

Merseytravel

Early Beginnings of the Corporations

The history of passenger transport in Merseyside is both rich and varied. The very first form of passenger transport harks back to the early 19th Century when licensed horse drawn carriages were the only means of public passenger transport.

Early experiments used larger horse drawn carriages, eventually upon a set of rails, which by 1876, developed into the Liverpool United Tramways and Omnibus Company. Merged from several competing companies it would eventually be bought out by the municipal Liverpool Corporation. During the latter 19th Century and early 20th Century, the Corporation oversaw transport in Liverpool, while other Corporations operated tramways in Southport, Bootle, St Helens, Wirral and elsewhere. (See history of Hatton Garden for more information relating to the development of Merseyside's tramways.)

Formation of the PTE

In 1945, following the Second World War, the process of replacing the tramways with buses began.



The Liverpool Corporation Transport Committee in 1945

As part of the post war planning policy, slum clearance became a priority, creating new towns outside the main metropolitan areas that in turn needed appropriate transport links. Bus routes were, therefore, extensively developed to reach out to these new urban areas and their new communities.

By 1957 the entire tram network had been replaced by a new system of buses.

In 1962, the Liverpool Junior Chamber of Commerce carried out a study on transport policy. The result of that study was to recommend that a Transport Executive, separated from politics, should be set up to present the best form of transport governance.

Until that time, the councils had established committee steering groups to co-ordinate passenger transport activities between various boroughs. It was also around this time when the first suggestion was made of a cross-river authority with control over ferries and tunnels.

The 1968 Transport Act effectively eliminated private operators, transferring the provision of the strategic guidance of passenger transport to the newly created Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority.

In 1969, the transport responsibilities of Birkenhead, Wallasey and Cheshire were incorporated into the Authority, followed by St Helens and Southport in 1974.

Bus Developments I

The first major step was to acquire the existing fleet of buses bringing the entire bus network under the control of the PTA, followed by a system of government bus purchase grants throughout the 1970s. By 1973 the number of buses in the fleet totalled 1,396.



Paradise Street bus station in 1968

As the stock of buses held by the PTA expanded, in 1974 a subsidiary company under the name of Merseyside Passenger Transport Services Ltd was created, and undertook responsibility for bus operations.

Restructuring



An early Liverpool Transport information centre

The Local Government Act of 1972 replaced the city and borough councils with the metropolitan county of Merseyside, which effectively brought to an end the existing system of transport management. The changes saw the PTA abolished and its role taken over by Merseyside County Council which consisted of five authorities: Liverpool, Sefton, Knowsley, Wirral and St Helens.

In 1976, a motion was proposed by Merseyside County Council to abolish the PTE and absorb responsibility into the council, although this did not happen until 1986.

End of the County Council

The Local Government Act 1985 abolished Merseyside County Council and, as a result, a new Passenger Transport Authority and Executive for the county area of Merseyside was established.

The Buses Act of 1985 also removed restrictions of competition in local bus markets in order to remove barriers for new entrants to the bus operation market. The Transport Act 1985 amended the PTE's functions to take account of bus deregulation and the privatisation of bus operations.

As of 31st March 1986, the County Council ceased to exist and the corporate branding of 'Merseytravel', which had only previously been used to describe booking offices, came into existence in October 1986.

The PTA itself was reconstituted and as the Transport Act 1985 prohibited continuing to operate bus services, the operating functions were passed over to separate companies.

In 1988 the PTA joined the PTE to become what is effectively now known as Merseytravel, bringing with it operational responsibility for the Mersey Tunnels. The PTA assumed financial responsibility for passenger transport and provided overall guidance on the direction of policy, while the role of the PTE was to implement that policy using the financial resources provided by the PTA.

Bus Developments II

In line with the Transport Act 1985, Merseytravel's operating company, Merseyside Passenger Transport Services Limited, became an independent company, adopting the name Merseyside Transport Ltd (MTL). Although the PTA did retain a shareholding interest, this was eventually completely bought out in 1993 for the price of £1. The company headed a number of bus operations, the most well known being Merseybus, which with its traditional Liverpool green livery became synonymous with Merseyside. Eventually a maroon livery was adopted that resembled the traditional colours of the old Wallasey Corporation.



A Merseytravel drop in centre in the 1980s

With bus services now deregulated, a highly competitive and relatively unstable period followed during the early 1990s, with a growing number of bus operators competing for service contracts. This period saw a number of bus companies emerge in Merseyside such as Liverline, Liverbus, Fareaway and Blue Triangle. Merseytravel plugged any gaps in the network by

subsidising operations on unprofitable routes and ensured all socially necessary services were provided. In the face of such competition, bus company's attempts to establish dominance in the local transport market meant that bus services saw an unprecedented number of changes in contracts, routes and services. During the period MTL also operated a number of other bus services in addition to Merseybus such as MerseyRider and Wirral Peninsular, and re-introduced one-route cross-city centre services in order to improve efficiency and accessibility. There was also a brief nostalgic reintroduction of the bus conductor on the Rest and Ride services in 1994.

Moving towards the mid 1990s, an element of stability did follow as MTL and Northwestern gradually acquired larger shares of the Merseyside bus network and emerged as the two main operators, although Northwestern slowly withdrew their share and CMT emerged as a major operator. In 1998 Arriva North West entered the Merseyside bus market, and rapidly acquired a large share of that market.

In light of MTL's growing interests outside of Merseyside and increasing financial difficulties, in a landmark move in 2000, Arriva North West bought out MTL and inherited the fleet of buses and several bus depots including Gillmoss. Arriva was now firmly established as the largest operator in Merseyside, occupying 65.4% of commercial mileage.

Reference

Horne J.B and Maund T.B (1991) *Liverpool Transport. Volume 5 – 1957-1986*, Transport Publishing Co Ltd, Derbyshire.

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