

Valley Gardens Phase 3 (Old Steine to Brighton Palace Pier)– Brighton Buswatch response to Consultation

November 2018

Brighton Area Buswatch has considered the proposals in detail. While we agree with the overall aim to improve the environment, we have serious concerns about the impact on buses and bus users. I am very grateful for the opportunity to air our views at Transport Partnership and Quality Bus Partnership meetings in recent weeks.

Unfortunately, Phase 3 Option 1 contains a number of serious flaws which we believe need to be addressed. Bus operators have expressed similar similar views in meetings, so we are a unanimous voice in calling for improvements. It is good to see some changes have been accepted, such as the need for a common stop for Lewes Road bound buses, but many other issues remain unresolved.

Buswatch believes Option 3 or a modified version of it would have given the best results for buses, as this option kept northbound buses outside the Royal Pavilion, but Option 1 has now been approved so our comments will refer to that scheme only. We strongly disagree with the comment in the report to the ETS Committee on 27 November that this scheme *“will result in smoother flows for bus traffic, removing the current bottleneck to the east of the war memorial and with a more efficient distribution of bus stops”*.

Our top issue is to put the case for a new southbound bus lane from Edward Street to the St James’s Street junction, continuing south to the southern arm of Old Steine by the Royal Albion Hotel. Bus companies are pressing hard for this as it would give buses priority through a crucial area which becomes very congested, both at peak times and at weekends. It would be used by around 100 buses an hour making it one of the busiest bus lanes in the UK.

Buses in Brighton carry 50 million passengers each year, more per head than anywhere else outside London. Many of these bus journeys pass through Old Steine and even those that don’t would be affected by increased delays which would affect reliability. We support the bus lane ideas put forward by Brighton & Hove Buses. In view of the volume of buses (and passengers) that would benefit, we believe a solution must be found to accommodate a bus lane without adversely affecting the business case. Where there’s a will there’s a way!

One solution might be to accommodate an extra lane for buses on the far east side approaching Sainsbury’s Local, with buses turning right from the inside lane through dedicated light phase, similar to the right turn at Grand Parade/Church Street junction today. This possibility was discussed at the meeting with bus companies on 15 November. Another option might be to relocate the cycle lane to the west side of the Old Steine, through the new pedestrian area in front of the Royal Pavilion and the south west side of the Steine to the Royal Albion Hotel. That would provide a quieter route for cyclists, away from the busy dual carriageway. This would free up space on the east side for bus priority measures.

Brighton & Hove Buses reckon a significant number of southbound buses heading towards North Street will have to travel the long way around the Steine clockwise, turning right by the Royal Albion Hotel. There is only a small turn right lane here and no traffic lights, so buses will have to wait for a break in northbound traffic and then cross a two-way cycle lane. This will lengthen journey times.

Turning to bus stops, Old Steine serves the Palace Pier and seafront plus North Street and St James's Street shopping areas. It is also a major bus interchange where passengers change buses to reach important destinations such as the RSC Hospital, London Road shops, Brighton Marina and the Universities. This makes it the hub of the network, the bus equivalent of Clapham Junction. The existing arrangements are not perfect but the 'bottleneck' at stop H has already been eased by removing some services and more routes could be removed if necessary. We have welcomed the proposed improvement for Lewes Road bound buses following our meetings.

However, we remain concerned about other locations. The new westbound stop opposite the war memorial can only accommodate one or possibly two buses. Brighton & Hove Buses suggest it could only be used to set down passengers on services terminating at Churchill Square, but we are concerned other buses will have difficulty overtaking here so they will queue, blocking the busy junction. It would appear that all traffic will be able to use the road past the war memorial westbound, adding unnecessary vehicles. At present all southbound vehicles except buses have to go straight ahead from the St James's Street junction.

The Castle Square bus stops are too small on both sides of the road and replace loading bays which do not appear to have been relocated elsewhere. It is hard to think where the loading bays could go to service nearby shops without creating conflicts with buses or the taxi rank. The eastbound stops should be extended towards the war memorial to accommodate buses displaced from northbound stops D & E. The pavement level at Castle Square is at street level on both sides with no raised kerbs. Raised platforms would be necessary to provide level access, as in Western Road at Clarence Square and Waitrose. This could restrict the space available for waiting. All bus stops will require adequate shelters with lighting and real time information displays.

The bus stands on the south side of the Old Steine have less space than today. They will need to accommodate at least two 18-metre long bendy buses on route 25 (10 per hour), double deckers on Stagecoach route 700 (6 per hour) on a regular basis, plus University shuttles and other services. National Express have asked for a coach pick up and set down point here too due to the poor facilities in Pool Valley.

When there is severe congestion or North Street is closed dozens of extra buses will need to turn at the Old Steine and stand. The current stop Z on the east side is not shown on the plan. This is used by Metrobus routes 271 & 272 to the Royal Sussex County Hospital as well as coast road services 12, 12A, 12X, 13X, 14, & 14C when they are turned short due to disruption along the A259, which happens regularly. Changing the roundabout to a T junction will remove the ability for late running coast road buses to do a U turn and return direct to the Sea Life Centre stop, so a bus stand at stop Z will be essential.

We hope you will give serious consideration to our concerns and suggestions. Bus use in Brighton & Hove has doubled since the early 90s against the national trend and we are very proud of having the busiest bus network outside London. This helps to reduce car journeys and with an increasing number of very low emission buses, provides a better environment for everyone.

The Council must ensure our bus services to continue to be successful by providing effective bus priority measures where they are most needed.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Boag
Chair, Brighton Area Buswatch – a branch of Bus Users UK

Looking at two further issues in greater detail: By Peter Elvidge

This Complements the Brighton Area Buswatch letter on Old Steine to Palace Pier (VG3), sent to officers and councillors.

The first issue to emphasise the problems with the proposed westbound bus stops. As a Hove resident I am particularly aware of the problems this would cause. Even if a second bus stop was added to the North Street/St. James Street crossover, this would still not resolve the westbound bus problems.

Part of the problem is the proposed bus stop in Castle Square (marked North Street on the diagram), with its issue of incompatible kerb heights.

The problem starts with the current kerb height being less than 2cm high, then the loading bay sloping down lower, to the current pavement height. With adjacent shops at this lower level.

To provide an acceptable loading height for buses bus stop, the kerb height would need to be raised by perhaps 15 centimetres (6 inches). But as access to adjacent shops is at the lower kerb height, so the 'bus height' would be totally unacceptable for shops. It is difficult to see how this contradiction could be resolved. And this does not address where you would relocate the loading bay, or find space for a bus shelter. Unless a solution can be found, then having a bus stop at this location should be disregarded- leaving just one, or two problematic bus stops for much of the westbound bus network.

While an enhanced Original Option 3, would be ideal. The bus company (and ourselves), have come up with an alternative. This would relocate most westbound through services, to the south-western quadrant of the Old Steine (where many bus stops are at the moment).

This will however require a southbound bus lane, to avoid the traffic congestion problems that afflict the area at busier time of year, and on many weekends.

This brings me to a second problem with the current design.

It is very difficult to model right turning traffic correctly, in a mostly 'ahead' traffic lane. I am primarily referring to the St. James Street junction.

The first questions are when will the offside lane become obstructed (so halving traffic flow) and when will traffic have the opportunity to turn right. This modelling is made even more difficult at the St. James Street junction, because buses are longer and slower than cars, so southbound buses turning right at the junction, would require a much greater gap in opposing traffic- to cross. Making it even more likely southbound buses would wait until the green right-turn filter- potentially blocking the offside lane for much of the signal phase (effectively narrowing southbound traffic to a single lane).

Now the council's 'option 2' was rejected, partly because the *single* southbound traffic lane caused too many traffic problems. And this is without the proposed new St. James Street junction having the capacity sapping four-way traffic signals. Problems are likely to become an everyday occurrence.

And this does not even include additional problems of crossing the useful two-way north/south cycle lane, and potentially substantial delays from the totally inadequate westbound bus stops, causing buses to wait in the offside lane- blocking traffic.

While other option may be possible. My preferred option is to provide the bus lane, beside the two existing traffic lanes. Although narrowness through the St. James Street junction means a pre-signal would be required (perhaps similar the southbound bus approach to Edward Street). This has multiple advantages in that buses can turn right easily, without causing substantial delays to general traffic (which will also delay buses). And allows easy access to the necessary offside bus lane, south of the junction.

Extra item: Edward Street junction: While hopefully much less problematic than St. James Street southbound, the lack of a separate right-turn lane (for northbound traffic) into Edward Street, means that once several vehicles require to turn right into Edward Street, it will block the northbound offside lane (so halving traffic flow, from this time). To avoid potential delays, it is suggested a separate right-turn lane is provided at the junction.

As the proposal stands at the moment, it will cause substantial problems for bus services and bus users (as well as general traffic).

Peter Elvidge (Nov 2018)