

Notes from the EABUG meeting of 17th June 2025

Held Eastbourne Town Hall from 10.30- 12.30

1 In attendance:

J Shacklock, D Everson, P Humphreys, C Mills, C Ralls, D Coffee (EABUG and EEAN)

D Morris (ESCC BSIP Bus Team), B Garcia (B&H Buses), N Price (Cuckmere Buses), D Rouse (Stagecoach),

P Bromley (SE Comm. Rail Partnership), K Richardson (EBC sustainability), L Trethewey ,

Cllr Nevill (EBC), Cllr Wright (ESCC), R Clayton Harding (Beachy Head Ambassador), P Cantwell, C Collins, Cllr M Cunningham (Polegate Town Council), M Gilroy, A Horner (Brighton Area Bus Watch), N Rae, R Ramsdale, D Roberts, M Simmonds (Eastbourne Blind Society), R Westwell, D Evans, Cllr C Belsey (ESCC), R Jarvis, Cllr S Shore (EBC)

2 Matters arising:

- **Disability Bus Passes** : EABUG along with other groups, have been pressing for an extension of the times when disabled bus passes can be used. These bus passes allow people with a range of disabilities to attend daytime activities, including learning opportunities and work placements. We are delighted that ESCC has been able to fund the use of these passes so that they can now be used before 9.30am. Thank you to all involved in getting this through.
- **Bus fare standardisation**: following the discussion on the new fare structure at the last meeting the question was asked whether bus fare zones could be standardised across bus providers. Differential pricing for the same journey confuses passengers and is often perceived as driver error. It was stated that the bus providers are legally not permitted to communicate with each other regarding fare setting, so these situations do arise, but the operators are looking into some of the discrepancies.
- **Communicating roadworks to bus providers**: Unfortunately, relevant representatives from ESCC were not available to attend the meeting – **item to be added to the next EABUG agenda.** **ACTION**
- **Stagecoach Route 51**: There had been significant public disappointment that the service had been reduced to an hourly service, particularly from people in Heathfield. Following a recent visit to East Sussex College, EB Campus by EABUG representatives it became apparent that some college students were inconvenienced by the reduced service. Access to East Sussex College via the 51 bus was a key deciding factor in students selecting the college for their studies. Morning services from Heathfield to

Eastbourne currently departed at 6.33, 7.25, 8.15 and 9.48. Could an extra bus be added to the morning? Stagecoach responded that the bus route was not financially viable on a half hourly basis and was already subsidised by ESCC.

Stagecoach accepted the offer from EABUG to attend the College Open Day and Freshers Day in order to inform students of bus routes, tickets etc.

ACTION

- **Exceat Bridge and BSIP monies:** In February 2025 ESCC proposed to replace the bridge with another single lane bridge with traffic lights. Inflation in building costs and large legal fees meant that ESCC no longer had sufficient funds to construct an off route two-way bridge. The construction of a replacement single track bridge would mean that the A259 would be closed for approximately 22 weeks causing severe disruption to traffic and potentially damaging bus patronage in the long term. B&H Buses were seriously concerned about this so they approached ESCC, suggesting that some BSIP monies could be transferred to the two-way bridge construction. In April 2025 ESCC Cabinet agreed to redirect £11.128m of BSIP monies to the bridge construction. As far as it is understood the DfT have agreed to the transfer of funds. The consequence of this transfer of funds means that the Newhaven and Peacehaven Bus Priority Lanes would now not be included in the current BSIP programme.

3 BSIP Update (Donnalynn Morris ESCC)

See slides 6-25 of the [EABUG PowerPoint presentation](#) for detail.

The report covered:

- Recent changes to the use of disabled bus passes,
- The results of a survey undertaken by Transport Focus on behalf of ESCC called 'Your Bus Journey'
- Punctuality of buses
- A list of the 14 bus services subsidised by either ESCC or the BSIP was provided. (Note that route 6 referred to later is partly funded through development contributions).
- Progress in delivering Real Time Information (RTI) at bus stops

Question: What causes buses to be late?

Answer: virtually all delays are due to roadworks and congestion, buses at night run on time as do buses in bus lanes.

Question: One sided RTI boards are a problem as only people approaching from one side can see the information, what can be done?

Answer: ESCC were aware of this, but there is a limited number of suppliers of RTI boards. Most suppliers are only producing single-sided boards, so to have two-sided boards would mean doubling the purchases by having them back-to-back.

Question: If buses are diverted or cancelled, bus operators need access database to update RTI boards?

Answer: Bus operators already have access to this facility, and they can update the information.

EABUG response: Common perception is that bus operators are not providing this information regularly. All too often prospective passengers are left waiting for buses that don't appear without any explanation. This is an important issue that we intend to monitor. If possible, we would like to see data on the number of bus cancellations.

4 Bus Operators Report

4.1 Brighton and Hove Buses.

- See slides 27-37 of the [EABUG presentation](#) for B & H slides.
- The report covered:
- Expansion of the 13X service
- Large investment of £19 million into new buses
- Liquid Hydrogen refuelling
- Dementia week, VE Day, Eastbourne sightseeing bus and Carnival

Question; To whom do we report bus shelter damage?

Answer: The majority of bus shelters are owned and maintained by the lowest tier local council (district, borough, town, parish), some by ESCC, and some are even owned by advertising companies so it is not easy to say to whom the damage should be reported. In certain cases where a developer has agreed to ownership for a limited period of time, transfer of ownership may not take place.

Can a list be produced or be made available which shows ownership?

Answer: EABUG provides details of how to report issues with bus shelters on the [EABUG web page](#).

Question from Beachy Head Ambassadors: Is there a possibility that the 13X which runs throughout the year on Sundays and during high Summer on other days, could be extended to be every day during the Spring and Autumn too to increase the leisure use of Beachy Head during the tourism season and help to lessen the reliance on cars. The tourism season now begins earlier and finishes later in the year

Answer: 13X relies mainly on tourism to Beachy Head and Birling Gap. This is why we're able to invest to increase the service in the summer, and really pleased for the first time ever, we're having a 20 mins frequency on a Sunday from 08 June. B & H buses will continue this discussion with Beachy Head ambassadors to look into future changes.

Question: What can be done to encourage more tourists to use public transport?

Suggestion: Eastbourne Eco Action Network would like to see a pop-up tourist desk at Eastbourne station during peak season and for events, which would give people more information on bus services. EEAN is looking into this, but funding sources would be needed.

4.2 Cuckmere Buses

The company is a small mainly volunteer-staffed one with 8 buses which cover 22 routes. It is planned to introduce a new bus in March 2026. Unfortunately, the new bus will be diesel as the cost of 'greener' buses is prohibitive.

Passenger numbers have improved and are currently at their highest, in part due to the success of the 39 service which covers Eastbourne and Charleston and now runs throughout the year.

The buses have been running for 50 year and to celebrate, buses will have a new livery.

Route 24 to Drusilla's has not been well used and it is thought that may be due to congestion on roads out of Eastbourne. The route may be more successful in the summer months.

During Eastbourne tennis week buses will run to Devonshire Park from the railway station and Saffrons. But there is some concern about disruption to the services due to roadworks planned for that week.

The 47 Rambler Service has had poor numbers of passengers and Cuckmere Buses would welcome ideas on how to promote this service. The route serves the whole valley from Berwick station, Alfriston, Seaford, Exeat, Littleington, Wilmington and back to Berwick.

4.3 Stagecoach

Following the network review in March it has become apparent that some changes have not been successful, consequently there will be revisions in September.

The Stagecoach App is being updated and in the future, it will allow the use of Google Search function in order to find one's location when using the App. It will also provide information on times of services from other bus operators. The update also gives passengers to buy specific point to point single tickets and have improved bus tracking, making the live bus function more reliable by having more data points to use from each vehicle.

There are plans to put more buses on routes 1 and 1A between Willingdon Trees/Hamlands and Shinewater in a bid to make them more reliable. The current buses often run late, so giving each one more time to complete a journey and maintaining the 15-minute frequency involves the cost of more resources.

Question; was there an opportunity for a service from Eastbourne DGH to Hastings Conquest Hospital?

Answer; The route had been looked at but is not financially viable and there was no funding to progress the idea further as a subsidised route. This was raised with the NHS Trust over 12 months ago and we have had no correspondence since.

Question: Can Stagecoach and B & H better coordinate their early Saturday morning timetables at least? The 12, when I use it, often runs late. The 12 can arrive as the 99 departs. There is a big gap until the next 99.

Answer: There are many many many different demands on the Coaster timetable (indeed any bus timetable) such as connections at various points along the route with different bus services

and also with train services (often in different directions) at the many stations served along the routes, as well as trying to make common headways with other bus routes.

Sadly if we make it all about connecting with 99s then there would be negative impacts on other demands so inevitably there has to be some compromise.

B & H have just changed the Coaster timetable starting last Sunday but will bear this in mind for future revisions. The new timetable doesn't have any very tight connections in the early mornings with the 0722 arrival connecting to the 0740 route 99 departure and the 0758 arrive connecting nicely to the 0810 route 99 departure.

In terms of performance at this time, looking at last Saturday, all the early morning journeys arrived in Eastbourne on time or within one minute.

Question: Can more buses be added to 51 route at peak times in morning for commuters and students?

Route 51 had 40% increase in costs since 2019 and revenue was not sufficient to make the route financially viable. Hence the reduction to hourly instead of a half hourly service.

Question : Can the Route 6 be looked at as it is a particularly tortuous route and a journey takes some time?

Answer: The route does access places not covered by other routes and is a subsidised ESCC route.

5 Southeast Communities Rail Partnership (SCRP)

See slides 38-43 of the [EABUG presentation](#).

The SCRП wishes to maximise bus/rail integration and has publicised existing offers and encouraged other venues to offer 'Green Traveller Discounts' to encourage access to tourist and recreation attractions by public transport.

They have also used stations for community functions such as a cycle marking service to reduce theft and aid identification of stolen bicycles.

Q How does one plan bus routes?

- Points raised include the need to revise routes as new housing developments appear
- Problems with developers reneging on transport agreements such as providing free tickets to new estate residents.
- ESCC do surveys on buses and ask for people's opinions
- GPS data can be used to see where people travel and this can be used to plan new routes or revise routes.

- There was an enquiry as to how Councillors could help in the provision of bus services. One key aspect was their leverage when it comes to planning applications

6 Discussion groups

6.1 What should be the top 3 transport priorities of a Sussex-wide Mayor?

This topic was introduced by Paul Bromley and his PowerPoint presentation is attached. The group presented discussion feedback as a letter to the new Sussex Mayor:

17th June 2025

Dear Sussex Mayor,

Please prioritise:

1. Promote active travel, public transport, better walking and cycling facilities.
More data. More open data.
2. Attract funding with ring fencing.
3. Integrated decarbonised transport combined with planning.

Regards,

Eastbourne Area Bus User Group

6.2 How can Real Time Information (RTI) for buses be improved?

Discussion feedback:

As a point of principle, the information on RTI displays at bus stops should be as good as information on apps. Not everyone has a smart phone.

There is a lack of consistency between information found through use of the QR codes, the operator apps and the RTI displays at bus stops. They are all different. There is still a frequently occurring issue with 'ghost buses' disappearing from the display and not turning up. Passengers have noticed that when information shows the precise arrival time of a bus, e.g. 08.20, this means the bus will not turn up. If the information shows, the time to wait, e.g. 2min, 3min, the bus is more likely to arrive.

Bus drivers cannot see the information as they approach stops with one-sided RTI displays, so would not notice any malfunction/damage and/or useful information to pass on to passengers who might have a question re: next or other upcoming services.

To improve accuracy of information at Gildredge Road and subsequent bus stops, there should not be 'dead' time between Cornfield Road and Gildredge Road, where buses are moving but not recorded. If bus information was started as a bus leaves Cornfield Road, rather than waiting until it arrives at Gildredge Road this would reduce issues.

There should be contact details at bus stops so that people can report issues with RTI display boards. (If you find a bus RTI display board not working, you can report by email to rti@eastsussex.gov.uk, but note that due to staffing this may not be monitored daily.

There was a suggestion to rearrange bus stops so that all buses going West start at Cornfield Road and all buses going east start at Gildredge Road this would be more efficient and clearer for passengers where they should wait.

Operators are able to feed information on bus cancellations and changes of route into RTI systems, but this is not happening enough. Making this happen would improve information and give people greater confidence in using and relying on buses. Waiting for buses that never turn up is a reason many people give up using them.

EABUG would like to know how many buses are cancelled.

7 Suggestions and comments on bus services:

EABUG meetings have a Post-it board for suggestions. These were received on 17th June:

Missing Links – where would you like to see bus routes introduced?:

- A link between North and South Harbour, with compulsory purchase of land as was done for Exceat.
- Heathfield to Hawkhurst via Etchingham stations
- A 99X – Eastbourne station to Conquest via DGH, Cross Levels, Stone Cross etc.

What is your favourite bus route and why?:

- No 28 because it tells me when to get off
- The 99 because it gets me quickly to Bexhill
- The 51 takes me to Heathfield and bus connection to Burwash and Etchingham via the beautiful Rother Valley.

8 Date of next meeting:

Tuesday 14th October 2025 Eastbourne Town Hall, 10.30-12.30

[PowerPoint slides from this meeting.](#)