The Road Transport History Association

Contents

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Reflections on Freight Transport

John Edser

One of my declared interests is the effect of competition between modes, freight in particular. This originated in the mid-1960s, when I was part of the BR HQ Central Planning Unit at 222 Marylebone Road - often known as 'the Kremlin'. BR had only been relieved of their Common Carrier obligation in the 1962 Transport Act, which had put the brake on any real hope of effective commercial initiatives in the freight field. The following example illustrates the problem.

'Common Carrier' obligations

The perils of the rail being a Common Carrier were vividly brought home on a visit to Hexham station by David St John Thomas in the 1950s. An ice cream van delivered a sealed frozen package and paid a very nominal sum for its conveyance to a remote place in rural Northumberland. Immediately the parcels clerk ordered a taxi to deliver it at about six times the cost. "It happens every week" he said, "This is a railway station but it doesn't't go by rail. As a Common Carrier we have to accept it and make a big loss" (1).

Examples could be quoted from all over Britain. Moreover, the Railways were obliged to publish their rates, making them sitting targets to be undercut for the most profitable traffics. While the 1962 Act removed this restriction, the railways were collecting all the data that informed the Beeching Report. Also, BR did not have a really aggressive commercial organisation to capitalise on their new-found freedom. A very large proportion of management time was taken up with the programme of passenger and freight closures.

The Central Planning Unit

The Central Planning Unit was responsible for the overall administration of the Beeching closure programme, both passenger and freight. It was a very small unit, but had various sections which played a key role in the development of the Harwich - Zeebrugge and early Freightliner services; the research behind the 1966 Trunk Route report; the 1967 Network for Development and the rail input into the 1968 Transport Act, which also deregulated the road haulage industry. There was provision in the 1968 Act for a new restriction on the road haulage industry in the form of special authorisations being required to be able to carry bulk traffics, long distance and large vehicle loads. However, implementation was conditional on BR being able to offer an equivalent service in terms of price, speed and quality. In the event this provision was never implemented and the freight market became freely competitive (2).

It was during the research for the 1967 Network for Development that I began to get an idea of rail freight's position vis-a-vis other modes, particularly road, although coastal shipping was still an important part of the freight transport industry at that time BR was given highly confidential information by all the major industries showing future networks; lives of existing installations; plans for future, installations, plans for future installations, plans for future sites, and in some cases the amount of traffic BR might expect to carry - mostly bulk or longer distance. These became the company/block trains of the 1970s and 1980s. It was

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clear that road transport had already made huge inroads into many of what had been traditional railway traffics. It was also clear that this was the beginning of the road served warehouse/distribution era that is with us today. This was helped by the ever- expanding supermarket developments, the out-of-town retail centres, and business parks and the steady expansion of the motorway network.

The BR freight network, with few exceptions, was still operated by wagon types that had not changed their basic design and types since 1900 - slow, the majority without continuous brakes and moved between marshalling yards before going on to their final destinations, often needing delivery by road from there. It was obvious that they could not compete with the many modern road vehicles coming on the market.

The early 1970s saw changes in all modes. Freightliner and Merry-go-Round had started in the later 1960s. Air- braked vans of 32t capacity and capable of 75mph appeared and the BR TOPS Wagon Control System was implemented in stages from 1972-76, changing the whole way the freight fleet was managed. The first ocean-going container ships had appeared in Europe and these needed a completely new handling and transport system. However, the motorway network had expanded and warehouse/distribution centres were growing both in numbers and size.

Trends in freight traffic

Two tables on the next page illustrate some of these developments. The first shows the relationship between the expansion of the motorway network and total rail freight carryings - taken from the contemporary Ministry of Transport and BR Annual Reports.

The second shows how the introduction of the BR TOPS Wagon Control System enabled a huge reduction to be made in the wagon fleet and the increase in the average load per wagon after TOPS achieved full coverage of the BR network in the autumn of 1976. All figures are taken from the BR Annual Reports for the year concerned.

Table 1 Motorway mileage and rail freight volumes 1965 to 1985

Year	Motorway Miles		Railfreight (m tons)	
	Total	Increase %	Total	Increase %
1965	347		229	
1970	6351	82	199	(13)
1975	1117	76	175	(12)
1980	1491	28	153	(13)
1981	1577	6	154	1
1982	1600	2	142	(8)
1983	1637	2	145	2
1984	1688	3	142*	(2)
1985	1740	3	140	(2)
Summary five-year changes				
1965-85		401		(39)
1965-80		329		(33)
1980-85		17		(9)
*miners' strike: actual figures for 1984 were 79.5 and (46) but equated for normal 12 months. Percentages in the above table have been rounded to the nearest whole number				

Table 2 BR Freight characteristics 1972 to 1985

Year	Total Wagons ('000s)		Total freight (m tons)		Average Capacity (tons)		Average load (tons)	
1972	266		179		18.66		19.77	
1975	216	(19%)	175	(2%)	20.01	7%	22.15	12%
1978	150	(31%)	171	(2%)	22.04	10%	24.86	12%
1981	88	(41%)	154	(10%)	24.32	10%	27.81	12%
1984	45	(49%)	142	(8%)	28.86	19%	31.90	15%
1985	39	(14%)	140	(2%)	30.38	5%	31.60	(1%)
Overall change 1972-85								
		(86%)		(22%)		63%		60%

The data – taken directly from BR reports – at first sight seem to give an illogical outcome – i.e. that average load carried was higher than average capacity. A likely explanation is that average capacity is a 'static' measure, based on the whole wagon stock, including older units with poor utilisation, whereas the average load carried (probably derived from ton-miles divided by wagon-miles) will reflect the much higher utilisation of high-capacity wagons, such as the 75-tonners used on the 'Merry-Go-Round' traffic to coal-fired power stations.

The author was heavily involved in the entry of all the necessary details of each wagon - and coaches if they were in the Engineering fleets - to be put into the TOPS computer. Of the 265,556 wagons, the oldest found was an ex-Great Eastern Railway ballast wagon of 1892 and we had to use most of the pre-1923 company wagon and coaching stock books for the hundreds of wagons and some coaches still running on BR.

Changes in distribution patterns

By the mid-1980s the 'Golden Triangle' of the M1/M42/M6 distribution depots was fast becoming established. The companies concerned used the road network to their full advantage, in many cases delivering direct to a wide variety of retail outlets. They also constructed sophisticated trunk networks - usually running through the late evening and night - that enabled them to give next-day delivery to most parts of the country.

The author did extensive detailed research in the mid-1980s into the growing networks of major road users like Post Office Parcels, Carryfast, Atlas Express, Lex Wilkinson, Schweppes; a very detailed look at Asda in its period of massive expansion; and the work of Archbolds as a third party haulier for Asda. All showed how their networks had been shaped by both the growth of the motorway network and major improvements to the A-road system.
All supermarkets, who had to deal with a wide variety of perishable and/or frozen produce, were leaders in this field. Two firms illustrate this:

1. In 1985 an Asda Produce Division run from Normanton served a store in Scunthorpe, and then Chadderton and Radcliffe in Greater Manchester. All three stores are on 'straight line' motorway links - M62/M18/M180 to Scunthorpe and back along the M62 to Manchester. The Radcliffe store was 1.5 miles from an M62 junction, the Chadderton store 1 mile from a motorway spur, and only 7.5 miles from its neighbour.

An Asda meat division driver from Lofthouse, near Wakefield, took a loaded vehicle for South Wales and then South West to Strensham Services on the M5. He swopped with a Bristol-based driver and took an empty vehicle back to Lofthouse. He then served the Sheffield shop - close to the M1 - and returned to Lofthouse - all within his legal working day.

2. M&S serve their shop in Douglas IoM with fresh produce six days a week. Certainly until 2010-12, at 2100 each day a lorry left their Crewe depot en route to Heysham to catch the night ferry to Douglas to deliver for the shop opening each morning.

Many of the drivers, particularly delivering fresh or frozen products, had keys giving access to suitable storage of the products if the stores were closed overnight.

The rail response

The rail response was rather slow and, as it turned out, not well timed. BR Speedlink began to set up a merchandise distribution network in 1977 but due to the slow spread of the new equipment it was not completed until 1983. The first build of high speed vans had a capacity of 24.5tons at 75mph; 29.5 tons at 60mph - both exceeding the existing 32t GVW maximum road vehicle capacity of 21-22 tons.

However, in May 1983, the raising of the GVW to 38 tons - just when Speedlink had a national launch - restored road/rail capacity equality - putting rail at its traditional disadvantage with the need to often transfer final collection and delivery to road with all the costs involved.

To show the competition that road hauliers could offer, the following is an extract from a June 1983 article on BR London Midland Region freight operations:

"The tight interlocking of all functions involved in the supply chain makes everyone conscious of the supreme reliability requirement. The stipulation of one manufacturer long courted for traffic with 25 vans a day from the Midlands to London and 17 to Manchester included insistence that rail equals the on-time performance of his present road hauliers. Their record turned out to average just six late arrivals a year. In that harsh light, even a 90% 'on time' Speedlink aarrival target has to be seen as a 10% failure."

It was fast becoming evident that rail could not compete with the road hauliers because of their ability to meet even tighter deadlines. There were two reasons why BR lost the Rowntree's York distribution contract in 1987:

1. The investment needed to refurbish the internal rail network could not be justified

2. The 38t GVW lorry had improved the economics of road distribution. In addition, the growth of the pre-packed, timed delivery to supermarkets or distribution

warehouses had produced a combination that rail just could not compete with.

This last point - time of day and/or day of week delivery - illustrates a practice that has continued with increasing sophistication until today and why you rarely see more than one lorry unloading in a supermarket backyard.

In addition, rail was subject to some unfortunate decisions. One long-term contract was suddenly terminated in late 1985. The reason was the appointment of a new transport manager at a leading North West breakfast cereal manufacturer with a total anathema towards rail transport, despite the fact that the service had run very regularly and successfully. He bought or hired in road transport and switched his whole trunk operation in a few weeks. In April 1987 BR had to move the London area terminal for its pet food contract due to the bankruptcy of the terminal.

Freightliner

Freightliner had been struggling in its efforts to serve provincial terminals with purely domestic traffic, although most of its port terminals were seeing increased business. As a result, in early 1987, they announced that eight of their terminals would close in April. These were Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Hull, Nottingham, Manchester Longsight and Swansea. The reasons for the cutback are revealing:

1. Freightliner stated that it was seeking a swift withdrawal from loss-making UK distribution services, chiefly involving transits under 250 miles. It would now concentrate on two business units - Deepsea and European. It further stated that 'the study of costs and revenue revealed that, as currently operated, UK distribution was unlikely to be sufficiently profitable to make a significant contribution to Freightliner's long term future'.

2. 'Under pressure from increasing road competition, the distance at which Freightliner services become competitive had been steadily increasing. It is now around 250 miles but varies depending on be nearer 10%'

Another factor was the increasing use of 8.5ft or 9ft high containers, which could be used on a relatively small part of the rail network due to its restricted loading gauge compared with other parts of the world. Much work has been carried out since then to allow these to be carried.

Subsequent trends

Even then, there was a lack of understanding in some railway managers of how complex many of the supply chains were. As a senior Current Operations Shift Manager for the whole of BR London Midland Region, I kept a close eye on key freight flows across the Region. In the mid-1980s one of the North West major power stations was partly dependent on imported coal through Birkenhead. We started losing complete days of planned trains. I quickly found out that Birkenhead would not allow quayside stacking, that the coal was being bought on the Rotterdam spot market and the ships involved were three 12,000t capacity Panamanian bulk carriers for a planned weekly throughput of 35,000 tons. When I mentioned this one day to a senior Freight Operations Manager involved, the reply was 'what's that got to do with me?'.

It was not surprising that, apart from the well-established bulk flows, company trains and port-centered Freightliner services, BR had given up on most of what might be called its 'retail business'. The 1990s and early 21st century saw the pattern continuing, with the emergence of well-known names on the roads - Eddie Stobart, Prestons of Potto, Archbolds, Knights of Old, Norbert (now XPO) and many more - as well as an increasing number of continental European operators (e.g. Agromex from Poland).

Apart from a few company trains, which have shown a real decline as the spread of pipelines had replaced many fuel trains, rail freight was now almost entirely bulk materials, cars and containers. Freightliner was now basically a port-centered operation with major flows from Felixstowe, Southampton and parts of the Thames Estuary.

Since 2012 there have been changes to both road and rail. Increasing road congestion, environmental pressure and the introduction of congestion charges has caused some road hauliers to start using rail for domestic trunk traffic. Tesco, Asda. Stobart Rail, the Malcolm Group and John G. Russell all use rail to distribute their products to Scotland - mostly from the huge warehouse complex at Daventry - taking 26 million truck miles off the roads each year. However, the recent cut back to the Mode Shift Revenue Support Grant has put many of these Anglo-Scottish flows at risk. Tesco has even tried shorter journeys from Daventry to South Wales and Greater London. factors such as v

Rail carryings have undergone a major change with the phasing out of coal fired power stations and the ups and downs of the steel industry. Construction materials now form a major part of their total. The hoped for vast increase in freight to and from Europe via the Channel Tunnel never materialised, partly because of the migrant problem at Calais. Container carryings continue to increase, with London Gateway adding further daily trains.

Coastal shipping has undergone changes as well. Feeder services from Felixstowe to other UK ports now

use ships with a container capacity approaching that of the original vessels built in the late 1960s for the UK - Australia run. There are still some tanker based flows from places such as Milford Haven and Grangemouth but general cargo is often limited to specialised trades at smaller ports (e.g. 0.5m tons of ball clay a year from Teignmouth) as so many products can now be shipped in containers.

Road transport has gone from strength to strength, developing even more sophisticated and automated distribution centres - not only in the M6/M1/M42 'Golden Triangle', which is now expanding into the Northampton - Milton Keynes area but in areas near the M6/M62 intersection; Crewe/Stoke for the M6/A50/M1 link; M4/M5 in the Bristol area and many other 'key road junction' areas. It is able to supply us with all our daily needs at almost a moment's notice. This is without even mentioning the burgeoning 'e-market' deliveries, by the now institutional 'white van man' .

In the last 2-3 years more and more HGVs have become compliant with the green 'Euro 6' standard and there are many examples of hybrid vehicles of various types, with some all-electric ones being introduced for short and/or inner city journeys. Low emission zones are proposed, as are concentration sites on the edge of large cities for all trunk deliveries with final deliveries - often at night - by these 'clean quiet' vehicles. Coincidentally, this gives rail freight an opportunity to deliver retail goods in bulk to these sites to be broken down for their final delivery. Whether this happens on a large scale remains to be seen.

Whatever pattern results, it is clear that road freight plays a key role in all aspects of life today. Without this network, or when drivers strike, shelves empty very quickly and some analysts have stated that a four to six day road haulage strike would produce 'shop anarchy/fighting in the aisles'.

References

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2. The Structure of British Industry - edited by Peter Johnson, Department of Economics, Durham University. Unwin Hyman 1988

Editor's note:

In 1976 I was a specialist advisor to the House of Commons Select Committee on Nationalised Industries, which examined the role of the railways in general, including freight. Some of the issues discussed in John Edser's paper above also arose in matters examined in their report. The Committee supported the then government aim of phasing out subsidies to rail freight by 1978, although the share of track costs allocated to freight remained a debatable issue. The Committee also recommended that the government should continue to restructure vehicle excise duty so that heavy lorries met their economic and social costs. A recommendation which may seem surprising in the light of subsequent privatisation was that Freightliner Ltd should be returned to direct BR ownership. Further details may be found in the 'Freight ' section (pages lxx to lxxviii) of *First Report from the Select Committee on Nationalised Industries, Session 1976-77: The Role of British Rail in Public Transport, Volume 1 (HMSO, May 1977)*

More on those Cat's Eyes

Dear Sir

I was interested in the life history of Peter Shaw, the inventor of "Cat's Eyes" on page 22 of issue 87. Whilst they were a great aid to road safety, particularly during the war years, they could be removed from their base quite easily. I say this because I lived alongside the A11 trunk road at Barton Mills, near Mildenhall, in Suffolk during the war and whole area was prone to numerous military manoeuvres involving all types of motor vehicles, including tanks.

If a tank's tracks went over one or more of the "Cat's Eyes" they could easily be dislodged and many times I witnessed them 'flying' to the side of the road, sometimes causing damage to other vehicles or property. I don't know whether other members of the Association witnessed similar occurrences, but I thought my observations would be of interest.

Kind regards
Maurice Doggett
Purley, Surrey

Everyday London bus travel (1938 to 1988): heritage interpretation of past lived experience

In October, Association committee and board member Amy Graham will embark on a PhD at Sheffield Hallam University with the above working title. Below, she describes a little about her research interests. If you have any material such as diaries, poems, photographs or other evidence of your London bus travelling experience during that time period, she'd love to hear from you via 213bus@gmail.com.

Does heritage practice encourage people to think critically about mundane aspects of their present lives? Inversely, what influence can the everyday have on the construction of heritage as both a concept and practice? This research will use the case of London bus travel experience to answer these questions.

We routinely consider transport for its utility and economic values, how quickly and at what cost to get from A to B. In transport museums, the narrative is often around technological innovation and interpretation is for the vehicle enthusiast. However, the aesthetic and social experience of travel is also significant. Divall and Scott suggest, 'when transport museums succeed, they cease to be transport museums' becoming 'windows on the wider world of the past' (2001, page 153) - they reflect significant social and cultural values, because transport is so integral to everyday life.

The theory of mobility as 'an ethical and political issue as much as a utilitarian and practical one' about 'filling time spent on the move with significance' (Cresswell, 2010, pages 552, 554) is one entry point. A second is the idea of 'invented communities' (Tonkiss, 2003): the bus as liminal space, both place and non-place (Augé, 1995), where we negotiate our relation as individuals within collective society. The community formed by a bus is completely transient, and yet in the moment as experienced it does exist, we are all 'on the bus'.

What do I mean by 'bus travel'?
I define bus travel as: leaving home (entering the public world), at the stop (bus as object), interaction with driver (part-machine), aesthetic stimuli (the window frames the view; elasticity of time), social stimuli (eavesdropping; normative behaviours) and getting off the bus (becoming 'placed').

Objectives
- To collect, evaluate and interpret accounts of historic bus travel experience in London (1938 to 1988) in relation to theories of mobility, everyday life and heritage
- To explore the relationship between historic lived experience and contemporary everyday life in museums and archives.

How will I do my research?
I will spend the first year completing an extensive literature review, developing context for and starting archival and museum based research. In the second year, I will select museum and archive artefacts and narratives to design a display or some other type of heritage interpretation (e.g. a talk, guided bus tour). The final part of the project will be evaluating how people engage with what I create and how this could influence bus travel and heritage practice.

References

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See Page 16 for details of our Autumn Business Meeting on Saturday 7 October at Coventry

- Liverpool's Carriers
- Motorcycle Design
- Milk Floats
- Beeching Bus Services
- Members' Open Forum
- Address by Rod Ashley

The Rise, Fall and Rise of Britain's Suburban Railways.

Ian Souter

Background

In a previous commentary in the R&RTHA 'Journal' (no 72), I drew attention to the relationship between London's pre-London Transport tramways and motorbus passenger numbers and those of the underground railways. My conclusion was that there appeared to be scope for all transport modes to justify their existence in society as passenger carriers. I also offered the suggestion that such a 'win-win' was/is not confined to London, although I provided no supporting evidence at the time.

Also in the past I have drawn the Association's attention to Britain's poor record of retaining passengers on road based public transport modes, about 75% of the passengers at the 1949 peak having been lost until the losses appeared to stop around 1997. As part of my studies into passenger data, the annual reports of the country's Passenger Transport Authorities (PTAs) were examined and it could be seen as a generalisation that suburban railway passenger numbers were slowly increasing as their bus passengers were reducing. It has long been the case that UK government agencies producing national transport statistics do not acknowledge the suburban railway passenger as a species.

Methodology

The thought was developed that the levels of service provided on individual suburban routes could be viewed as a proxy for passenger numbers. Continuity of data for such an approach was provided by the data within issues of Bradshaw timetables, the later all-lines British Rail (BR) timetables and their successors. The years then studied were: 1910; 1922; 1938; 1949; 1960; 1974; 1994; 2017.

The cities selected for the study were those with a population greater than 150,000 in 1931, all of which had had electric tramways; these are given below. Where cities were later part of a PTA, only the main city of the PTA was studied. Each route radiating from the city centre stations was identified and logical boundary stations for that route nominated, preference being given to those boundary stations extant in 2017. The Monday to Friday outward train services from centres to the boundary stations were then listed. Trains not stopping at the boundary were discounted, as were those which stopped short and those which stopped but not to set down. Where a route was later converted to light rail, the new services were counted, but those routes which used only part of a former heavy rail route were not. Where there was no continuity of data over the years for a particular rail route, all data for that route was discounted.

For this comparison, data for cities has been grouped into major administrative blocks, viz:

- All Scotland (Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen)
- Scotland non PTE (i.e. Scotland excluding Glasgow)
- Wales (Cardiff and Swansea)
- All England, comprising the subsets of England PTEs and England non PTEs
- England PTEs (Newcastle, Leeds, Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham)
- England non PTEs (Hull, Stoke on Trent, Nottingham, Leicester, Bristol, Portsmouth, Southampton and Plymouth)

What was Found

The study looked for trends in three categories:

1. Numbers of Routes operating between centres and boundary stations
2. The number of stations on these routes, avoiding double counting of intermediate stations.
3. The level of service provided on each route in accordance with the above specification.

A tabular summary of the findings for each field of study is given below.

Routes and Stations:

1. The low point for both was in 1974 when about 50% of the facilities available in 1910 had been lost. The greatest losses were between incurred 1949 and 1974, the worst (about 35%) between 1960 and 1974. From 1974, routes to date have increased by 15%, stations by 31%.
2. The most significant regional variations were in:
   a) Scotland non-PTE. At -80%, the decrease in routes and -88% for stations from 1910 to 1974, this was the most severe of all the groupings. From 1974 to date, 4 routes and 10 stations have been opened.
   b) England non-PTE - The decrease in both metrics from 1910 to 1974 was c60%. Thereafter, 2 routes and 3 stations have been regained but 1 other station has closed.
   c) Wales - Since 1974, 4 additional routes and 14 stations have been gained.
3. Most of the increases post-1974 were effected before 1994.

Table 1: Number of Suburban Railway Routes in Selected Cities Grouped by Region

YEAR:	1910	1922	1938	1949	1960	1974	1994	2017
REGION:								
ALL ROUTES	207	205	197	187	159	103	113	118
ALL SCOTLAND	57	56	53	49	38	23	28	30
SCOTLAND non PTE	25	25	22	19	13	5	7	9
ALL ENGLAND	139	137	132	125	110	70	75	77
ENGLAND PTEs	86	86	83	79	67	50	53	56
ENGLAND non PTE	53	51	49	46	43	20	22	22
WALES	14	15	13	13	11	7	10	11

Sources: Public Timetables for Respective Years

Table 2: Number of Suburban Railway Stations in Selected Cities Grouped by Region

YEAR:	1910	1922	1938	1949	1960	1974	1994	2017
REGION:								
ALL ROUTES	796	783	770	714	598	373	437	487
ALL SCOTLAND	236	226	223	201	178	94	128	142
SCOTLAND non PTE	93	88	72	61	48	11	16	21
ALL ENGLAND	524	513	519	476	395	259	295	336
ENGLAND PTEs	377	381	379	353	291	204	237	279
ENGLAND non PTE	147	132	140	123	104	55	58	57
WALES	55	59	52	54	42	25	36	39

Sources: Public Timetables for Respective Years

Table 3: Total Number of Suburban Railway Services per Weekday in Selected Cities

YEAR:	1910	1922	1938	1949	1960	1974	1994	2017
REGION:								
ALL ROUTES	4151	4232	4836	3412	3743	3013	4626	6113
ALL SCOTLAND	878	824	901	595	660	727	958	1266
SCOTLAND non PTE	383	363	355	181	216	34	116	287
ALL ENGLAND	2937	3098	3496	2443	2676	2010	3217	4225
ENGLAND PTEs	2080	2239	2500	1730	1886	1571	2743	3563
ENGLAND non PTE	857	859	996	713	790	439	474	662
WALES	250	273	324	295	327	236	423	606

Services:

(see Table 3, previous page)

1. Until 1994, the peak year for provision of services by all groupings was 1938.
2. The low point for 'All Services' was in 1974 when 38% of services operated in 1938 had been lost. Thereafter, despite the reduced size of the network, numbers of services increased, almost matching the 1938 peak level by 1994, exceeding it by just over 25% in 2017.
3. Although there was a net gain, 2%, in services between 1910 and 1922, this was as a result of major improvements in services in Manchester (43%) and to a lesser extent in five other cities. In the remaining cities there was a loss, the worst of which was in Leeds -22%.
4. The greatest loss, -29%, was incurred between years 1938 and 1949 compared with a loss of -20% between 1960 and 1974.
5. There were many regional variations and only a very small sample can be discussed:
    a) Scotland. This grouping was dominated by Glasgow which bucked the trend of service losses 1960 - 1974 when services increased by 10% in consequence of electrification schemes.
    b) Scotland non-PTE. This grouping was losing services from 1922 but the -49% loss between 1938 and 1949 was the most severe nationally. BR's 'Modernisation' programme of the 1950s saw a respectable 19% increase to 1960 followed by a hefty -84% reduction to 1974. Thereafter there was reinstatement of services which have increased to date by an unrivalled factor of 7.4, mostly in Edinburgh but some in Aberdeen.
    c) England PTEs. This grouping generally followed the 'All Services' profile but did not lose so many services in the Beeching cull as other groupings. Since then, services have improved to date by 127%.
    d) England non-PTEs. This grouping generally followed the 'All Services' profile until 1960 and was then second only to Scotland non-PTE in losing services in the Beeching era. It has since made the weakest recovery of services of all the groupings, a 51% increase from 1974 to date.
    e) Wales escaped the worst of the 1938 – 1949 service reductions, losing only 9% of services but fared slightly worse in the Beeching cuts. Since 1974, services have increased to date by an overall 157%.

Most of the increases in services post 1974 took place before 1994, the England non-PTE grouping being the exception.

Discussion:

In this brief outline of a complex issue, only a few key points can be tabled, more comprehensive discussion having to be deferred. The experience of individual cities contains much to be considered and has not been covered in this account. The general point is also made that transport provisions do not exist in isolation from society as a whole, the interlinkages between the two being critical to events.

To stimulate further investigation of this subject and to promote debate, the following observations are offered:

1. It would accord with conventional wisdom that there was a close correlation between routes open and the number of stations. That there has been a wide fluctuation in the numbers of services provided on these routes is less well known.
2. After both world wars suburban rail services emerged in a weakened state following periods of government control of the rail industry. In both instances, there followed a major re-organisation of the rail industry, that in 1948 being nationalisation when BR inherited a depressed business at a time of national austerity.
3. The BR "Modernisation" programme did see suburban rail services increase despite continuing losses of routes and stations and all regional groupings benefited, particularly Scotland non-PTE.
4. During both world wars there was an increase in passengers carried by tram and bus, this at the same time as suburban rail services were being suppressed in order to give priority to the war effort. It appears that displaced rail passengers were left to fend for themselves, the assumption possibly being made that other modes could cope. Road-based modes were severely stretched in 1949.
5. The 1938 peak in suburban rail services was when motorbus services were still expanding. This could indicate a public demand for both rail and road modes, the two modes serving different market sectors. Was this a sign of a potential win:win in which the two modes complemented each other?
6. BR's focus post Beeching was on Inter-City routes; suburban services were a lower priority but had a better chance of survival if they shared tracks with an Inter-City route.
7. Suburban services in the major cities in 1974 were boosted by the recently created PTAs. The increases in services recorded in 1994 were boosted by the BR Provincial Services sector and it is notable that the strongest increases were where a regional government was also involved. The conversion of some heavy rail routes to light rail operations also brought additional services as well as additional stations.
8. Some new post 1994 suburban routes had previously been freight-only routes. Such transfers

of routes were aided by the rail freight industry's retreat from certain businesses in certain areas, thus releasing track capacity.

9. It cannot just be coincidence that suburban rail service increases in recent years have happened as bus passenger numbers outside London have been falling.
10. Over time, the country's population has been static neither in numbers nor location. Spread of population must have encouraged an improvement in suburban railway services.

Transport study in this country has usually concentrated on specific modes; there is merit in this fragmented approach changing if transport's contribution to society is to be better understood.

Editor's note:

As Ian Souter rightly notes, there has been a lack of publication of rail passenger statistics for suburban services in Britain, even in the case of London. This continues to be the case in respect of statistics published directly by the DfT. However, the situation has improved in recent years. The Passenger Transport Executive Group (PTEG) - now the Urban Transport Group (UTG) - has collated statistics from its members for PTE-supported rail services for some years. For example, in reviewing trends in bus use in PTE areas in a study for PTEG published in 2008 ('Factors Affecting the Decline in Bus Use in the Metropolitan Areas') I was able to show that an aggregate decline in bus use in the six English PTE areas between 1999/2000 and 2006/07 from 1213 to 1109 million passenger trips (i.e. 96 million), was to a considerable extent offset by a growth in rail use within the same areas (including the Tyne & Wear Metro) of about 40 million trips over the same period. It does not follow that the same users directly transferred between modes, as growth in rail use may have been associated with increased commuting from outer suburbs to city centres with growing office employment, while bus use declined due to rising car ownership.

The Office of Rail and Road (ORR) now publishes regional estimates for rail use, which gives trends not only for each region as a whole, but also within that region ('Regional Rail Usage (Passenger Journeys) 2015-16 Annual Statistics Release', January 2017). For example, data for the Yorkshire and Humberside Region (sub-table 4) shows that ridership in West Yorkshire (i.e. the PTE area) increased from 14.046m in 1995-96, to 59.900m in 2015-16, much greater than the national growth trend. However, is it unlikely that equivalent data before 1995-96 are available.

The impact of Britain's post-war trunk roads programme

The following paper by the transport economist David Starkie was published in 2015, and will be of interest to members of the Association following the debate about the extent to which investment in transport infrastructure has wider economic effects. The full paper may be obtained from http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ecaf.12104/abstract

David Starkie, Investment and Growth: the impact of Britain's post-war trunk roads programme. *Economic Affairs*, Volume 35, Number 1.

Along with investment in nuclear power, New Towns and Concorde, investment in motorways, which introduced a new road 'technology' to Britain, was symbolic of the nation's quest to modernise itself after the Second World War. After some delay, construction of an inter-urban motorway network finally got under way and, when it did so, progress was rapid, impressively so; in little more than a decade, focused on the 1960s, a basic network of 1,000 miles had been completed. Often overlooked, but also an important element of policy, was the construction of hundreds of miles of new (all-purpose) dual-carriageway and many bridges and tunnels, the latter often, but not always, forming part of the motorway programme (these riparian crossings sometimes were of record-breaking dimensions).

The potential impact of this new, extensive transport infrastructure on most inter-regional journey times was considerable and it was generally presumed that, as a consequence, this infrastructure investment had stimulated the UK's rate of economic growth. Indeed it was often asserted in policy documents that: "[r]oads make an important contribution to economic growth…" (Roads for the Future, HMSO 1969) However, OECD research, conducted in 2009, was unable to detect that this huge investment programme had had any such stimulating effect.

The paper examines reasons for this surprising outcome, two of which stand out. First, the costs of road haulage, instead of continuing to fall as they had done in the 1950s, remarkably, increased in real terms in the 1960s and 70s, not because of an increase in the real price of fuel but because of increases in drivers' wages. The latter, Starkie argues, was due in part to motorways and improved trunk roads raising substantially the demand for trunk-haul drivers (an endogenous effect) whilst trade union constraints prevented the easy adjustment of delivery schedules and thus improvements in productivity.

The second factor the author focuses on is the poor alignment of the motorway network with the then

needs of the economy. Surveys in the 1960s eventually showed over 85 percent of journeys by road goods vehicles were within and not between regions so that the potentially large savings in journey times as a result of the new inter-urban motorway network did not really matter.

With the passage of time, the transport dependent sectors of the economy did adjust and adapt (at a cost) their supply chains to take advantage of motorways and gravitated to locations with easy access to them. And with increased globalisation as the new millennium approached, supply chains became more international so that access to the ports (including some airports) became important. But early post-war Britain, more than fifty years ago, was a different world with different, less expansive, transport requirements; inter-urban motorways were not obviously one of them. For today's policy makers and particularly for those who promote investment in transport infrastructure as a cure for Britain's economic woes, the lesson is a salutary one.

Provincial Exhibition Highlights Gosport's Buses and Trams

Andrew Waller

Gosport lies across the harbour from Portsmouth's thriving naval dockyard. Early in the 1900s the town was home to around 30,000 people, and like many such places might well have established its own municipal tramways. But in Gosport private enterprise seized the opportunity early on to provide public transport. It sustained this position much longer than did many other towns.

The Provincial Tramways Co Ltd, a holding company active in half a dozen other towns, started running horse trams in Gosport in 1882. In 1905 the horses were retired and the tramway was electrified. In other places, like Portsmouth, Cardiff and London, local authorities took over the company's tramway systems even before they were electrified, yet in Gosport "Provincial" still plied the streets for many years.

Buses replaced the trams at the dawn of the 1930s. They still bore the Provincial name for half a century more, and the Provincial Society still keeps it alive today (*http://www.provincialsociety.org/*).

In conjunction with the Hampshire Cultural Trust it mounted an exhibition of Gosport Buses and Trams. The focus was naturally on the history of Provincial, also known from 1930 as the Gosport & Fareham Omnibus Company, but the town also had an unusually wide variety of small independent local bus operators. These were well represented in the exhibition.

Some of them survived the 1930s and still thrived through the 1940s. Provincial concentrated on the main road to Fareham and big 1930s housing estates that were home to Portsmouth dockworkers. The independents' little buses served other parts of town, like Alverstoke, Haslar and Elson. Individual operators shared routes, sometimes dividing responsibility between them for covering different times of day.

Photographs of people and the buses they ran, documents and other artefacts on display in the Discovery Centre, all gave a vivid impression of the variety of their activities and how they affected the lives of the people of Gosport. There's even a wartime notice by H Orme White, Manager of the G&FOC, passing on government instructions to passengers to form orderly queues at bus stops.

The exhibition, at the Discovery Centre, Gosport Gallery, ran until 8 July.

The following illustrations from the exhibition have been kindly provided by Chris Richardsen, Archivist of The Provincial Society.

Above: Thornycroft char-banc AA53091, new to Gosport & Fareham Tramways in 1914

Above: A Guy Arab 'coach-bus' EHO869, a design developed, by H Orme White, who remained in charge of the company until the late 1960s

A further illustration, drawn from the editor's collection, is a poster from 1926, advertising Provincial's Cleethorpes operations at the time, when H Orme White was Manager and Engineer (he subsequently moved to Gosport in 1936, when remaining tram and bus operations were sold to Cleethorpes municipality). The vehicle shown is FU5039, a Guy BB model, one of four owned, hence the reference to parties of 120 being conveyed. A fleet history of the operations in Grimsby and Cleethorpes was published last year by The Provincial Society, as 'Provincial in Grimsby' (by Stewart Brett, Christopher Richardsen and David Whitaker). This comprehensive and well-illustrated account is available from the Provincial Society, c/o 50 Penhale Gardens, Fareham PO14 4NL, price £6.50 plus £1 p&p (by cheque payable to the society).

PRW

Above: From the Provincial Society Archive, a view of Gosport Ferry, showing a healthy number of buses operated by the small independents (one that stands out is C.W.Hutfield's Dennis Ace RV6666) in addition to one of Provincial's Leyland Lions (acquired in 1934 from Hants & Dorset).

Viewpoints and opinions expressed by contributors to this Journal should be seen as personal, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Association.

The next issue will be no. 90, November 2017. The copy date is 6 October. Contributions should be sent to the editor at the address shown on page 2.

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From The Archive: Bartle of Potton

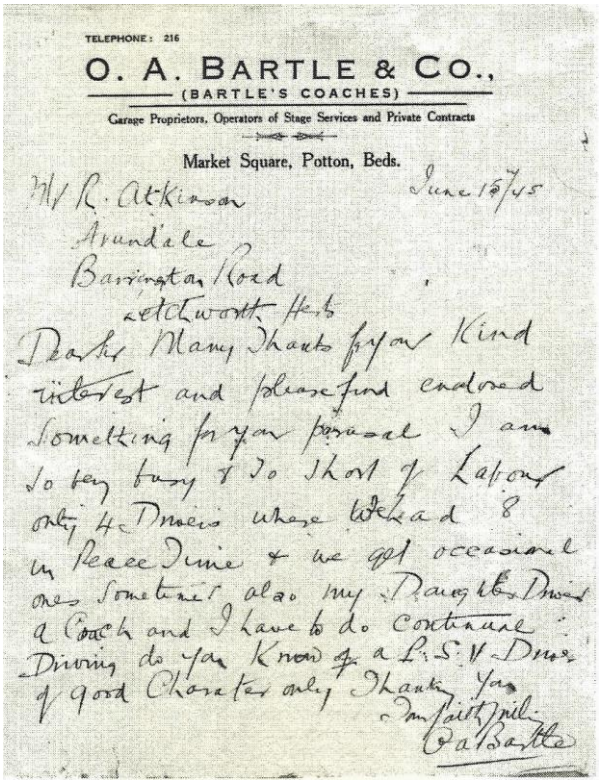
This piece is drawn from issue no 38, August 2004, from an article by the then editor – and still active member of the Association - Roger Atkinson, entitled 'Meandering thro' There Counties' (the counties in question being Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Essex). He opened by recalling a visit just after the end of war with Germany in summer 1945 to Potton in Bedfordshire, and attempting to make contact with the local operator, O.A.Bartle & Co. A subsequent written request for information resulted in the handwritten letter reproduced opposite which read as follows:

"O.A.Bartle & Co
Market Square, Potton, Beds.
Mr R Atkinson
Arundale, Barrington Road, Letchworth, Herts
June 15th/45

Dear Sir, Many Thanks for your kind interest and please find enclosed something for your perusal. I am so very busy and so short of Labour only 4 drivers where we had 8 in Peace Time & we get occasional ones sometimes also my Daughter drives a coach and I have to do continual driving do you know of a P.S.V. Driver of good character only.

Thanking you, I am faithfully,

O.A.Bartle"


TELEPHONE: 216

O. A. BARTLE & CO.,

(BARTLE'S COACHES)

Garage Proprietors, Operators of Stage Services and Private Contracts

Market Square, Potton, Beds.

June 15/45

M/r R. Atkinson
Arundale
Barrington Road
Letchworth Herts

Dear Sir Many Thanks for our Kind interest and please find enclosed something for your perusal I am so very busy & so short of Labour only 4 Drivers where we had 8 in Peace Time & we get occasional ones sometimes also my Daughter drives a Coach and I have to do continual Driving do you know of a P.S.V. Driver of good Character only Thanks Yours faithfully
O.A.Bartle

As Roger recalled, "Not only did he send me that courteous and historically informative, reply, but he also included, from an old timetable book, a photograph of himself in his study in Wisteria House, a dominating building in the Market Square. Rather grainy – but this was wartime, and almost any photograph was to be treasured. No photograph of one of his buses, but I had not asked for one. I had the privilege of a photograph of Omar Bartle himself. I feel privileged to this day."


Mr. OMAR BARTLE.

The Roads Transport History Association Autumn 2017 Business Meeting

at the Coventry Transport Museum,
Millennium Place, Hales Street, Coventry, CV1 1JD
on Saturday, 7 October 2017 starting at 11.00am

Confirmed speakers:

Sharon Brown: Liverpool's Carters

Sharon is the Curator of Land Transport & Industry at the Museum of Liverpool - Urban History, National Museums Liverpool.

Owen Williams: Motorcycle Design over the Years

Owen is Head of School of Automotive Engineering at the University of Wales Trinity St David's, Swansea.

Members' Contributions:

Roger de Boer: Milk Floats

John Edser: Beeching Bus Services

plus an address by our new Chairman Rod Ashley
and the popular Members' Open Forum

As usual, a sandwich buffet lunch will be provided.

The subsidised fee for members is £18, the full price for non-members is £25. To book:
(1) by bank transfer to a/c 81460994, sort 40-27-07 (and send confirming email to philip@kitheadtrust.org.uk)
(2) by cheque to the address below, payable to 'Roads and Road Transport History Association' enclosing a photocopy of the completed slip below

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Name, Address and Email:

Send with remittance to:
RTHA, c/o Kithead Trust, De Salis Drive, Hampton Lovett, Droitwich Spa, WR9 0QE