

Brighton Area Buswatch

Representing local bus users



A branch of Bus Users UK

Buswatch News – May 2019

The new Council - what will it do for bus users?

Following the Brighton & Hove City Council election on 2 May there are now 20 Labour Councillors, 19 Green, 14 Conservative and one independent. So Labour remains the largest single party, having briefly lost this status before the election, but it needs support from the Greens to get policies agreed. Council leader Dan Yates stepped down a few days afterwards. He has been replaced by East Brighton Councillor Nancy Platts who has been involved in local politics for several years.

Councillor Anne Pissaridou becomes chair of the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee. The new North Portslade Labour Councillor will have a tough job. Her predecessor Gill Mitchell had over twenty year's experience and took a keen interest in transport. Councillor Pissaridou must quickly get to grips with two of the most controversial issues in the city at the moment: – Valley Gardens Phase 3, and improving air quality.

We need to have a clear strategy for transport. At an election hustings event on 25 April many interesting ideas were put forward by the guest speaker, Stephen Joseph. These included a workplace parking levy for larger employers. In Nottingham this has helped to fund big public transport improvements including electric buses, park and ride and even new tram lines. Issues raised by the audience were mostly around environmental and cycling improvements. Responses from candidates tended to favour cycling over other modes, although Dan Yates made it clear he was in favour of bus lanes and he didn't care whether the Aquarium roundabout became traffic lights, which will have upset objectors to the Valley Gardens scheme. Brighton & Hove Buses had a well-staffed stand at the event where Martin Harris and his team were busy answering questions afterwards.

The idea of reducing the number of traffic lanes on the seafront to make more space for cyclists was welcomed by Pete West from the Greens. Where the displaced cars would go is not clear. Park & Ride is not supported by the Green Party which believes it doesn't reduce overall car journeys. Since Labour needs the support of the Greens it is unlikely to progress, although without P&R it is difficult to see how cars can be actively discouraged in the city centre. Many of those who drive into Brighton live in rural areas where public transport is poor or non-existent, so they have no choice but to use their cars. Surely it is better for rural residents to drive part of the way and transfer to a modern electric bus into the city centre along dedicated bus lanes?

The low emission zone, buses are not to blame

We need an Ultra-Low Emission zone that covers all vehicles. Buswatch News covered this item last month but from issues raised during the election campaign and especially on social media, it is clear many people blame buses for high emission levels in central Brighton. A common comment is that this is obvious because the highest recorded emissions are in North Street which is mostly used by buses. Many also say there are too many buses in the city, a claim often heard from people who never use buses! Try telling that to people on the Bristol Estate, Lower Bevendean or beyond.

The new Council needs to address the issues of pollution caused by other vehicles. **Creating a low emission zone for buses only, has perpetuated the myth that buses are the main problem.** Environmental groups need to be more careful when they publicise issues of concern. A few months ago Friends of the Earth highlighted the fact that North Street has the 7th highest levels of harmful emission in the UK outside London. This was widely reported in the media and it gave ammunition to people who blame buses.

The message we all need to get across is that modern low or zero emission buses are the cleanest vehicles on our roads. They are not the issue; they are part of the solution. A low emission double decker is capable of carrying 80 people in the same road space as three cars.

North Street is a problem, but emissions have been falling as bus companies upgrade their vehicles and there should be a big improvement by the end of this year. It has been challenging to achieve reductions here because the street is on a gradient and hill starts generate the highest emissions. The clock tower traffic lights should be re-phased to reduce the number of westbound buses queueing. The relocated westbound bus stops near Ship Street don't help either, as buses also start on a hill and the stops are now situated where buses cannot easily pass each other, so they are often idling with engines running.

Tap On Tap Off is coming



These little black boxes are appearing by exit doors on Metrobus and Brighton & Hove buses. They will go live over the summer to allow contactless users to tap off as they leave. Contactless users will tap on using the ticket machine by the driver without the need to specify a ticket type. Paying the driver will remain an option for those travelling in groups. The exit card readers will calculate the single fare according to distance/zone travelled and will cap the fare at the day Saver price if several journeys are made.

Concessionary bus passes linked to improved happiness for older people.

This is the result of a study carried out by University College London (UCL) published in the *Journal of Transport & Health*. It found that older adults with bus passes were also more physically active and less socially isolated than counterparts without bus passes.

Free bus travel for older people has been available across the UK for more than a decade. In England alone, the scheme costs about £1.17 billion a year, and some have called for the concession to be means-tested, limiting it to the less well-off. The latest study is believed to be the first time the policy's effects on wellbeing and health have been tested.

Lead author Dr Sarah Jackson (UCL Epidemiology & Health) said: "Our research shows free bus travel offers clear benefits to older people's health and wellbeing. It helps them to stay active and facilitates better contact with friends and family, which in turn have a positive impact on mental health.

"And because mental health has knock-on effects for physical health, maintaining wellbeing is also likely to help people stay physically healthy in later life, reducing the financial costs associated with an ageing population."

The research looked at surveys of 5,861 people in England, all of whom were aged over 62 and therefore eligible for free bus travel. The data came from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing and had been collected in 2012 and 2013.

Bus pass holders, who represented 85% of the sample, were 37% less likely to be sedentary on a weekly basis and a third less likely to be classed as socially isolated. The authors said being physically active and less isolated was likely to explain at least part of the increase in wellbeing among bus pass users.

Mobile Hearing Checks a success

Over thirty people, including Brighton & Hove Mayor Dee Simpson, visited a special bus at Churchill Square on 9 May for a free hearing screening, arranged by Brighton & Hove Buses in partnership with Action on Hearing Loss.

Many more visited the double-decker to get information and advice about hearing loss, tinnitus, and hearing health; to learn about the latest assistive technology aids; and to take part in free British Sign Language taster sessions.

The event helped mark Deaf Awareness Week (May 6-12), which aims to increase empathy for hearing loss and deafness across the UK, which affects one in six people. It's also about making our city more inclusive and accessible for people who are hard of hearing or deaf.

Brighton Area Buswatch meeting

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be at 5pm on **Wednesday 24 July** in Brighton Town Hall. Meetings are open to all, but space is limited so please contact Buswatch at the address below if you wish to join us. The following meeting is on 16 October.

Buswatch News is produced and edited by Andrew Boag, Chair, Brighton Area Buswatch. We welcome your contributions and suggestions. The next issue is due mid-June 2019.

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