



TfL Corporate Archives Subject Guides

Subject Guide No 9: Routemaster Buses

The Routemaster was developed by London Transport (LT) from the early 1950s, initially as a motorbus to replace London's very extensive trolleybus network, which was in the course of being phased out (Ref: LT000773 & LT000773/017).

London Transport had been involved with the manufacture of Halifax bombers during World War II and gained much experience in working with lightweight aluminium, jigs etc, and the new bus was to take advantage of this knowledge by being much lighter than conventional London buses of the time but still having more seats (64 compared to 56). It was also wider than its contemporaries (8ft - 2.43m - against 7ft 6in - 2.28m for the standard double-decker), giving more room for the conductor and passengers. It was also felt that the new bus would be easier for trolleybus drivers to adapt to, since it was fitted with power-steering and automatic transmission.

From the outset it was decided that the new bus should be named the Routemaster (RM) (Ref: LT000115/179).

Material in the collection includes public correspondence and newspaper reports from certain areas of London affected by the 'trolleybus to bus' conversion (Ref: LT000745/004, LT 000745/007 & LT000745/013). More material can be found covering the reconstruction of depots for motorbus operation and staff training (Ref: LT000773/020 & LT001227/185).

First Productions

With a few exceptions, the new bus had an engine by AEC (Associated Equipment Company) and bodywork by Park Royal, with whom London Transport had a close working relationship. Four prototypes were built: RMs 1 & 2 were similar to each other; no. 3 had a Leyland engine; no. 4 (also a Leyland) was a Green Line coach with power-operated doors and luggage racks. Routemasters 3 and 4 had 'one-off' bodywork by different builders. These vehicles were subjected to very extensive testing (Ref:

LT000366/001/002/003) before construction of production vehicles got under way in 1959.

In 1961 the first batch of 30ft long Routemasters, classified RML or Routemaster Lengthened/Long, entered service. The extra length was achieved by the insertion of an extra half-bay in the bodyside, together with eight more seats.



More variants were to follow. With the successful operation of the one coach, 68 RMC (Routemaster Coaches) for limited-stop Green Line operation were introduced in 1962, initially for services between Guildford and Hertford, the vehicles again being fitted with power-operated doors, deeper seats and luggage racks. In 1965, 43 longer coaches were introduced, similar to the RMCs, but with the extra bay, in similar manner to the RMLs. Originally they operated on the Grays and Tilbury Green Line services from Aldgate (Ref: LT0000/44/051).

Production of the shorter RMs continued until 1965 with the completion of over 2,000 vehicles, the trolleybuses having been ousted in 1962. With the need for more capacity, production now concentrated on the longer RML, a number of which operated in the Country Area in green livery, being transferred to London Country Bus Services (LCBS) upon its formation in 1970 along with the Green Line coaches. The last examples appeared in 1968, bringing LT's total build to 2,760. (LCBS, a subsidiary of the newly-formed National Bus Company, took over all Country Area and Green Line operations.)

Only two other operators purchased the Routemaster from new: the Northern General Transport Company and British Airways (formerly BEA). Based in the north-east of England, Northern General operated them around the Durham/Gateshead/Newcastle area. The 50 buses were fitted with Leyland engines, power doors and front entrances and operated successfully from 1964 to 1980.

Experimental Designs

A one-off experimental Routemaster, built with the entrance behind the front axle and front staircase, never entered service with London Transport and after use as a demonstrator model was later sold to this Northern General for passenger use (Ref: LT000044/051).

The 65 British Airways vehicles of 1966 were not dissimilar but were adapted to haul small luggage trailers (Ref: LT000315/1658) for dedicated services between London and Heathrow Airport, which LT had been operating on BA's behalf for many years. These vehicles ceased operation in 1979 upon extension of the Piccadilly line to the airport.

Another one-off vehicle (FRM or Front Entrance Routemaster) was built in 1966, with the door in front of the front axle and rear-engine, with the intention of one-person operation, which became legal for double-deckers from 1969 (Ref: LT000044/051 &

LT000315/5634). The vehicle, incorporating a fair percentage of Routemaster parts, entered LT service with limited success but the design was not perpetuated.

Later Routemaster Years

During the 1970s Routemasters appeared in a number of special overall advertising liveries. A batch was painted silver for the 1977 Queen's Silver Jubilee (Ref: LT000044/53) and others have appeared in special commemorative liveries. In 1979 a batch was painted red and yellow for a short-lived 'Shoplinter' flat-fare service in the West End.

From the early 1980s, many examples had been sold off for further use elsewhere in the UK and indeed worldwide and a flourishing preservation movement commenced with its own owners' association (Ref: LT001754/003). Many are used by private operators for weddings, sightseeing and other corporate events.



Despite being of an obsolete design by the 1980s (all standard Routemasters had to have a conductor), the bus went through a thorough programme of refurbishment (Ref: LT001344/050, LT001344/052, LT001754/001) and soldiered on into the 1990s and past the Millennium, being regarded by many as an icon of London. Many of the intended replacements had themselves been replaced and were found to not be up to the rigorous requirements of London. Routemasters were being used on many front-line central London routes but were finally withdrawn from normal passenger service in 2005.

Due to great popular public support, heavily-refurbished and re-engined examples were retained and used – crew operated – on part of two central London routes, the 9 and 15, which were labelled as heritage routes.

Key Sources

Transport for London Corporate Archives holds much documentary and photographic material for research into the Routemaster buses. In addition to the documents outlined above, the following key series of records contain valuable information. The list below is not exhaustive so please contact the Corporate Archives should you be looking for something in particular.

Subject category	Archives reference
Introduction of the Routemaster	LT000044; LT000115; LT000264; LT000745; LT000773
Specifications	LT000291; LT000279; LT000315; LT000366; LT000649; LT001345; LT001736
Replacement of Routemaster buses	LT001344; LT001353
Routemaster on tour	LT000852; LT001309; LT001436
Routemaster as an icon	LT000012; LT000291; LT001754