



TfL Corporate Archives Research Guides

Research Guide No 40: Overseas Bus Tours

The first known example of a London bus being sent abroad, except for military purposes, was in 1936 when B340 (now part of the London Transport Museum collection) was shipped to Vancouver, Canada to mark the Golden Jubilee of that city. The bus was shipped by the SS *Pacific Enterprise* from Surrey Docks (London) in February, returning the following November. It took part in a procession whilst out there, which can be viewed briefly today on YouTube.

Between 1950 and 1975 over 30 goodwill visits were made by some 70 double-decker London buses of various types to foreign countries, either to encourage travel to Britain, to promote festivals, or to sell British products abroad - including new types of bus. After a lengthy gap, more tours were organised in 2013/14.

The first of these visits was by two variants of the RT family in 1950, when two of the wider Leyland RTW type were sent to West Berlin to represent London Transport and Leyland at the German Industries Fair, both vehicles carrying *Britische Industriemesse* adverts along the sides.

A longer promotional tour took place from July to October that same year when four AEC RT-type double-deckers embarked on a 4000 mile tour (6500km) covering Scandinavia, Germany, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France to publicise the 1951 Festival of Britain, visiting 26 towns and cities. Three of the buses were converted to mobile exhibitions, the remaining one giving rides to the populace. After a special ceremony on Horse Guards Parade, all were shipped to Oslo (Norway), two from Hull on the SS *Tinto* and the remaining two from Millwall Docks on the SS *Silvio*. The buses were accompanied by a private car and generator van. On their return the buses were welcomed back by Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, before entering normal passenger service following the necessary conversion work. These buses, as with the majority of those which went on these overseas missions retained their rear 'GB' plates and, in many cases carried commemorative interior plaques.



In March 1952 London Transport, in conjunction with The British Travel and Holidays Association, embarked on an even more ambitious tour, when three brand-new buses of the RT family (two A ECs and one Leyland) went on a five-month 12000 mile (approx. 19300km) goodwill tour of North America in order to promote travel to Britain and the purchase of British products. The vehicles were shipped to New York from Liverpool on the Cunard liner *Parthia* along with a support vehicle and newly - purchased private car. Principal locations visited were Washington DC, Pittsburg, St Louis, Fort Worth, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Milwaukee, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland and Boston. Due to its success, and whilst they were in the USA, the tour was extended to include eastern Canada, visiting Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, London (Ontario) and other towns. [Image from LT000942/008]

One of the buses was specially equipped as a mobile workshop and crew vehicle, whilst another, which was used to give the populace rides in the towns and cities visited, was fitted with additional air-conditioning equipment and air-scoops to cope with the American climate. Ventilators cut into its front dome were retained for the rest of its operational life, making it easily recognisable.



In like manner to the 1950 tour, one bus was fitted out as a mobile exhibition unit. Specially-modified blind displays were carried. The crews were specially-selected and had to undergo stringent medical examinations. In Hollywood, California they visited Paramount Studios, where they were met by Bob Hope, Bing Crosby and Dorothy Lamour, who were making a film. The tour was a tremendous success and included official luncheons and television appearances. British traits such as tea-drinking, and an appearance by Pearly Kings and Queens were featured. [Image from LT000942/008]. Upon their return to London in August 1952 the vehicles took part in a welcome ceremony at Horse Guards Parade, led by the Minister of Transport. They also appeared at the 1952 Commercial Motor Show at Earl's Court before re-entering normal passenger service. The only bus of the trio to survive is the RT fitted out as a mobile workshop (no 2775), which has been fully restored as a normal bus and may be seen today at the London Bus Museum, near Weybridge.

RT-family buses held sway for overseas tours during the 1950s. Between June and August 1953, two visited Switzerland and Sweden for British Weeks; one visited Maastricht (Netherlands) in 1954 on a goodwill tour; another visited Arnhem (Netherlands) between May and August 1955; one was sent to the Netherlands in

June/July 1957; two were sent to Finland between August and October that year. All were on goodwill tours or trade missions.

The new Routemaster (RM) entered the fray in February 1961, when one was sent to British Week in Basel (Switzerland), travelling via Dover-Boulogne, the same vehicle also visiting the Netherlands and Paris the following April, where it helped the British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) publicise its new office there. With minor exceptions, and to avoid repetition in this narrative, it should be noted that all visits by London Transport buses from now on were operated by Routemasters.

A proposed visit with a Routemaster to West Berlin in 1962 did not take place due to problems in obtaining an indemnity (LT001384/055).

May 1962 saw one visiting Stockholm (Sweden); another visited Geneva (Switzerland) in September/October and a new lengthened Routemaster (RML) was in San Francisco from September 1962 to January 1963 for a London Week. The bus was shipped direct on the Royal Mail Lines' vessel *Dongedyk* from the Royal Victoria Docks and returned to London on the *Pacific Stronghold*.

The buses on all of these tours were normally crewed by London Transport bus drivers but on occasions by engineering or managerial staff with the appropriate driving qualifications. Hotel accommodation for staff and storage and maintenance facilities for the vehicles was arranged in advance.

Further visits took place in 1963, when a bus visited Philadelphia; another went to Munich in June and Zurich later that year, whilst concurrently another was sent to New Orleans and Memphis.



An RTL-type bus visited Canada from September to October 1964, after sale to the British Travel and Holidays Association - although it was staffed by London Transport personnel posing as driver and conductor. The bus remained in Canada/USA on sightseeing duties etc. and did not return to the UK. The same year, a Routemaster visited the southern USA (New Orleans and Birmingham, Alabama) for a 'Best of Europe' promotion, being shipped from London to Mobile; another visited Cincinnati for a British fortnight, also Omaha and Lincoln (Nebraska); two others visited Copenhagen and Dusseldorf for a British week.

In 1965 a bus was shipped to Tokyo (Japan) where it was sponsored by the department store *Seibu*, staying from September to October. A further visit to the USA took place that year, covering New York, Virginia and Charlotte, whilst another bus visited Toledo (Ohio) in connection with the British Overseas Fair. This was shipped via Avonmouth direct. That same year two buses were despatched for a 'British Week' in Milan, being shipped via Dover/Calais.

In 1966, four overseas visits were organised, still using Routemasters: two visited a Trade Fair in Oslo (Norway) in April/May; one was promoting *Galleries Lafayette* in Paris (August/September); one travelled to New York and Baltimore; another to Strasbourg (France). These were all on either goodwill tours or trade missions.

In February 1967, one of the experimental Leyland Atlanteans (XA type) visited Leipzig, East Germany. Two buses represented British interests at the EXPO exposition in Montreal (April-October 1967), one of which left for Toronto and Pittsburgh for further promotional work, whilst two other buses went to Brussels for a British Week in 1968.

Not owned by London Transport (but garaged and maintained by them) a new British European Airways Routemaster, complete with luggage trailer, visited Paris where it operated a special service, during May and June 1967.

Two buses were despatched to Hamburg, West Germany for a British Wool Textiles Week promotion (September/October 1969), being shipped from Ipswich direct.

For a British Trade Week in Stuttgart, West Germany (September/October 1972) a bus was sent out and operated a special service. It was shipped via Harwich/ Bremerhaven.

Another was shipped to Pittsburgh, USA in October 1972 for a Gimbels Store promotion, the same bus that had visited the USA in 1965. In fact, it was not uncommon for the same vehicle to make more than one visit abroad.

London buses were sent to Munich during 1973 on a British Trade Drive, whilst two visited Brussels and Paris in 1975, details of which are unavailable.

After a lengthy gap, in 2013/14, two brand-new 'New Routemasters' (LT class) were sent to Singapore and Hong Kong with a view to overseas sales. Another was sent to Abu Dhabi (UAE) in June 2014 and displayed as part of the official opening of Wrightbus' Middle East office in Masdar City, for the same intended purpose.

There is a considerable amount of material in the Archive relating to this subject, as follows:

ArchiveRefNum	Content
LT001384/054	Correspondence relating to visit to Berlin in 1950 and European tour that year in connection with Festival of Britain, Sep 1950-Jan 1953
LT000799/188	Papers relating to 1952 North America tour including route London to Liverpool and possible changes to planned route in North America, Jan-Aug 1952
LT000799/187 & LT000799/186	Papers and reports on the 1952 American tour, Apr 1952-May 1953

ArchiveRefNum	Content
LT000852/101	Arrangements for the 1952 tour of USA and Canada, costings and staffing, Nov 1951-Sep 1964
LT000942/007	Papers, press cuttings, Press Notices, miscellaneous correspondence and transcripts of various speeches relating to 1952 tour of USA & Canada prior to and after the return, Nov 1951-Sep 1953
LT000942/008	Press cuttings, numerous photographs, further transcripts of speeches, special tickets and miscellaneous papers relating to the 1952 tour
LT000942/009	Notices and tributes relating to the 1952 tour
LT000705/019	Papers and itinerary relating to 1952 USA tour and Canadian extension, Mar 1952-Apr 1977
LT000705/040	Reports, a photo, and layout of a subsequent exhibition on the 1952 tour
LT000705/017	Correspondence and route details of 1953 visit to Switzerland and Sweden
LT000705/016	Papers relating to 1954 visit to Netherlands
LT000705/015 & LT000705/020	Correspondence, photos and route details of 1955 visit to Netherlands, May-Aug 1955
LT000705/018	Correspondence relating to 1957 visit to Netherlands, May-Jul 1957
LT000705/021	Papers relating to 1962 tour to Sweden including accident damage report, Apr-Jul 1962
LT001384/052	Correspondence, report and photos relating to 1962 British Fortnight in Geneva, Apr 1961-Sep 1963
LT000705/009	Correspondence, reports and cuttings on the 1962 visit to San Francisco, Apr 1962-Dec 1962
LT001384/061	Papers and photos (black and white and colour) relating to 1963 Munich visit
LT001384/051 & LT001384/057	Correspondence, photos and cuttings relating to visit of Routemaster to New Orleans and Memphis, Feb 1963-Jul 1964
LT001384/060	Papers relating to 1963 visit to Zurich and article, with photos from "The Shellman"

ArchiveRefNum	Content
LT001384/053	Visit of RTL-type bus (sold to British Travel Association) to Canada Sep-Oct 1964. File includes correspondence, notes and tickets, Jun 1964-May 1965
LT001384/058	Papers relating to 1964 visit to Cincinnati and Omaha and damage sustained to vehicle, Jul 1964-Mar 1965
LT001309/001 & LT001384/059	Papers and photographs relating to visit to Dusseldorf 1964, 10 Jul 1963-Jul 1964
LT001309/003	Photographs and miscellaneous papers on the 1964 visit to New Orleans and Birmingham (Alabama), Jul 1964-Jan 1965
LT001309/004	Correspondence, documents and photos of damage to Routemaster on the 1964 visit to Cincinnati and Omaha, Jul 1964-Jan 1965
LT001309/002 & LT001384/056	Correspondence, papers and photos of buses which visited Denmark 1964, Oct 1963-Jan 1965
LT000705/010	Correspondence and photos relating to 1963 visit to New Orleans including damage suffered by bus whilst in transit. Also 1965 report concerning diesel fuel used in USA, Jun 1963-Feb 1965
LT000705/022	Papers relating to 1965 visit to Tokyo, includes lists of spares taken
LT000705/023	Reports, correspondence, letters, brochures, cuttings, route details and other papers relating to the 1950 visit to Berlin; to Scandinavia and France; Netherlands, 1955; San Francisco, 1962/63; photos of damage sustained by RML2262 during USA visit 1965; and photos of Routemaster in Denmark with Princess Margaret, 1950-1963
LT000705/013	Correspondence and papers relating to 1965 visit to Toledo and report of damage suffered by bus on return voyage, Jun 1965-Jan 1966
LT000705/024	Photographs relating to the 1965 visit to Tokyo and reports of damage sustained to the bus in London Docks and Japan
LT000842/006	Report and papers relating to Milan visit 1965
LT001208/158	Correspondence and reports on 1965 visit to New York and Charlotte, Mar 1965-Nov 1966

ArchiveRefNum	Content
LT001309/008	Reports, photographs and correspondence relating to 1966 visit to Oslo (British Trade Fair and Lord Mayor's Show - Oslo)
LT001309/010	Photos, correspondence and accident report relating to 1966 visit to Paris (Galeries Lafayette)
LT001309/009	Photographs, maps, permits and publicity relating to 1966 visit to New York and Baltimore. Also photographs of BEA Routemaster which visited Paris in 1967
LT001309/011	Photographs, correspondence, accident reports and miscellaneous papers relating to Montreal visit 1967, Jul 1966-Nov 1968
LT001384/040 & LT001384/041	Reports, maps, press cuttings, correspondence, damage reports and photographs of the visit by two Routemasters to North America, 1967
LT001384/039	Reports, correspondence, maps and photographs regarding the operation of one bus in Pittsburgh, 1967
LT001384/037 & LT001384/038	Principally correspondence and photographs relating to North American visit 1967
LT001384/040 & LT001384/041	Reports, maps, press cuttings, correspondence, damage reports and photographs of the visit by two Routemasters to North America, 1967
LT000705/012	Correspondence and arrangements for British Wool Textiles Week, Hamburg, 1969
LT000705/011	Correspondence and arrangements for visit to Stuttgart and arrangements for visit to Pittsburgh, 1972
LT001208/038	Contains papers and photographs on the 1973 British Trade Drive visit to Munich

Publications with information on this subject include:

London Bus Magazine: published by the London Omnibus Traction Society since 1972, notably issues 24, 59, 65, 67, 75, 79 & 83 covering events for the years 1950 to 1967.

The Tale of Three Buses, published by Self-Changing Gears Ltd of Coventry - booklet commemorating the 1952 tour.

London Transport Buses & Coaches by John A S Hambley various issues covering the 1950s and 60s