

Written: late May 2026

Valley Gardens Scheme- a personal update.

While the scheme is nearing completion, the full ramifications of the proposals have yet to be felt. First something positive. Councillor Muten and certain council officers should be praised for creating several red routes- which have helped buses and improved safety. They have also helped in the creation of two bus lanes (although more could be said on these). Bus signal priority at some traffic signals is also much welcomed. Also despite early fears, the roadwork were coordinated reasonably well. And the finished scheme should look better, will have useful cycle lane(s), and more 'open space'.

However that is where the good news ends, while a number improvements have been made to the design, it just shows how poor the original proposals were, that bus users are still being disadvantaged.

Firstly, the design of the bus stops are not very user friendly, particularly for less mobile passengers. Having nearly 100 buses an hour at the main south-west bus stop- heading up North Street (with many passengers setting down), it makes it difficult for passengers to catch a bus here.

I have been on a through Hove bus which has made no attempt to see if there is any intending passengers, and seen passengers put out their hand to catch a bus several times, and for bus to just sail past. Part of the problem is there can be up to five buses loading or unloading at any given time, and once buses stops, they are reluctant to stop again nearer the front of the bus stop.

I would like to relay an incident that occurred to a wheelchair bound person. This person waited near the front of the bus stop, and wanted a service 7 or 27. He complained the first bus just sailed by when he signalled. I helped by standing at the other end of the bus stop area, and managed to flag down a service 7. I explained the situation, and the lady driver waited for the wheelchair to board. However this was the fourth or fifth bus, in a long queue of buses, and without my help, it is unlikely the disabled user would have been able to board. The whole situation is very disabled unfriendly for all but the most nimble of passengers.

Also spare a thought for those who are partially sighted, not only do they have to be nimble, but they would have difficulty seeing the bus number until it has already passed them!

So in some ways **it has already failed as a bus stop**. While it is good for setting down passengers, if passengers do not feel confident their bus will stop, or it is too difficult to spot their bus, they will not use the bus stop; or just use the first available bus, then change at a more convenient bus stop.. Again this disadvantage less mobile passengers. As well as the inconvenience, it can increase costs passengers even more money.

This unpredictability means only a fraction of the original number of passengers still use the stop (compared to the original two stops). A number of passengers are using the North Street bus stop instead. This has in turn, made these bus stops far busier, overloading these bus stops, so directly increasing congestion in North Street. So, adding to delays to buses in both directions. This in turn, has caused northbound buses to be removed from serving the central part of North Street (possibly with a knock on effect on trade, in the Lanes, North Lanes and East Street).

The problems at the old Steine bus stop could well get worse as we head towards summer, as this bus stop is the closest to the beach for many bus services, potentially attracting far greater usage.

It may be suggested that bus services at the Old Steine westbound bus stop could be split over two major buses stops, to ease the problem. At the moment the road looks quite wide, but the road will be narrowed down considerably by the new 4+metre cycle lane. This area NOW looks to be nearer to 6 metres, further restricting the ability of buses to overtake. This will probably make it impractical for buses to manoeuvre into two separate bus stops, when many buses are laying over in the offside lane.

The single northbound bus stop appears to be working better. However with so many buses using the stop, it is still only suitable for more nimble passengers- especially when buses wait time there. Also far more passengers have been forced use the stop than previously, because the former bus stops for northbound buses have disappeared from the central section of North Street. The alternative Clock tower bus stop, is almost at Churchill Square.

The time it has taken for a new bus shelter to be introduced (throughout the wet winter months- and beyond), and the continued lack of real-time information at any of the new bus stops, is deplorable.

One has to ask- if council officers had to use the bus stop regularly (instead of perhaps being ensconced at Hove Town Hall, or working from home); whether they would have done more, and earlier; to make sure bus shelters arrived on time, and passengers were not left unprotected in this particularly exposed location (with the strong wind and rain sweeping across the valley- far worse than the previous location).

Passengers also do not like the new bus stop in Castle Square either (when operating), as they feel vulnerable, the shelter provided is very exposed, and the bus suddenly appear from around the corner, requiring fast mobility to catch the bus, made worse by (again) the lack of real-time information.

Overall, while council officers have their excuses, this should be a text book case of how not to change a major passenger interchange. Is anyone accountable?

Marine Parade bus stop (eastbound): Previously buses could start heading into the bus stop from Steine Street, leading to easy access. The extension of the cycle lane means that buses cannot start to head in towards the bus stop until almost the start of the bus stop. This means that while the first bus may be able to get reasonably close to the kerb; the second and subsequent services can be a long way out, sometimes loading for the road, requiring a big step up for passengers. Again OK for the most nibble, but again seriously disadvantaging passengers with lesser mobility. Given the importance of the bus stop, there are often multiple service using the bus stop simultaneously. This is not good enough.

This problem was also pointed out at a much earlier design stage, but the then relevant council officer either chose to ignore it, or had insufficient understanding to recognise it was a problem. A very short combined cycle lane/ bus lane here, would solve this problem.

Other problems:

Potential congestion problems: The old Aquarium roundabout could cope well with all but the most extreme traffic conditions.

In terms of capacity, it is good the council has adopted the clever right-out, left in signal proposal, suggested by the previous consultants; rather than the capacity sapping 'all pedestrian/cycle' signal phase system.

However the new layout has led to some pedestrian confusion. If the signal phasing was changed to an 'all pedestrian/cycle' based system, this would significantly reduce junction capacity, with a knock on affect on bus services.

It may be suggested that most of the time the junction now appears to be flowing reasonably well. However, before the recent changes, each direction was narrowed to a single lane, leading to extensive delays for traffic (including buses)- a delay of half-an-hour was mentioned.

Given this extreme disruption, motorists have sought alternative routes. It depends how many drivers return to the junction, to see the future level of delay.

Much more could said about the traffic modelling, changes to the design, and how it does not take into consideration summer/weekend traffic conditions. Also how poor design of the Lower Rock Gardens junction has led to delay for eastbound buses.

Problems for southbound buses: While delays for westbound buses have been minimised by the bus lane in Marine Parade (yes it is not perfect), the main potential problems are for southbound buses.

Most of the A23 southbound traffic should be in the right hand lane, the traffic lane buses need to be in, to enable them to turn right towards North Street. This has been seen to cause problems, at busier times.

This has been made worse by the narrowness of this former bus lane, towards the right turn into the Old Steine. The council could have chosen to widen it, by removing part of the central reservation, but chose not to. So buses have been observed mounting the kerb, to avoid notable additional delays.

There is also a concern that the Zebra crossing at the entrance into North Street, could also delays buses. Especially as when the cycle lane is introduced, and a new right turn traffic signal will be installed on the St. James Street crossover, to allow cyclists to cross.

While this is not currently a problem because of the extra lane. However this lane will soon disappear to make space for the cycle lane. So buses turning into North Street would basically share the same lane, as traffic being held by this new right turn traffic signal, causing extra delays to buses. Then the reverse could become true, buses are being held by pedestrians using the Zebra crossing, then blocks right turning traffic, so it cannot move. Possibly adding to delays at the south western bus stop.

It should be remembered that as well buses such as the service 25 (etc.)- much other traffic will want to turn right here. Including traffic wanting to access St. James Street, and A23 traffic using out-of-date SatNav information. Creating further potential delays. While this extra traffic is likely to be light, given the bunching of buses, it could still further impede buses getting into/out from- these bus stops.

Layover space: Several bus services terminate/layover at the Old Steine. While some provision has been made opposite the westbound bus stop; the more buses that use these bus stands, the more likely it is to cause significant delays to westbound bus services.

And there is the risk unauthorised coaches will use this site, or unauthorised parking; further blocking manoeuvring space for the bus stops.

An added complication is two regular coach services serve the area, and the council's proposal for them to instead layover at a desolate site near Brighton Station, has its own problems. That is why the bus user group is campaigning to retain Pool Valley as a bus/coach hub.

There is another bus stand on the east side of the Valley. It would then become a case of what vehicles would use it, and how easy it would be for buses to cross several lanes of near stationary traffic, to turn right into the Old Steine.

Another potential problem is how bus operations work, at times of congestion. Before Valley Gardens 3, late running buses could turn early, at the Old Steine, to maintain some semblance of reliability. With the lack of waiting space, this will become difficult, and could result in buses terminating at St. Peters Church instead; which is a major nuisance for passengers, especially those who are less mobile.

While there has been a considerable increase in open space (mostly paved), under Valley Gardens 3, much of this space has been derived from areas which buses formally used, to maintain reliability and allow passengers easy access to bus services.

What could be done to help buses:

The Aquarium junction is a done deal, so it is a case of trying to manage the likely delays to buses, particularly at busier times of year. It is hoped that general traffic is held north of the Church Street/Marlborough Place bus lane, so reducing delays to southbound buses (although if this occurs too regularly, motorists are likely to seek alternative routes). Buses are still likely to be significantly worse off, than before Valley Gardens 3 was created, not least because of the extra journey distance.

A simple change would be to create the very short cycle/bus lane, in Marine Parade, allowing buses to get closer to the bus stop. Although road marking are not helpful for buses getting out from the stop. However the removal of the contra-vision on the bus shelter is very much welcomed, making it much easier to see approaching buses.

Perhaps the biggest potentially positive change could be to the Old Steine, south of the St. James Street crossover. While it could be too late, the north-south cycle lane could be moved from the west side of the fountain, to the east side (inside the tree line).

This has a number of advantages- firstly for buses, but equally importantly for cyclists. While the new cycle lane will provide the useful missing link down towards the seafront. However, the official route would force cyclists to take the long detour around the Old Steine. If the cycle lane was moved to the eastside of the fountain, it would be considerably shorter, encouraging use. Without it, the council risks cyclists either using the pavement on the east side, the road, or using unsuitable routes into East Street, or through Pool Valley.

The advantages for buses is even greater. First it could allow the retention of the existing road width. This in turn could allow the creation of two separate bus stops- perhaps one for Western Road services, the other for services to the station. The bus stop would no longer be failing.

While there are plans for service terminating at Imperial Arcade to use a separate bus stop, these are small in number, and if the layover spaces are full, could block subsequent buses. This new arrangement would provide all the manoeuvring space required, and space for waiting buses, if necessary.

This would prevent awkwardly angled buses from blocking the road, and more importantly make it far easier for passengers to catch the bus they require, rather than being perhaps five buses back.

Brighton & Hove Bus Company used to have a maximum two buses loading rule- but this is totally impractical at the new bus stops, given the huge number of buses using the main stop- and the number of buses following each other into the bus stop.

This should also have a substantial positive affect on North Street as well. If the number of passengers in the Old Steine return to historic levels, then this will greatly reduce the loading (and delays to buses), at the North street bus stop. Potentially cutting journey time. Although whether this would allow a northbound bus to serve the central area of North Street, helping less mobile passengers (as raised by the Older People's Council), is less certain.

The entrance into Castle Square could be converted to a signalised junction, but even if it isn't, the extra road width, means buses heading into North Street, are less likely to be blocked by traffic signals, at the northbound right turn- into the St. James Street crossover, where the cyclists cross.

Thirdly: A section of central reservation could be removed, adjacent to former bus lane, where buses turn right into the south west corner of the Old Steine. So they no longer need to mount the kerb.

Fourth: While the separation of the service 700 is welcome, extra holding space for buses could be also provided on the south side of the Old Steine, so more buses could turn here, rather than terminate in the London Road/St. Peter's Church.

Although of course, this will be insufficient to cope when North Street is closed (as during the Children's parade), and buses had to be sent back early.

Ideally the three former bus stops outside the Royal Pavilion would be restored, to help less mobile passengers use the northbound bus stop. But being realistic, this is very unlikely to happen, so other ideas to prevent over use of the current single bus stop- need to be considered.

As a minor point, the signs suggest the current seating will be replaced, it is easy to see this being far inferior to the present seating.

Buses are important!

At the start of this article, some more recent positive bus proposals were highlighted. However even these positives look to be drying up.

This leaves too many negative proposals directed towards bus services, particularly in the city centre. This would be less important, if buses were not so vital to the economic and social vitality of the city. From a council survey, a majority of local people travelling into the city centre, did so by bus (if you exclude those walking into the city centre).

While Brighton currently has the highest bus usage outside London (pro rata), but service cut-backs (such as the service 49), because of negative policies and only limited improvements, do not bode well for the future.

The council has previously suggested it supported using bus services, but these negative policies do not chime well with this. Brighton needs to do better than this!

This piece was written by Peter Elvidge