services.

The City Council has been monitoring congestion since the first stage of the Lewes Road scheme was completed in 2013, but it was not possible to obtain accurate information while the Vogue gyratory works were in progress last year. The initial monitoring report showed there was little change in journey times for general traffic along Lewes Road. We understand the spring 2015 monitoring report will be published soon. If it shows there has been increased rat running and congestion on other roads, this can be addressed in other ways. Restrictions can be imposed on through traffic movements and there is already a study into improving traffic flows at the Downs Hotel junction in Woodingdean.

Our suggestions for getting people back on buses!

Buses keep our city moving. With most major road schemes completed and fewer roadworks planned over the summer there is an excellent opportunity to restore confidence in our public transport network.

If fewer people use buses it could lead to more cars and more congestion and bus services will spiral into decline as has happened in many other UK cities. We must not let that happen in Brighton & Hove so here are twenty ideas:

For Brighton & Hove City Council

1. Re-phase traffic lights, especially at the Clock Tower junction to speed the flow of buses and reduce waiting times and emissions from stationary vehicles.
2. Plan roadworks more carefully so bus passengers can be advised in advance of disruptions and special publicity and timetables planned.
3. Consider new bus priority measures along busy corridors eg Marine Parade
4. Make sure buses are considered during the planning stages of major projects, eg Churchill Square/Brighton Centre
5. Work with bus companies through the Quality Bus Partnership to develop new routes so people can move around the city without changing buses in the City Centre
6. Stop funding cuts for supported services and seek alternative sources of funding for bus service improvements

For Brighton & Hove and other bus companies:

7. Put more effort into controlling reliability and reducing bunching. Terminate fewer buses at Old Steine when they are running late – instead have spare buses on standby to fill gaps.
8. Employ more bus company staff at critical points to keep buses moving through Churchill Square, building on an experiment carried out in 2013 which we suggested.
9. Make sure the Churchill Square information kiosk is properly staffed and doesn't close in the middle of the afternoon rush hour. Employ staff with clearly marked yellow jackets to pro-actively help passengers as they do at Brighton Station.
10. Make special announcements inside buses (which now have audible message facilities) when services are disrupted or diverted.
11. Encourage more passengers to use Key Cards and smart phone M tickets so fewer pay the driver which can create delays.
12. Introduce a Pay as You Go facility and an all operator ticket and make it possible to top up bus Key cards from machines at rail stations and other strategic locations.
13. Introduce transfer tickets – We have been pressing for one hour M tickets so passengers on single tickets can change buses without being penalised - as in most of Europe.
14. Provide better messages on real time bus stop displays when there is disruption.
15. Introduce special timetables during long term roadworks to allow for delays and diversions.
16. Stop confusing passengers by putting route branded buses on the wrong route. This happens every day. It should occur only when no other bus is available, see photo below.
17. Provide more information on bus stops and shelters to indicate the direction of buses stopping at each stop, eg 'towards Brighton Station' or 'Towards Churchill Square' in North Street. Make it clearer how to get to major destinations from each stop.
18. Have a 24 hour information line available. Buses run 24 hours so information should be available at all times, not just office hours.
19. Promote new cheap fares to entice people back on buses to 'Get on and Go somewhere'.
20. Introduce two door buses on the busiest cross city services to speed them up.

We know many of these ideas are already under consideration and I am very grateful to Martin Harris, Managing Director of Brighton & Hove Buses for taking the time to talk to me about his plans recently. Please let us know what you think, especially if you have further ideas.

North Street returns to normal – with old bus shelters



Good news – after five months of disruption the North Street roadworks have finished and all bus stops are now open again throughout the day. The Real Time Information signs should be re-installed shortly. RBS bank which planned and funded the scheme (before recently selling the old Hanningtons building to a developer) refused to provide new bus shelters on the north side, so the

shabby twenty year old ones have been re-installed with new ones on the south side. We feel a few thousand pounds for three new shelters was the least they could have done after inflicting so much disruption and confusion on bus passengers.

Note the 'Regency' branded bus in the right photo, incorrectly allocated to route 48 but which should be on the 28 & 29 services to Ringmer and Tunbridge Wells. It was one of three wrongly allocated buses seen in North Street within five minutes. This annoying practice confuses people, especially visitors and visually impaired people who identify approaching buses by the coloured branding. Fortunately the new route 12 Coaster buses have so far kept to their own route as do bendy buses which are restricted to route 25, so it can be done.

The Brighton Station Gateway project which has also created much disruption is finally nearing completion and routes 6 & 7 now stop in the station forecourt again. A new shelter will soon be installed outside the Railway Bell public house and real time information displays will be restored.

Meadowview meeting

Users of Compass Bus services 37 & 37B in the Coombe Road and Meadowview areas are invited to a meeting on Wednesday 17 June at Meadowview & Tenantry Community Centre, organised by the Meadowview and Tenantry Community Action Group. Representatives from Compass Bus and Brighton & Hove City Council will be present to discuss concerns raised by local people since the services were changed in April. The meeting begins at 6pm.

Brighton Area Buswatch meetings

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be on **Wednesday 15 July 2015** at 5.15pm in Brighton Town Hall (note earlier start time). 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 copies of this newsletter are available from Hove town hall reception and a pdf version is available on request. The next issue is due in mid July 2015.

E mail: brightonbuswatch@gmail.com. Phone: 01273 323075



brightonbuswatch.org



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