

Notes from Eastbourne Area Bus User Group meeting of 14th October 2025

Held Eastbourne Town Hall from 10:30-12:30

1 In attendance

Bus Operators: Ben Garcia and Nick Hill (Brighton & Hove Buses), Nick Price (Cuckmere Buses), Alex Humphrey, Katherine Jones, Paul Robertson, David Rouse, Mark Slater (Stagecoach)

Councillors: Cllr. Colin Belsey (EBC & ESCC), Cllr. Ali Dehdashty (EBC), Cllr. Christina Ewbank (EBC & CEO Chamber of Commerce), Cllr. Nigel Goodyear (EBC), Cllr. Jane Lamb, Cllr. Susan Sanders (Westham Parish Council), Cllr. Tom Nevill (EBC), Cllr. Brett Wright

Council Officers: Donnalyn Morris (ESCC BSIP team)

Guest speaker from East Sussex Highways Network Management : Trevor Merchant

Community Groups: David Barclay and Mark Simmons (Eastbourne Blind Society), Chris Collins (Civil Service Pensioner Alliance), Anna Hoad (Beachy Head Ambassadors & 3VA), Alec Horner (Bus Watch), Nash Travelman (Transport in Newhaven), Derrick Coffee, David Everson, Carol Mills, Christopher Ralls, Jill Shacklock (EEAN TG), Paul Bromley (Southern Community Rail Partnership)

Bus heroes: Members of the public who have given up their time to represent other bus users: Debi Bristow, Angela Connolly, Pearl Frankling, Allan Green, Ray Jarvis, Pat Kenball, Marvis Poplett, Norman Rae, David Stopp, Liz Trethewey, Richard Westwell, Jane Wilde

1.1 Apologies:

Cllr. Malcom Cunnigham (Polegate Town Council) Monika Farkas (University of Sussex), Paul Humphreys (EEAN TG), Lucy Lisle (University of Brighton), Cllr. James Murray (EBC)

Acronyms explained: **BSIP**=Bus Service Improvement Plan, **EBC**= Eastbourne Borough Council; **ESCC**=East Sussex County Council, **EEAN TG**=Eastbourne Eco Action Network Transport Group, **RTI** Real Time Information

2 Matters arising

2.1 Compliance with accessible information:

Are all eligible buses compliant with the need to provide accessible information by 1st October 2025? All buses registered after 1st October 2014 should now have both audible and visible information about routes and upcoming stops for passengers onboard.

Brighton & Hove buses have had accessible information onboard all their buses for some time. Cuckmere buses are not required to have audio and visual announcements as their buses carry less

than 22 passengers. All Stagecoach buses will have audible and visible information onboard by October 2026.

Stagecoach comment: Following the law, our newer vehicles first used on or after 1 October 2019 were fitted from 1 October 2024. Vehicles first used between 1 October 2014 and 30 September 2019 were fitted by 1 October 2025 and the rest of our fleet (vehicles first used between 1 January 1973 and 30 September 2014) will be retro-fitted by 1 October 2026. There are currently 14 buses at Eastbourne fitted with this facility.

2.2 Disruptions to route 3 and 6

Members of the public have contacted EABUG about the disruption caused by recent bus timetable changes and the non-appearance/cancellation of buses, particularly No 3 and No 6. These are both Stagecoach routes and Stagecoach responded to say there had been problem keeping these services to time as the timings were too short, with no allowance for congestion and other issues. The length of journey times have been slightly increased in the new September timetable to improve bus punctuality. There were initially teething problems with new times and also staff sickness, but reliability has now improved with an 8% increase in compliance. One of the bus users raising the issue with routes 3 and 3a confirmed that buses had been more reliable after October 5th.

2.3 Further questions/comments from the floor:

2.3.1 Timing of route 6

The timing of the number 6 has been changed from 12 minutes past the hour to 42 minutes past at beginning of journey in Polegate. This does not fit in well with commuter times. Stagecoach explained that the times had been changed in response to requests to make a better balance with the 52 (between Polegate and Dittons Farm). The times of these two services were very close together leaving a big gap between buses running along a similar route.

Number 6 timetable is agreed with ESCC to fit in with Willingdon School times.

2.3.2 Could route 3 buses be single decker buses?

Short answer is that double decker buses are needed for school journeys. If the double decker was swapped for a single decker in between school start and end times, they would need twice as many buses for this route which is not viable.

The most expensive part of operations is the driver. The next is the vehicle. Double-deckers are required in order to manage loading at certain times of day – particularly pupils to school which ESCC has a statutory duty to do. Those buses can't sit around doing nothing all day (which is what most private cars do) when there are routes to be served and vehicles that can safely do so. Electric vehicles are heavy, and a single decker EV can weigh as much as a double-decker.

3 BSIP update (Donnalyn Morris ESCC)

See slides 6-20 of [EABUG meeting PowerPoint presentation](#) for Donnalyn's slides with full details.

Donnalyn from ESCC BSIP team provided detailed updates on

- bus stop infrastructure improvements,
- bus priority measures and
- RTI displays.

Improvements to bus stops are often planned in response to feedback. Installing new bus stops can take time, for example when people object to new bus stops.

The software for RTI screens has been updated and this has reduced the number of issues with screens freezing. Large display screens are being updated and will have live data on one side and maps on the other side.

There have been many complaints about the quality of information on RTI display screens, the most frequent complaint continues to be about buses disappearing from the screen. This causes anxiety and reduces public confidence in buses. Ongoing improvements should increase reliability of information. Bus operators now have access to update the system with information about cancellations etc.

EABUG will continue to monitor progress and perceived reliability of the RTI for buses.

If RTI display are not working, or QR codes are missing on a bus stop, you can email rti@eastsussex.gov.uk. Most people don't know this email address.

The BSIP team are currently waiting for funding announcements before confirming next steps for bus improvements and fare subsidies beyond 2026.

3.1 Questions for BSIP team:

3.1.1 Can contact information for RTI issues be provided at all bus stops?

There have been several requests for this.

Action: Donnalyn to take this back to BSIP team.

3.1.2 Can small businesses connect monitors to the RTI system?

Some small businesses, for example cafes, have asked about displaying real time bus information on their premises for the benefit of customers. Although technically possible, it is not straightforward, requiring hardware and software (a specific thin client installation) and costs around £3000. Security considerations prevent sending a feed to any computer or screen. There is one café in Eastbourne with a bus time display.

4 Stagecoach Southeast update (Katherine Jones and Mark Slater)

Stagecoach Southeast have centralised control of buses. Previously this work was done by 'controllers' at bus depots, but these people had many other responsibilities at the depot. Now there is a dedicated team at Canterbury whose sole role is delivering to the timetable and monitoring buses. These people will be able to update online information on changes and cancellations, helping to make the RTI more reliable.

The Stagecoach app has been updated. Improvements have been made to the journey planner and the app now uses Google maps. Using the app, you can identify routes and times for your regular journeys and get notifications/alerts when there are changes. The updated version will be available by the end of October. Stagecoach will demonstrate and help people with the new version of the app at the February EABUG meeting.

Stagecoach are also updating the system that tracks buses.

45 newer buses will be introduced to Stagecoach Southeast operations. Some of these buses will be for routes in Eastbourne.

Teething problems with changes to timetables for routes 3/3a and 6 were discussed earlier under Matters Arising.

Stagecoach have replaced their popular Brilliant Days out by Bus leaflet with an updated version entitled Top Days Out in Eastbourne..

4.1 Questions/comments to Stagecoach

4.1.1 Did Stagecoach receive 5 new minibuses as announced at recent EABUG meeting, and if so, could these be used on route 3, to swap in when double-deckers are not required for school journeys?

Response from Stagecoach: The smaller buses, called 'Solos' are currently used on routes 4 and 8. Route 4 needs to be a short vehicle due to the nature of the roads and parked cars and buses. Route 3 serve schools during the morning and afternoon peaks. These double deck buses need to be used somewhere during the day and route 3 and route 6 are just two examples of where the capacities in the daytime do not reach the capacity of a larger vehicle. Double decker buses can take a maximum of 100 people, compared to 25 for Solo buses, thus have greater potential to earn revenue.

4.1.2 Can Stagecoach improve telephone customer services?

The experience of a bus user attending the meeting had not been positive. The phone number for Stagecoach enquiries appeared to go to a call centre in Scotland. The member of staff had no understanding of local services and were unable to explain why buses had not turned up, or whether any would be coming soon. This contrasted with Brighton & Hove telephone service, who answered very quickly and gave the help needed, including the exact location of the next bus.

4.1.3 How can bus punctuality be improved?

Answer: there are various options: give buses more time to complete the journey; add extra buses. Donnalyn added that as well as more time, more resource (other buses) and reduced frequency to improve punctuality, bus priority (physical – lanes and virtual – traffic light priority) will of course help, especially along busy corridors.

5 Cuckmere Buses update, Nick Price

The new Cuckmere buses timetable starts in two weeks. Nick had brought paper copies of the timetable which he shared.

There have been two alterations.

- The 39 service is continuing into the winter months, connecting the Towner to attractions such as Charleston Manor, who have subsidised this service.
- The 24 service is to continue beyond Drusillas to Alfriston.
- Cuckmere Buses had met with the MP for Lewes and suggested we all speak to mayoral candidates and invite them to speak about their plans for transport.

Action: EEAN to look into this.

6 Brighton & Hove Buses update, Ben Garcia

Ben's presentation is included in the [EABUG meeting PowerPoint presentation](#), see slides 26-34.

Ben gave updates on:

- Services changes in new winter timetable, including doubling of previous winter service levels for 13X. Services will terminate at Cornfield Road Eastbourne during winter (and not serve pier). Services to pier will resume after winter season.
- The 54 route between Uckfield and Eastbourne is now being run by Brighton & Hove Buses. Brighton & Hove have issued 32,000 free ticket vouchers to households along 54 route to encourage them to try the new service. Vouchers expire midnight on 30th November 2025 and can be used on any B & H service.
- New 3X service across Brighton, new Days Out Campaign, Rewards available through the B & H app.
- B&H Buses have already got a number of accessibility initiatives in place. [Their Accessibility and Communities Manager has been appointed as one of the Government's Disability and Access Ambassador](#), representing the bus industry.
- Ben provided instructions on setting personalised Travel Alerts through the app – see Ben's slides for more information

See slides 26-34 of [EABUG meeting PowerPoint presentation](#) for more detailed information.

7 Planning & communicating roadworks and street works, Trevor Merchant, East Sussex Highways

Trevor Merchant is Traffic & Network Manager for East Sussex Highways and he kindly agreed to talk to EABUG about

- Process and legislation
- Coordinating street works and road works
- Immediate (emergency) street works & roadworks process
- Communicating information on these works

Trevor's talk provided a fascinating insight into the issues faced by Network Coordinators in organising roadworks and we recommend you refer to slides 39-60 of the [EABUG meeting PowerPoint presentation](#) for further information.

The network management Industry is heavily legislated. Contractors must have permits to carry out roadworks. There is a duty on local authorities to manage their networks and if the Network Management team does not respond to a permit application within a specified time, the applicant can carry out the works they requested, because there have been no objections.

The team use One.Network as the network management tool. Bus operators and other organisations can register to use One.Network to find out more about current road and street works.

If work falls into 'emergency' category, Statutory Undertakers (Utilities) do not require Highway Authority authorisation to commence the work, they are required to submit a permit 2 hours from commencing the work which the Authority must grant. If work is carried out in the evening (after normal working hours), then they are required to submit a permit by 10am the next day. Emergency work may conflict with planned works, causing increased disruption. Emergency works do not leave enough time for bus operators to plan and organise changes to services.

Not all works pushed through as an 'emergency' appear to be emergencies – some examples were cited. Often the need for work has been known about for some time and could have been planned giving adequate notice to road users, bus operators and the public.

ESCC have introduced lane rental charges as an additional tool to manage the network and a way to incentivise contractors to complete their works in time. Charges of £1,500 per day for a lane closure, or £2,500 per day for road closures are charged from day 3 on emergency work, with charges being applied for the whole duration of the work on planned jobs. Revenue raised goes into the Lane Rental Surplus Fund and funding can be applied for providing it is for highway improvements or innovation.

Emergency works cause significant disruption to bus services and transport planners have made a list of recommendations to the Department for Transport (DfT) to reduce the amount of unplanned works and to improve the efficiency and quality of road repairs. Unfortunately, the DfT rejected all of these recommendations.

Action: EEAN to follow up on these recommendations and ask local MPs for support

When roadworks are planned, communication includes

- emails to stakeholders (e.g. ESCC passenger transport, emergency services and bus operators)
- permit conditions are applied to ensure letter drops are undertaken & advance warning notices are erected in bespoke locations to assist with journey route decisions
- all granted works are recorded on One.Network for stakeholders to review and are continually updated with permit/licence information
- Information on emergency works are sent to ESCC passenger transport, when they are known about.

The team are currently reviewing communication & engagement processes

7.1 Questions to Trevor

7.1.1 Which bus companies are informed about emergency works?

Asked by Nash Travelman.

Answer: all bus companies are informed

7.1.2 Has the number of roadworks increased?

Answer: Over the last three years, the number of requests for permits have gone down from 32,000 (2022) to 22,000 (2025), BUT the number of road closures has gone up.

Nick Hill commented that communication between Network management team and bus companies has been good. but lots of emergency works being carried out by contractors without permits or correct permissions. Bus companies can only close bus stops if they know about the works.

7.1.3 Why did the DfT say no to the recommendations?

Asked by Brett Wright

Answer from Trevor: I believe we have had refusals on all the recommendations because a number of key personnel at DfT have recently retired. Consequently, it is a very new DfT team now in position who have not had time to fully understand the recommendations and the implications of agreeing them, so have refused all until they have undertaken a full review.
ESCC Bus team perspective

Two/three people work on roadworks in the bus team. They try to get alternative dates (particularly if it's one day's work and it's a day when an infrequent service runs but doesn't run on other days) or work to be completed at night or using lights (that is not closing the road completely). However, nights aren't always feasible (for example, residential area). Nights often start at 7pm, so pushing this to 8pm is tried and with requests for last buses to be allowed through of course. Sometimes lights can be agreed for buses only.

They liaise with the bus operators but when there are 'emergencies' emailed in after 4pm it can be difficult to get the correct personnel due to working patterns (very early starts). Emergencies mean a lack of time to establish alternatives and check diversions are safe to use.

Not all roads are wide enough to be worked on safely and to allow buses through. As there is a statutory duty to get schoolchildren to and from school, this is why extended works often happen during the school holidays

The people on the ground organising roadworks don't always know that buses should be let through road closures.

Comment from Nick Hill that bus apps are not currently designed to cope with changes to services caused by diversions, but app providers are working on this issue.

7.2 Bus operator perspective

Ben Garcia explained the steps they take to inform stakeholders. Sometimes they get three months notice of planned works, but no/last-minute notice for emergency roadworks. B & H buses have a service update page at buses.co.uk as well as notifications on the app. They aim to place physical roadwork information at affected bus stops. Turning on personalised travel alerts with B & H app will ensure you have more reliable information on changes due to roadworks and other issues. See slides 63-67 of [EABUG meeting PowerPoint presentation](#) for further details of how roadwork information is communicated by B & H buses.

7.3 Further questions on roadworks

7.3.1 Could it be made a condition of granting permit to require contractors to cover bus stops that fall within roadworks?

Could contractors be obliged to ensure the bus stops are covered, or flagged to show that they are out of use?

Answer: Trevor to look into this.

7.3.2 Is there a contact address to report rubbish being left by contractors after roadworks?

Contractors often leave equipment on pavements after roadworks which can be hazardous, particularly for blind/partially sighted people.

Answer: The Traffic and Network team email address is networkmanagement@eastsussexhighways.com

8 Next meeting

The date of the next EABUG meeting has been provisionally set for **Tuesday 10th February 2026** from 10:30-12:30 with doors opening at 10:00 for refreshments and networking.

See next page for questions from Bus Users sent to us before the meeting.

9 Questions asked in advance of the meeting

Meeting attendees are given the opportunity to ask questions in advance of the meeting as part of the registration process. This gives bus operators and other parties time to prepare a response. We received the following questions:

9.1 Questions/comments from members of the Eastbourne Blind Society

9.1.1 Any chance of bringing up why the 3a now terminates in Gildredge Road rather than going into the town centre as it did before?

Response from Donnalyn and Stagecoach: This is because the same buses now stay on the 3 and 3A during the main part of the day. So a 3A bus arriving at Gildredge Road then runs to the stop opposite the railway station to return to Meads. Stagecoach made this change to help improve time-keeping. The new routing and timetables were available on their website two to three weeks before the change. The new timetables were on the website in August, a month before the changes came into effect. Stopping at Gildredge Road means every journey ends in the same place and stops the bus from having to loop around the town centre to get back to Stop R1. If we changed it back to serve Cornfield Road, the frequency of journeys would need to be reduced to allow for this extra time.

There is also a separate issue about 3s and 3As not tracking. This has been raised with the RTI supplier, Vix.

9.1.2 The indicator boards are regularly out of sync with the buses.

I was waiting at the Town Hall for one which said it was due then it disappeared off the board. Two minutes later it arrived just as I was about to walk away!

Response from Donnalyn: We are working with our RTI supplier to look at improvements that can be made on the quality of predictions. As stated at the meeting, there are different algorithms used for predictions for RTI feeds and bus apps (please remember the operators apps have nothing to do with the council, and often not that much to do with local operator control) – like different weather apps.

9.1.3 I would just like to say the signage for buses as you exit the railway station is very good and is repeated as one approaches the 99 bus stop in Cornfield Road.

Response from Donnalyn: Pleased to hear this.

9.1.4 The signs on top of poles are not good for members, I often have to ask other travellers for the information.

Response from Donnalyn: ESCC have been pressing the supplier for a roll-out of buttons for our new TFT signs. There is an issue with the supply of buttons for these. In respect of the older LED signs which are being redeployed where practical, Vix are currently testing. Buttons for these ARE available and expected to be rolled out – the timing of this provision is currently being established.

Testing of the Sm@rtbus app has not been successful. We are looking at REACT keyfobs instead – again timing to be established.

9.2 Questions from individuals

9.2.1 Will the Brighton and Hove operated 54 bus route enable a more evenly distributed timetable between Eastbourne and Hailsham and stops to Golden Cross?

Asked by Derrick

Response from Donnalyn: On Monday to Saturday daytime there are 3 buses per hour between Eastbourne, Hailsham and Golden Cross. These being the half-hourly 28 and the hourly 54. It could be said these buses are already optimally spaced, given the constraint that the 28 is a half-hourly service:

The 28 generally departs Eastbourne at 00 and 30 past the hour, and the 54 at 10 past the hour.

The 28 generally departs Hailsham for Golden Cross at 00 and 30 past the hour, and the 54 at 44 past the hour.

The 28 generally departs Golden Cross for Eastbourne at 12 and 42 past the hour, and the 54 at 03 past the hour.

The 28 generally arrives in Eastbourne at 04 and 34 past the hour, and the 54 at 51 past the hour.

9.2.2 Is there now a likelihood of provision of a bus stop to serve Blackberry Farm activity centre?

Asked by Derrick

Response from Donnalyn: This is being costed and whether it is delivered will be dependent on the value for money compared to other bus stop infrastructure proposals and the funding available.

Does the group have any information on the potential use of the stop if it was provided?

Currently, the Flexibus service can be used to access Blackberry Farm. Those traveling from Eastbourne will need to change to conventional services (suggest this is done at Polegate).

9.2.3 Is there any prospect of a '99X' limited stop service between Hastings and Eastbourne?

Asked by Derrick

Response from Donnalyn: running additional limited stop 99X journeys would increase the attractiveness of a service. However, this would require an investment in extra buses. There is little or no scope for such to convert existing journeys to limited stop without compromising the availability of departures currently available.

Response from Stagecoach: This is unlikely to happen in the near future, as many passengers are travelling at intermediate points rather than end to end. The service already runs as direct as possible from Little Common to Pevensey and Eastbourne.

9.2.4 Why aren't the bus companies responsible for the updating and repairs of digital information display boards at bus stops?

Asked by Jane

Response from Donnalyn: Transport Authorities are responsible for roadside RTI provision. Operators are responsible for what they provide passengers in terms of information on and off bus. As there are often multiple operators in an area (particularly large cities and some towns) it would be challenging for these operators to manage roadside RTI provision collectively.

9.2.5 On Sunday the Loop (now renamed Link) terminates in town so I had to board a later loop to get to Hampden Park and had to pay twice.

Asked by Debi

Response from Donnalyn: Where a change of bus is required and you are making a return journey, purchasing a day ticket may offer much better value. As advised at the meeting, the Loop has always stopped in town on Sundays.

That RTI may not be showing the correct via or terminating at the Town Centre is being looked into.

Response from Stagecoach: The LINK takes about 1:15 to complete a journey on a Sunday, but runs every hour. If the bus carried on through the town and started another journey, frequency would either drop to every 1 hour and 15 minutes or you would sit on the bus for 45 minutes until it was time to leave. In this 45 minute period we utilise the bus to do other routes to maximise efficiency.