

# Brighton Area Buswatch



Working in partnership with Bus Users, the national charity representing bus passengers

## Buswatch News – September/October 2021

### Bus Service Improvement plan

Brighton & Hove City Council is required to produce a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) as a response to the Governments National Bus Strategy 'Bus Back Better' which was published in March. It sets out how the Council plans to improve bus services and requires an Enhanced Partnership to be set up with local bus companies. Without this partnership, the Council would not be eligible for Government funding for improvement schemes. The Environment, Transport and Sustainability Committee approved a draft response on 21 September.

At the present time buses are only carrying 60-70% of the numbers carried two years ago so there is a need to promote buses to avoid a car led recovery. Second hand car sales are booming which suggests this is a real threat. The target for bus use to have returned to previous levels by 2023/24 is probably achievable but only if the Council actively promotes bus travel and delivers priority measures to speed up buses. Brighton Area Buswatch made a number of suggestions for the BSIP. We are concerned that some current Active Travel proposals benefit cyclists but would make buses slower, yet bus users are far greater in number. Almost 50 million bus journeys were made in the city in 2019. New bus priority measures included in a 2018 review have not been implemented; these are being reviewed again and Buswatch hopes issues including new bus lanes on the A259 approaching the Sea Life Centre and towards Rottingdean will be advanced.

Fares are often cited as the biggest issue for bus users in the city. Some simplification of the fares structure and targeted price reductions are needed to encourage usage. At present Saver tickets can be used on all buses within Brighton & Hove except Stagecoach services 17 & 700. That needs to change so passengers can use every bus within the City Saver area with one ticket. Daily capping is available for contactless users but based on cash fares, not the lower advance prices available on Mobile phones and the Key Card, so this needs to be reviewed and weekly capping should be introduced.

Park & Ride was a firm recommendation from the Climate Assembly and must not be ignored. Brighton & Hove Buses has put forward an excellent proposal for a trial in 2022 using Mill Road. This could become a mobility hub for cyclists and walkers as well as keeping 500 or more cars out of the City Centre and approaches. It would make a valuable contribution to the objective to create a more 'liveable city'.

At the Environment, Transport & Sustainability Committee meeting on 21 September, Councillor Nancy Platts made several interesting observations on the draft BSIP. Crucially she asked how modal shift could be achieved to get more people using buses. It was agreed this was difficult but certainly bus priority measures help. Public Transport Officer Owen McElroy explained that bus costs increased as journey times became longer because more buses had to be used to provide the same frequencies. Brighton & Hove Buses have introduced two door buses to reduce dwell times at bus stops.

Cllr Platts also raised the issue of affordability and referred to the fares comparisons with other towns and cities which Buswatch had highlighted. She was concerned that no solutions to this were put forward in the BSIP and asked for bus travel to be made free for all under 16s as it is in London. Owen McElroy explained that discussions were taking place with bus companies through the existing Quality Bus Partnership although more free travel would be very expensive to provide. He was hopeful that weekly capping would be introduced soon for contactless payments.

There was also a suggestion for a frequent minibus service to link parts of East Brighton with the main radial bus services. It was explained that such services had not been very successful in the past. Interestingly most of the areas given by Cllr Platts as having a poor service are served by existing routes 21 & 21A which have suffered more cutbacks than any other services in recent years.

## Save Lewes Bus Station



A planning application has been submitted to the South Downs National Park (SDNP) to redevelop the bus station site with flats. The developer is supposed to make sure there is a replacement bus station, either here or on another site but no plans have materialised and there are concerns Lewes could lose its bus station altogether. The bus station is used by Brighton & Hove and Compass Travel buses and it provides a hub for services to surrounding towns and villages. There are fears buses could be removed from this part of the town centre if there is nowhere for them to stop. While there is an online petition to save the bus station organised by the Lewes Chamber of Commerce, it appears the SDNP Authority is not legally required to consider petitions. We have written to the SDNP Authority to register our concerns and we urge others to do so.

## Please stop confusing your passengers!



This appears to be a number 7 bus outside Brighton Station on its way to Brighton Marina. Nothing odd about that you might think, but in fact it is a number 6 which goes in the opposite direction towards Western Road and Portslade. Unfortunately this happens every day; buses branded for one service are used on the wrong routes. It can be very confusing for bus users, especially visitors arriving at Brighton Station whose first sight of a Brighton & Hove bus is a side view like this, with the vehicle prominently promoting a route it isn't running on.

It was reported that on one day this summer, almost half the fifteen vehicles branded for route 7 were running on different routes. Obviously, there are occasions when buses have to be substituted at short notice due to breakdowns etc, but it should not be happening on this scale. Perhaps a simple rule could be instigated that in normal circumstances, no branded bus is allowed on any route other than for which it is branded, with any gaps filled by non-branded buses.

Route branding is designed to help passengers to identify their own bus and promote specific services. It is a well-known marketing practice which, if used properly, can increase usage of those services. B&H can get it right, the Coaster buses on routes 12/12A/12X rarely stray onto other services and look fantastic in their smart green and blue livery.

## Driver shortages delay Coast Road Night buses

Before the pandemic there was a regular night service between Brighton, Peacehaven, Newhaven and Eastbourne on routes N12 & N14. Late night bars and night clubs have all reopened, students have returned and other night services operated by Brighton & Hove Buses, plus the Stagecoach Coastliner N700 to Worthing and Goring have resumed. Unfortunately the N12 & N14 have not.

Brighton & Hove Buses told us a coast road night service is high on their list of priorities, but with the current driver shortage they cannot commit to start additional services without putting others at risk. They added that the driver situation here is not critical and is largely caused by long waits for newly trained drivers to get tested and receive their PCV licences. Hopefully this situation will ease soon so these services can be restored in the next few weeks.

## New Managing Director for B&H Buses

Ed Wills has been appointed Managing Director to replace Martin Harris who is retiring. Ed takes up his post on 1st November and will overlap with Martin who leaves at the end of that month. He has previously held posts with other bus companies in the Go Ahead group. We look forward to welcoming Ed and hearing about his plans for the company.

## Brighton Area Buswatch meetings are back

Thanks to Brighton & Hove City Council, we can now resume our public meetings with bus companies and the Council. The next meeting will be on **Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> October at 4.30pm in rooms 2 & 3 at Brighton Town Hall**. Note the different rooms and earlier start time which is necessary because we have to finish earlier. There will be some restrictions, attendees must remain one metre apart and face coverings should be worn if possible.

Attendee numbers will be strictly limited so please email Buswatch at the address below if you would like to attend or raise an issue.

Buswatch News is produced and edited by Andrew Boag, Chair, Brighton Area Buswatch. Contributions and suggestions are welcome.

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



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