

Brighton Area Buswatch

Representing local bus users



Part of Bus Users UK

Buswatch News – September 2016

New winter timetables begin this week - Cuts to the 21 & 21A timetables go too far.

While there are some improvements, highlighted in Buswatch News last month, some services are less frequent. From 12 September the daytime 21 & 21A frequency has been reduced from every 15 minutes to every 20 minutes between Hove and Brighton Marina. Several evening buses have been cut, with no buses from Goldstone Valley to Brighton after 8.12pm and only one late bus back at 11pm. This means the newly introduced midnight bus, introduced after a campaign by Goldstone Valley residents is scrapped after just a five-month trial. On top of the withdrawal of the 14 to Hangleton (noted in Buswatch News last month) this is a double whammy for people in the Goldstone Valley area. Furze Hill now gets an hourly daytime service instead of half hourly and these will be through buses to/from Goldstone Valley, so the Western Road service through Palmeira Square is reduced to hourly.

On the face of it the daytime reduction from every 15 minutes to 20 minutes at the Brighton end is not huge but 21s are particularly busy between London Road, Elm Grove and Queens Park, where they replaced the old 81 service in 2014. Before then the 81 ran every 12 minutes and the 21 every 20 or 30 minutes, providing up to **eight** buses an hour where there are now just **three**, with one extra bus at school times. One bus an hour has since been added to route 22 but this does not help those travelling to Queens Park, Manor Hill and Whitehawk. Brighton Area Buswatch supported the 2014 changes and worked closely with Brighton & Hove Buses and local residents' groups to ensure a good level of service was maintained for Queens Park. There were plenty of teething problems (mostly due to roadworks) and the 21 timetable has changed several times since 2014 to try to make it more reliable.

The current timetable works reasonably well and we were told recently that the 21 is carrying more passengers than a year ago. So it is fulfilling the main objective of the 2014 changes. This result would normally lead to further improvements not cutbacks. Yet we estimate up to three daytime vehicles are being removed from the 21 service. The new timetable also appears to reduce the amount of recovery time at Brighton Marina. This means buses arriving at the Marina terminus late are more likely to start the following journey late, so some buses may be turned short or run empty to get back on time, leading to long gaps. Brighton Area Buswatch calls on Brighton & Hove Buses to restore a 15-minute daytime service on the 21, at least between London Road and Queens Park.

The Queens Park area is also suffering from a reduced service on route 23....

'Sorry Bus Full' - Save the 23!

The 23 runs from Brighton Marina to the Universities and Amex Stadium via Royal Sussex County Hospital, Queens Park, Elm Grove and Lewes Road. For the past few winters it ran every 20 minutes during the daytime with but this year it is cut to every half hour with an hourly Sunday service (reduced from half hourly) and no Sunday evening buses after 8pm. Buses on the 23 are often packed during term time. Government grants were secured to support the service as part of the Lewes Road bus lanes project. This funding has now finished and the bus company claims it cannot make a profit with a 20-minute frequency. The reduced timetable means there will be fewer buses overall to the Universities this winter. However, student numbers are predicted to increase - so there will inevitably be more 'Sorry Bus Full' displays on the front of 23s and other Lewes Road services, resulting in long waits for passengers.

The 23 provides unique links to Lewes Road and Falmer and to the Royal Sussex County Hospital. It is the only route providing regular all day cross city links without passing through the congested City Centre. This is exactly the sort of service the bus company and the City Council should be promoting, seeking financial support from both Universities, Amex, RSC Hospital and Brighton Marina. Sadly, none of them seem interested so the outlook for the 23 is bleak. Evening and Sunday buses could face further cuts next year.

If you are adversely affected by these reductions we urge you contact Brighton & Hove Buses at info@buses.co.uk If you copy your message to brightonbuswatch@gmail.com we can see how people are affected and press for action on your behalf.

Record Profits for Go Ahead Group

These cuts come as the Go Ahead Group which owns Brighton & Hove Buses and Metrobus has announced record profits of £100 million on its UK bus operations. This represents an increase of 9.4% on income from bus services outside London over the past year. Detailed breakdowns by area are not available but our two local companies are known to be amongst the best performing within the group. Many people will feel there should be no need to reduce well-used bus services in our area with these results. Go Ahead is the majority partner in the GTR rail franchise which includes the troubled Southern Railway, plus Thameslink and Gatwick Express.

Threat of bus strikes averted

The threat of bus strikes has been lifted following talks between Brighton & Hove Buses and the Unite union which represents most bus drivers and engineers. Brighton & Hove Bus Company Managing Director Martin Harris issued a statement expressing a willingness to review working practices with Union representatives and sort out the issues that had led to disquiet. Unite told The Argus it was very pleased with the response of the company to address the issues they had raised and it was keen to work with them.

Bus services back to normal

We've criticised Brighton & Hove buses a fair bit, but their swift action to restore full services to overcome the summer driver shortage was very impressive. Drivers were loaned from other bus companies, Compass Bus took over the 7X express between Brighton Station and Brighton Marina using a couple of smart white and maroon double deckers. Green and cream Seaford & District vehicles took over running the 77 to Devil's Dyke. Seaford & District even ran some open top buses on fine days – something Brighton & Hove weren't able to do this year. The open top buses included a beautifully preserved 1967 Eastbourne Corporation bus.

Bus driving experiences

Thank you to all bus drivers from all bus companies who have kept services running the busy summer months; most have remained cheerful and only too happy to help passengers. Here is an item posted on Facebook by Patrick Warner who is Business Development Manager at Brighton & Hove Buses, based at their Conway Street Head Office who often (along with several of his colleagues) does the odd shift to keep in touch and help out. It certainly gives an interesting insight into the life of a bus driver!

"Well that was a shift with a difference, after a day in the office I joined colleagues on the front line to get commuters home with three hours on the 7s between Hove George Street and Brighton Marina. My first bus, a hybrid named after local inventor and pioneer Magnus Volk turned out to be anything but a bright spark as the hybrid drive failed leaving me in diesel in limp home mode. With a full load of passengers, it struggled badly (stopping three times whilst climbing St James's Street) and I was asked to continue back to George Street where it could be swapped. It then failed spectacularly whilst climbing North Street and after swapping my passengers onto the No 7 bus behind I just about managed to limp it back along Western Road.

The engineers at Conway Street bus garage had a replacement bus waiting for me take over at George Street. My next trip turned out to be rather lively with some very noisy passengers. To say I was glad to survive that outing doesn't cover it!"

Patrick commented to Buswatch, "driving a bus in service when I get the chance is a great opportunity to experience the challenges that our professional drivers face on a daily basis, I really enjoy the challenge of piloting these big people movers around our city but it has certainly given me a new level of respect for my front line colleagues and really helps inform our decision making as Managers"

The Big Lemon wants your vote to fund solar powered electric buses

The Big Lemon wants to install solar panels on its depot roof to provide carbon neutral power for two electric buses and it needs some help to raise funds. More info at www.thebiglemon.com/solarbus.



Musical bendy bus hits the streets



Look out for this colourful bendy bus on route 25. The design was developed with the BIMM – now known as the British and Irish Modern Music Institute. The launch of the bus will also mark the start of Brighton Digital Festival with a "Hello Music Bus" digital project. In partnership with London based Pan Studio UK who create experimental digital games, a text message platform for play will invite people to strike up a conversation with the Music Bus from anywhere in the city.

Fares please!

The excellent free Bus Times publication used to include a handy reference page listing fares but the last two editions have replaced this with promotions for specific tickets. A separate fares leaflet is available but this omits any mention of Scratch cards, children's fares or student fares and it doesn't explain the Centrefare area. Many of our members have criticised this. We urge Brighton & Hove Buses (who publish Bus Times on behalf of all local bus companies), to restore comprehensive fares information in Bus Times, so bus passengers see the basic fares at a glance in this very useful publication.

Brighton Area Buswatch meetings

The next meeting with bus company managers and Brighton & Hove City Council will be on **Wednesday 12 October 2016** at 5.15pm in Brighton Town Hall. 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 A5 copies of this newsletter are available from Hove town hall reception and a pdf or large print versions are available on request. The next issue is due mid-October 2016.

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