

251 REMINISCENCES 1952-1966 Eastern National

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(being a longer and more detailed version of the story also published here)

My relationship with the route commenced in 1948 at the age of 3 when a trip to the Green Gate Ilford to watch the buses was the only sure way to stop me crying. From 1950 until 1957, I can recall Summer Sunday and Bank Holiday day trips to Southend, from 1956 to 1963 school journeys between the Green Gate Ilford and Broad Lane Tottenham, from 1963 to 1964 it formed part of my journey to work at Eastern National Head Office from the Green Gate to Brentwood. In 1964, I was a main road Conductor at Brentwood and in 1966 I was a driver at Southend.

During most of that period, I made detailed notes of what I saw and this information forms the basis for this set of reminiscences. I would hope that all observations are accurate, but not comprehensive as my access to other parts of the EN area was limited. However opinions expressed were mainly heard second hand from friendly staff members, both management and platform staff, and are therefore subject to legitimate alternative interpretation and/or factual correction. I have also added a few later notes for completeness but the bulk of this was written in 1970.

INDUSTRY OVERVIEW 1952- 66

In 1952, the bus industry generally was still expanding; rising car ownership was just beginning to impact on leisure travel but many operators had never applied for a general fares increase since they were created. This was about to change initially because of rising costs but increasingly due to a drop-off in passenger numbers mainly affecting off-peak travel. At the same time, despite increasing the labour pool by encouraging immigration, a shortage of people prepared to both operate and maintain buses caused unreliability and also reduced the overall quality of the staff employed. Meanwhile the creation of the British Transport Commission and the Road Passenger Transport Executive led to fears that there would be regional bus groups involving compulsory purchase of those operators not already nationalised. Despite campaigns alerting the public to the potential risks of such an action, many well known independent operators, including City, decided that the early 1950's was a good time to sell up. In the event a return to Conservative Government led to the Regional Bus Group proposal being aborted.

Bus Companies and Traffic Commissioners had both supported the principle of cross subsidisation since the 1930 Road Traffic Act whereby profitable routes, mainly urban and inter urban, subsidised the unprofitable routes, mainly rural, with a common fare scale. Sadly this principle was maintained long after it became untenable but as the industry only had a sketchy idea of route costing, the Traffic Commissioners had little choice but to maintain it until the coming of Local Authority Subsidies in the eighties.

By 1966, the industry was in serious decline due to the combined effects of fares increases, service reductions and rising car ownership. Staff shortages affecting drivers, conductors and maintenance staff caused many cancellations. The conductor shortage was tackled by the belated introduction of driver only operation but the invariably full OMO rotas, popular more because of the escape from incompetent conductors rather than the 15% premium payment, diverted more drivers away from busier crew operated services which became even more unreliable and hence less profitable.

THE ROUTE AND ITS USERS 1952-1966

Few bus routes can claim such affection as the `City Coach` later known as Eastern National 251 which linked the north London suburbs with several South Essex towns and finished up at Southend-on-Sea. The original Wood Green to Southend route with a journey time of 3 hours, had been established by Mr A H Young trading as New Empress Saloons in May 1927, initially operating hourly either via Eastwood or Rochford and with a refreshment break at the Kings Head Great Burstead. The enterprising City Company targeted this route, assuming control in November 1928, and after periods of competition and coordination but never joint operation acquired the Westcliff service in 1935.

With the British Transport Commission acquisition of City in 1952, the service reverted briefly to Westcliff before Westcliff itself was absorbed by Eastern National, hitherto only an operator of inter urban services in the Southend area.

The characteristics of the route meant that it served multiple urban, inter urban and long-distance needs and very few stops en route were passed without either picking up or setting down. It took people to work or school, facilitated visits to friends and relatives and linked them to local shops, market towns and the seaside, all except the latter being year round.

From Southend to Romford, the route followed the Great Eastern Railway, which prompted a housing boom along its catchment particularly after electrification in 1956. From Southend to Rawreth Carpenters Arms was continuous urban development and after a brief stretch of open country between Rawreth and Shotgate, the route became urban again through Wickford before reaching the longest stretch of countryside between Wickford and Great Burstead whence housing development took over through Billericay before the final stretch of country running between Billericay and Hutton, followed by urban development through Brentwood as far as Mawney Road, Romford. The stretch forward via Whalebone Lane and Little Heath was relatively sparsely populated but then from Aldborough Hatch to Wood Green via Gants Hill, Woodford, Walthamstow & Tottenham, the route was through continuous London suburban sprawl.

The unique section of the 151 route was entirely different. Following the line of the LT&S Railway, electrified in 1961, from Southend to Basildon, it served the ribbon development along the London Road, provided an urban cross-town function in Basildon and then a rural service before joining the 251 at Billericay. This generated far fewer journey opportunities than 251 and the main new links were Basildon to Brentwood and then points beyond Romford, already partially met by Express service X10. Like most New Towns, Basildon was designed to be self-contained and the Eastern National refocussing of routes in the area was possibly optimistic. 151 was noticeably less busy than 251 so no surprise that after seven years it was diverted to start from Canvey Island as part of yet another area service revision.

THE ROUTE AND LONDON TRANSPORT

From Brentwood, the route was within the London Passenger Transport Special Area and was operated with the written `Consent` of London Transport subject to restrictions as to seating capacity provided and observance of London Transport conditions such as the number of standing passengers (5 as against 8) and a sliding scale of minimum fares to protect parallel LT routes. In City days, the `Consent` rules were relaxed between 12 noon on Saturday to 12 noon on Monday (or Tuesday following a Bank Holiday) provided extra buses did not convey local passengers entirely within the LT special area.

However this was discontinued probably from 1955 and a three level system of `reliefs` was employed, two of which were exempt from the hourly seat restriction as they did not convey local passengers within the Special Area. However the hourly seat restriction latterly of 420 in each direction was in force well into the sixties and enforced by London Transport through frequent checks.

Within the Special Area, the entire route was paralleled by London Transport Bus and Green Line services; a Wood Green to Brentwood journey in 1964, other than by the 251 group, would require four changes; Wood Green to Tottenham Broad Lane on 243, Broad Lane to Ilford Gants Hill on 123, Gants Hill to Romford Market on 66 and Romford to Brentwood on 721

SUNNY SUNDAYS AND BANK HOLIDAYS

Fine weather brought crowds of non car owning pleasure seekers from North London anxious for a day out in Southend beside the sea or to the Kursaal with its fairground attractions and Wall of Death with refreshments being provided either by a picnic or by local seafood stalls, pie shops and Rossi Ice Cream Parlours.

The City stage carriage route was in competition for this traffic with multiple independent coach operators who held excursion licences with pick-up points along or near its route. City's answer to that was to regard its Summer Sunday and Bank Holiday service from North London as an excursion with a comparable day return fare and the added advantage that as it was not pre-bookable, there was no need to travel in unsuitable weather; this was to some extent offset by the unpredictable delays caused by queuing in both directions and, for dedicated fun seekers, the lack of an en route refreshment stop on the Southend Arterial Road at somewhere like the Halfway House, East Horndon or the Weir at Rayleigh. As this demand was at its highest when other demands were at their lowest, this was an extremely shrewd and highly profitable move backed up by a guarantee to get you home.

City had evolved a plan to tackle these crowds which involved carefully managing both inbound and outbound traffic in order to deliver their promise not to leave anyone with a return ticket stranded at Southend. This was in an age of full employment and Southend `Slashes` were a welcome way of boosting pay for platform staff, offering up to 10 hours a week extra pay even though it was virtually compulsory to make yourself available. The origin of the term `slash` was obscure but most crews interpreted it as an extra journey which ran direct to and from Southend via the Southend Arterial Road, with no picking up or setting down of the same passenger between Mawney Road and Wood Green or running non-stop.

The planning started with an assessment of the number of and size of buses available and the number of staff (particularly drivers) available to man them. The bulk of the crews and vehicles for duplication came from Brentwood. Demand followed a predictable pattern, the better the weather the greater the number of passengers. Up to a maximum of 4000 regularly appeared for a day out requiring around 100 bus journeys often utilising around 75 vehicles.

The morning operation was co-ordinated by Regulators at Wood Green with another located at Gants Hill. Queues started building up at Wood Green from around 6.00am and these were cleared by despatching reliefs as soon as they filled for Southend only. Small buses were despatched without conductors and all ran non-stop to Southend. Service buses generally left empty apart from any intending passengers for points other than Southend to make space available for those joining en route. Although the fixed payment for a `Slash` was 5 hours irrespective of route, travelling direct via the Arterial Road meant a round trip could be completed in around 4 hours or less enabling a second `Slash` to be operated if required.

By around 9.00am, the focus shifted to the Regulator at Gants Hill, who received intelligence about queues at various stops from Wood Green bound service buses. On the basis of this information he decided whether to turn returning `Slashes` at Gants Hill or some other stop rather than returning them all to Wood Green, keeping Wood Green informed by phone as to what he was doing. By 11.00am available buses were rapidly running out and a decision had to be made to stop the `Slash` operation and revert back to relying on service journeys which in many cases also had a scheduled duplicate. This meant some passengers were disappointed but enabled City to claim to honour return tickets from Southend. Conductors on `Slashes` had to announce `Southend only` and often LT inspectors were on hand to check that they did.

For the return journey, the regulators at Southend knew roughly how many passengers had been transported to Southend on the `Slashes` but not when they were likely to return. Once again the principle was to only despatch full buses and this generally started at about 5.00pm. As the evening progressed and passenger numbers increased, buses were usually despatched in pairs, the idea being that as soon as the combined load got down to one bus load, one bus returned to Southend for its second `Slash`. This continued until the queue was cleared which was targeted for around 10.00pm but if there had been an error in calculating passenger numbers could be as late as midnight, but in those circumstances Westcliff buses were often called upon.

During this period service buses and scheduled duplicates (which generally started empty from Victoria Circus and operated as far as Brentwood) continued to use the full route but rarely were overloaded due to the increased journey time of nearly one hour over a `Slash`.

City was very mindful of the fact that, although highly profitable, the operation took place at most on 15 days in the year and regular users still needed to be looked after. A separate shuttle service to Wickford via Shotgate was also operated at frequent intervals with a separate queue. On the other hand, Romford was given a low priority as passengers were expected to travel to Southend on the shorter route operated by Westcliff.

The whole plan provided a framework and much depended on the skill of the Inspectors to judge traffic flows on the day, the goodwill of staff to be flexible and the confidence of passengers that City would get them there and back. The onset of bad weather required the whole operation to be scaled down whilst the biggest headache was when a fine morning was followed by a wet afternoon which advanced the peak for departures by several hours.

However, the BTC takeover and the link with Westcliff started to erode the goodwill and, although elements of the plan lasted until 1955, conventional arrangements took over with less end-to-end duplication and more running via the full route, although the occasional `Slash` was still being operated in 1966. This contrived to kill off a lot of demand as over five hours on the bus for around 6 hours on the beach was unlikely to appeal to families with small children and the final nail in the coffin was the end of the cheap day return fare, competitive with excursion fares, in 1964. In 1966 the end-to-end single fare was 7/6 or about £6 today.

Finally, the five-hour fixed payment at the overtime rate for the day for each `Slash` was still in use until at least 1966

FLEET 1952-1966

Just prior to its takeover, the City fleet allocation was 20 vehicles at Southend, 24 at Wood Green [WG] and about 70 at Brentwood. On ordinary traffic days, nearly half the fleet was employed on the Main Road to cover both service journeys and extensive duplication either preplanned or on an ad hoc basis. After the BTC takeover in 1952, Westcliff and later Eastern National continued to rely mainly on City vehicles to maintain service.

One of the first three Lodekkas (1433) delivered to Westcliff was allocated to TA [Tylers Avenue] on delivery in March 1954. At that time, the TA allocation was 9 single decks (2 Gnu, a Leyland PS1 coach, a Royal Tiger coach and 5 dual doored LS buses) and 10 double decks (the LD5G, a Daimler CVD6, and 8 PD1).

Wood Green was home to 3 Gnu, 1 PS1 Coach, 1 PS2 and 1 Royal Tiger coach plus 14 PD1, whilst the BD Main Road Fleet was 6 PD2, 6 CVD6 double decks plus 8 TS7T, 7 PS1 coaches and 2 Royal Tiger Coaches.

All double decks were lowbridge, the two City highbridge PD1 having been sent to Canvey. There was then a wait of 12 months before further Lodekkas appeared commencing with 1457 (BD) followed by 1461-3/6 (TA) & 1458/67-8/75-8/80-84 (SD), all delivered between June and November 1955. Thus for about 10 years Main road drivers could be faced with a constant mesh (Bristol or Leyland PD1), synchromesh (Leyland PD2) or preselector (Daimler) gearbox double decker.

1461 was the first LD6B to be used regularly, supplemented by an occasional 5G, but after 1482-4 all LD6B deliveries between July 1956 and December 1957, a total of 21 vehicles, were so allocated. The pre-war single deck Leylands were replaced mainly by LS buses by 1955, the post war single deck Leylands by 1956, then most of the PD1s by 1957, although 1123 made sporadic appearances up to 1962, and the Daimlers by 1958. 1955 was also the last year when Bedfords, Commers, Seddons and Westcliff AEC's were seen as duplicates on the route.

LD6Bs were favoured for the route as the Bristol engines were a lot less rugged than Gardner and therefore better for interurban services with less frequent stopping and starting. Both engines were governed to the same speed (35mph) which was quite fast enough to maintain the fairly undemanding schedule which required an average speed of 16.8mph. Four-speed FLFs were governed to 40mph and 5 speed versions to 50mph which figures were a matter of choice for individual bus companies. The number of stretches of route where fifth could be used to propel the vehicle at faster than 40 mph on the 251 Group was strictly limited to between Romford Parkside and Charlie Brown's Roundabout at the end of the dual carriageway, so in practice it made very little difference.

It was noteworthy that while TA and WG received a full Lodekka fleet for timetabled work by the end of 1957, BD soldiered on with ex City or City ordered double deckers, the last PD2/12s not being transferred away from 251 duties until July 1962, with a few LD5Gs and after 1958 some LD6Bs. In view of this, it was a surprise that BD was the depot chosen to host LDL6G 1541 which was subject to considerable engineering scrutiny, particularly the five-speed gearbox and the air suspension.

FLFs appeared in November 1960 and the first 20, with four-speed gearboxes, entered service by January 1961. Despite unreliability centred around clutch failures and door faults their early replacement was a surprise as the route specific between deck signage indicated a more permanent stay was envisaged than the actual period of under two years. They were progressively replaced,

initially by 1591 to 1614 and 1617 to 1623, benefiting from 5-speed gearboxes, between July 1961 and October 1962.

There was some controversy over 1600-7, which were allegedly destined to support service revisions involving Services 3 and 26 in South Essex but were diverted to the 251 due to strike action at Canvey delaying implementation. By 1963, the five-speed FLFs were the mainstay of the fleet with occasional support from LDs and the first batch of FLFs, but these were seen off by the further allocation of newer FLFs, the highest numerically being 2851 at WG. These remained on the route group until the coming of the semi-automatic FLFs from late 1967.

Major changes to the allocation were made as models were upgraded but there was no conscious attempt to keep new vehicles on the route. Thus the semis from 1967 replaced manual 5-speed FLFs the oldest dating back to 1961, manual 5-speed FLFs began displacing 4-speed FLFs from 1961 and in 1960 4-speed FLFs displaced LD6Bs the oldest dating back to 1955. The exception that proved the rule were the City Leyland PD2/12s, employed for 10 years from 1952 to 1962.

During the course of 1959, a total of 59 buses were seen at the London end of the route, as against the 32 nominally available for allocation to 251 duties at WG, BD and TA, identified by an x in the list below. The single deckers and the Ks were generally duplicates but SD in particular seemed to have little regard for the nominal TA allocation. At this time, duplication into London in the morning and out of London in the afternoon was extensive but often insufficient to clear intending passengers.

An interesting working for one of the two LWLs at WG was early morning light to Great Burstead Kings Head then a 251 duplicate back to Wood Green and an afternoon duplicate to Great Burstead returning light therefrom. Although I rarely ventured to Southend and thus was unaware of the fleet numbers involved, I was aware of the Shotgate supplementary service and that an occasional journey was extended to Wood Green as a duplicate. The early dual doorway LSs were a frequent choice for this work.

Seen on 251 in **1959** denoted by an x:

336	1123	1293	1456x	1482x	1499x	1519	1541x
346	1134x	1350	1461	1483x	1500x	1520	1544
387	1135x	1361	1462	1484x	1501x	1524x	1545
392	1136x	1389	1463	1489x	1502x	1525x	1547
410	1137x		1472	1490x	1503x	1526x	1554
415	1138x		1473	1496x	1504x	1527x	
489	1139x		1474	1497x	1505x	1528x	
			1476x	1498x	1506x	1529x	
			1480		1507x		
					1508x		
					1509		

In late 1960 the 251 fleet allocation started its move towards 70-seaters but it was not until August 1962, with the deployment of 1617-19 and 1621-3, that the PD2/12s at BD were finally retired after 10 years of Main Road service. The last Bristol Ls were phased out in July 1962 and no K types were seen at all during the year.

Southend and Brentwood continued to maintain separate vehicle allocations for the 251 Group until the mid-sixties to simplify maintenance arrangements but also to demonstrate to a suspicious TGWU no undue bias towards the 251 Group. Each depot had a designated Main Road spare from 1962, 1620 at SD and 1623 at BD.

A noteworthy feature of the FLF introduction was that, unlike the LDs, no distinction was made between Bristol and Gardner engined vehicles, both being represented in the vehicle allocation. 66 buses were noted on the route in **1962** (list below) including 12 delivered during the year. Over half of the TVX FLFs had moved on after only two years on the route with the hope that later batches would prove to be more reliable, which proved to be the case. 1541 continued to be part of the Brentwood Main Road Fleet but it had lost its celebrity status with the coming of the FLFs and its lack of doors now made it unpopular with conductors. Most of the new deliveries with offside illuminated advertisements were to be found on the 251 Group but these proved to be a passing fashion and they gradually fell out of use to be replaced in the future by all over advertisements.

(An unusual aberration in 1966 was the appearance of freshly overhauled and repainted 2701, then at Clacton Depot, complete with a full 251 route identifier on its offside).

339	1123	1446	1571	1600	1617
346	1134	1459	1573	1601	1618
392	1135	1489	1575	1602	1619
407	1136	1496	1576	1603	1620
422	1137	1503	1578	1604	1621
470	1138	1504	1586	1605	1622
476	1139	1508	1587	1606	1623
490		1509	1588	1607	
492		1520	1590	1611	
518		1525	1594	1612	
547		1528	1597	1613	
550		1529	1598	1614	
		1541	1599		
		1553			
		1554			

April 1964 saw the introduction of the ten minute headway for the 251 group and the end of duplication at the London end of the route. It also marked an end to the variety of types seen up to now with 44 of the 64 buses appearing during **1964** being 5-speed FLFs.

539BD	1435BD	1541BD	1571BD	1591SD	1617BD	2762BN
1326SD	1446SD		1575SD	1592SD	1618BD	2803SD
	1478CF		1582HH	1593WG	1619BD	2806SD
	1514CF		1590BD	1594WG	1620SD	
	1525BD			1595WG	1621BD	
	1526SD		2705SD	1596WG	1622BD	
				1597WG	1623BD	
	2428SD			1598SD	1630SD	
	2431SD			1599WG	1633SD	
	2468BD			1600WG	1645SD	
	2497BD			1601BD	1649WG	
				1602SD	1652BD	
				1603SD	1655SD	
				1604SD	1659SD	
				1605WG	1661BD	
				1606SD	1664BD	
				1607SD	1665WG	

1611BD 1666WG
1612BD 1667SD
1613WG 1668SD
1614SD

1525BD, 1528/2497BD and 1541BD are the only buses to appear in all three lists.

Finally, because of the lengthy cycle time, buses did not always return to their home depot every night and separately bus and crew schedules ensured the right number of buses and the right crews finished at each depot.

Apparently, the main reason for separate main road vehicle allocations was that they were regarded as one pool and each depot maintained whatever bus presented itself. Thus any bus from any depot could appear on any journey on any day of the week. It would appear that any substitution of a non-pool bus was sequenced to return to its home depot at Wood Green and for this reason an incoming driver left his bus at the fuelling point and the Wood Green shunter then ordered the buses for departure appropriately.

The system did not always work too well and the fleet was let down on occasion by running maintenance issues such as brake adjustment and water shortage, the latter often blamed on the CBC heating equipment but mainly due to neglectful maintenance practices and/or the characteristics of the wet-linered Bristol BVW engine.

TIMETABLE 1952-1966

The basic City fifteen-minute headway service, dating back to 1947, remained unchanged until 1964, even the running time. From 1947 to 1961, a longish diversion for double deckers was instigated to avoid Blue Brick Bridge in Shotgate. This was operated non-stop as the route via Battlesbridge was within the Eastern National operating territory. To remind drivers, a framed map was located in the cab of all City double deckers, those in the PD2/12s lasting until their sale by Eastern National.

The 251 was far and away Eastern National's most profitable route and under the ruling principle of cross subsidisation, underwrote much of their rural bus network. The strength of the route day to day was not day trips from London to Southend, which was mainly focussed on School Holiday Sundays and Bank Holiday Weekends, but substantial peak and off-peak traffic into the main trip generators en route of which the most important, other than Southend itself, was Romford. The East London habit of moving out into the suburbs on retirement led to many moves to towns like Wickford with the 251 being convenient for family visits before the days of high car ownership. The fact that the service was every fifteen minutes with the same departure times from either end within an operating day starting at 0525 and finishing at 2125 was a powerful factor in keeping demand buoyant.

1964 marked the year when most of the Eastern National operator acquisitions of the fifties and early sixties were included in a new service pattern which put more emphasis on long distance inter-urban services and diverted more services into the emergent Basildon New Town.

One consequence of this new commercial approach was the introduction of the 251 route group which initially comprised the 151 service, which, whilst following the 251 route as far as Sun Corner, Billericay, then diverged to reach Southend via Basildon. Combined frequency was every 10 minutes but off-peak Monday to Friday 151 services were terminated at Ilford (Gants Hill),

giving a reduced frequency of every 20 minutes from Ilford to Wood Green. Sunday service was every fifteen minutes, which represented a halving of the 251 service on that day.

Increasing the peak vehicle requirement from 25 to 36 (albeit some redeployed from other services on common sections) meant a substantial increase in operating costs and placed further pressure on service provision overall when staff shortages were making it increasingly difficult to maintain existing services. Flexibility was also lost as the ten-minute headway used up the LT Consent condition of no more than 420 seats per hour thus precluding duplication of exceptionally busy journeys.

A weird complication from May 1964 was the re-routing of a few peak hour Monday to Friday 151 journeys via Chesnut Road which although offering a more direct route between Tottenham High Road and Tottenham Hale missed the important traffic generator at Broad Lane. Although allegedly done to counter traffic congestion, this was not a major problem and usually resulted in affected 151s having to wait time at the Bell Walthamstow to maintain the ten-minute headway. This was abandoned in May 1966.

151/251 was shown as a co-ordinated service in the main Eastern National timetable but as their routes within the Southend Co-Ordination area were totally different, they were shown as two separate timetables in the Southend & District Timetable booklet.

In 1966, there was still some Monday to Friday 251 duplication into Southend, an example being empty to Rawreth Carpenters Arms then 1015 to Southend Victoria Circus, then empty back to Rawreth and 1115 back to SND. Both these journeys ran 4 minutes ahead of the service bus and with an arrival in SND of 1046 after the first journey, it was often a bit tight to return for an on-time departure at 1115.

By the sixties, there were a total of 41 stopping places between Wood Green and Brentwood; of these, 30 were located at the appropriate LT Stop, 10 were dedicated EN stops and one, the Bell Walthamstow had no stop at all merely being identified as 50 yards east of the Bell. This contrasted with the 43 London bound stopping places where only three (Brentwood White Horse, Romford Market and Wood Green) were not LT stops.

In July 1964, the Tylers Avenue terminus was closed for redevelopment and a new terminal was constructed at the top of the Seaway Car Park. The need to vacate the site was well understood but the logic of its replacement escaped most, although alternatives such as Central Station and Pier Hill probably did not have sufficient space. The cafe at Tylers was sadly missed by ex-City crews who used it as a proxy canteen, whilst most passengers continued to leave the bus at the top of Tylers Avenue, and only day trippers made use of Seaway to start their homeward journey.

After two years the timetable was recast again, this time reverting to a combined 15-minute frequency but with Monday to Friday evening peak enhancements, those from Wood Green effectively being 251 duplicates to 151 journeys, whilst on 151 there were two additional single journeys between Romford and Pitsea. Also, the hourly weekdays journey on Service 250 between Billericay Rail Station and Shotgate, which commenced in 1966 had to be augmented the following year to provide a half hourly weekdays service commencing alternately at Brentwood or Billericay Railway Station, co-ordinated to reinstate the 15-minute frequency with 251. A further change was made from January 1968 to overlay the new 351. 151/251 remained at half hourly but to new timings and were diverted to operate via West Green Lane instead of Bruce Grove.

Thus in a period of less than 4 years, the weekday daytime frequency of 251 had gone from every fifteen minutes, through every 20 minutes to every 30 minutes and had experienced two route revisions and four timetable changes; it never recovered.

DESTINATION BLINDS

Ex City Leyland and Daimler double decks featured a one-piece display showing London Wood Green, Southend, occasionally with Tylers Avenue in smaller letters, and Brentwood with no route number. Eastern National PD1s were fitted with a destination blind and a combined route number and intermediate point blind showing Romford - Brentwood - Battlesbridge. From 1958 onwards the FJN PD2s which, like all City Double deckers, had a destination blind above the rear entrance but not at the rear were equipped with new blinds showing the route number and final destination as Southend Tylers Avenue and London Wood Green, with Brentwood as an intermediate point. These blinds only covered the 30/40 and 251 groups.

The following Lodekka three-line intermediate displays, dating back to Westcliff days were shown interchangeably until intermediate point blinds were phased out:

Romford	Romford	Brentwood	Brentwood	Brentwood	Billericay
Brentwood	Brentwood	Billericay	Billericay	Billericay	Wickford
Battlesbridge	Billericay	Battlesbridge	Shotgate	Wickford	Battlesbridge

The latter was designed for use on Route 253 Brentwood to Rawreth Carpenters Arms up to May 1961 but was often to be seen on 251 vehicles.

Eastern National generally favoured two-line intermediate point displays and from 1956 these began to appear, initially on Wood Green allocated vehicles:

Romford	Billericay
Gants Hill	Wickford

These were to be used for Brentwood terminators and also, for a while, to be changed on through buses at Brentwood.

FLF final destinations from 1964 were:

- London (Wood Green)
- Southend (Tylers Avenue)
- Southend (Seaway)
- Brentwood
- Ilford (Gants Hill)

(Tylers Avenue) was blacked out from its closure and vehicles just showed Southend until Seaway was painted on. The LS buses used on the Shotgate shuttles to Wickford typically displayed Shotgate as the only intermediate point. If they were travelling through to London they would display the three line blind including Shotgate but in the absence of Southend (Tylers Avenue) had to display Southend.

Each depot had many variations of blind so finding your required destination could involve a lot of winding. Southend also had two final destination blinds, one for locals and one for long distance, known as A and B scrolls, whilst some of Brentwood's Main Road Allocation had blinds covering all of the network's trunk routes

From 1958 onwards, regular double deck performers (those from 1496 to 1529) were equipped with painted displays on each side in the between decks advertising space proclaiming 'Daily Bus Service – every 15 minutes' and identifying the key points en route. The TVX FLFs were so equipped within weeks of their introduction but all had been replaced by advertisements by 1963. No Leylands were so treated. From 1964, a London Underground style route diagram in red was placed in both saloons of appropriate FLFs showing all picking up and setting down places within the London Transport Special Area but these only lasted a couple of years. Details of stopping places were also included in the Eastern National timetable.

CREWS

Up to 1964, crews for Main Road were based at Wood Green, Tylers Avenue and Brentwood. In City days, there was a separate rota for this work at Brentwood, mainly because City made a weekly additional payment for crews working into London. This ceased when Westcliff took over and bought out the benefit with a lump sum payment, mindful of the fact that its crews also operated within the London Transport Special Area. Eastern National, Westcliff & non-Main Road City crews were already paid the same National Council for the Omnibus Industry agreed rates and Main Road Crews reverted to this rate.

Even in 1964, this was a sore point with the many remaining ex City crews, particularly drivers, and many went out of their way to minimise the number of London passengers carried, a favourite trick being to follow a LT 66 bus up to a bus stop and then pass it as it was slowing to stop. As late as January 1965 there was a dispute over the use of the new LT bus lay by at Aldborough near Newbury Park with the Union claiming they had not been consulted and that the layby was designed for 26' rear entrance RT's and not 30' front entrance FLFs. The suspicion was that the main reason for the additional stop was the picking up of LT passengers and for a while, passengers were asked their destination and only allowed to board if it was beyond Romford Market.

It would seem that the keeping of separate rotas at Tylers Avenue and Brentwood was a goodwill gesture to enable the ex-City staff to maintain the 251 route as far as possible as a separate entity and this lasted until 1964 at Southend when the route changes dictated their inclusion into the main rota, although Brentwood still retained two separate rotas at this time. In 1964, the Brentwood Main Road Rota conductors were equipped with nearly new Setright Speed machines which counted in £.s.d (instead of shillings and halfpennies) and greatly simplified cashing in. Brentwood conductors being relieved at Brentwood had to complete an auxiliary waybill for the benefit of their replacement and ticket inspectors. This comprised an extract from the waybill relating to ticket numbers for the particular journey.

In the days of the 6-day, 48-hour week, a typical duty was one round trip over the whole route and a Wickford short. By 1960 the working week was down to 42 hours over 7 days. My basic rate of pay as a conductor was just under £11 per week. Saturday was generally the busiest day and my busiest shift was early shift B40 on Saturday 5th September after which I paid in £31.0.9.

In 1964, after the introduction of the 151, Brentwood Main Road rota had 25 Monday to Friday duties and five pieces of overtime, worth around 3 to 4 hours each, Early round trips generally went towards Southend first whilst lates generally went towards Wood Green. The OT pieces comprised return trips to Gants Hill, where off peak 151 trips terminated, or a trip to Southend. Generally, crews operated the same duty for a week.

A typical early was B4 as described below for 31st July 1964, the first day of operation to Seaway:

0554	Sign On		
0609	Brentwood – Southend Seaway	251	1602SD
	Paid Meal Break		
0834	Southend Seaway – Wood Green	151	1598SD
1138	Wood Green – Brentwood	151	1597WG
1305	Sign Off (Takings £20.12.3d equivalent to about £350 today)		

A typical late was B21 as described below for 5th October 1964:

1702	Sign On		
1718	Brentwood – Wood Green	251	2790SD
	Paid Meal Break		
1908	Wood Green – Southend Seaway	151	2782SD
2204	Southend Seaway – Brentwood	151	2782SD
2353	Sign Off (Takings £13.11.1)		

A typical overtime piece was OT 2 as operated on Thursday 13th August 1964:

1052	Sign On		
1108	Brentwood - Gants Hill	151	2733SD
1201	Gants Hill – Brentwood	151	2733SD
1248	Brentwood – Gants Hill	151	2730BD
1341	Gants Hill _ Brentwood	151	2730BD
1435	Sign Off (Takings £6.16.11)		

The turn round arrangements at Gants Hill were complex. On arrival at the Gants Hill Bus Stop in Eastern Avenue, the bus proceeded forward to the roundabout, exited left up Cranbrook Road, first left into Bramley Crescent and then left again into Perth Road to stand on the offside of the road outside the Odeon Cinema where LT had a stand usually used, amongst others, by their route 139. The Southend bound stop at the time was in Woodford Avenue and to get there the bus had to turn left at the end of Perth Road, comply with roundabout and exit at Woodford Avenue, proceed to the Redbridge Lane Roundabout, and then return via Woodford Avenue.

I was fortunate to have Doug Brown as my regular driver but as he had better things to do with his time then work overtime, I worked with most of the Main Road drivers, most of whom had done at least twenty years and some approaching forty years. They represented professional busmen at their best with tremendous pride in the job they were doing.

There were very few odd workings although conducting MW5G DP 539 on the 1358 Brentwood to Wood Green 251 on Thursday July 30th, which was switched with the FLF which operated the journey from Southend as a positioning move for a private hire the next day, and conducting MW5G bus 1326SD on the 1729 Brentwood to Southend on Saturday 22nd August, working its way back from Central Works, were unusual. Finally on Bank Holiday Monday, whilst spare at Brentwood, I conducted a single journey `slash` to Southend, via the Southend Arterial Road, leaving Wood Green at 1040 and collecting £21.5.0 in fares, all Southend returns.

In Summer 1966, I started as a driver at Southend. Here crews operated a 6-hour 40-minute day six days per week with a different duty every day, arranged as a week of earlies followed by a week of lates. Every few weeks an early turn on Friday followed by Saturday and Sunday rest days

returning to a late turn on Monday gave a long weekend off. There were also split shifts over both peaks with a break in the middle but apart from those covered by crews who worked permanently on split shifts, these duties were split into two overtime pieces. Additional payments and enhanced payments boosted the payable hours figure but these were so complex that most crews relied on the wages clerk to get the calculations right.

All destinations had been allocated a three digit identifier which is what appeared on duty schedules. Those relevant to the 251 Group were:

BTC Basildon Town Centre
BWD Brentwood
RCA Rawreth Carpenters Arms
SSY Southend Seaway
SND Southend Victoria Circus
WFD Wickford
WGN Wood Green

For SD, the 251 Group work was probably only about 10% of the total and with rostered duties changing every day, on average you had a rostered round trip 3 or 4 times per month. However, as on overtime these duties could only be done as a Rest Day or a double duty, they were not in high demand so I managed about 8 per month.

Each London rounder comprised an outward and return trip on either 151 or 251 split up by a meal break, paid as it was taken away from the home depot. Morning arrivals usually crossed the road to Wood Green LT depot for one of their special breakfasts, although ham, egg and chips in the WG Canteen was my choice on lates. It was possible to complete 2 Main Road round trips in a day and an example was early duty 113 and late duty 96 driven as a double duty on Thursday 6th August 1966:

0658	Sign On		
0718	SSY-WGN	251	2851WG
	Paid Meal Break		
1046	WGN-SSY	251	2721SD
1354	Sign Off		
1448	Sign On		
1518	SSY-WGN	251	2734WG
	Paid Meal Break		
1831	WGN-SSY	151	2739WG
2131	Sign Off		

The break needed to be of 30 minutes duration and as the 1518 ex SSY arrived at WGN at 1759, the 32-minute break was about the minimum allowable representing a step back of three departures. The 0718 SSY-WGN arrived at 0959 and hence the break was a more leisurely 47 minutes or four departures. It was extremely rare that the break for both buses and crews was the same.

By 1966, the peak vehicle requirement for the 251 group had reduced sufficiently for it to be rare to see anything other than an FLF and those I drove on the route are set out below. Of the non FLFs 2304, 2471, 2488 and 2495 and FLF 2855 were deployed on non-Main Road vehicle allocated journeys, whilst 2345 and 2351 were BN substitutions for unserviceable FLFs. It was also apparent that BN never had dedicated Main Road buses, merely selecting any FLF available and this

probably coincided with the introduction of a double-sided board designed to return the vehicle to its home depot every second day.

2304	2471	2720	2736	2759	2791	2822	2855
2345	2488	2721	2739	2761	2795	2844	2866
2351	2495	2725	2746	2762	2798	2851	
		2726	2747	2764	2803		
		2729		2769	2807		
		2732		2772	2808		
		2734		2775	2809		
		2735		2778	2818		
				2782			
				2787			
				2788			
				2790			

The age distribution of the FLFs was biased in favour of older vehicles such that 8 were new in 1961, 4 in 1962, 12 in 1963, 8 in 1964, 3 in 1965 and 2 in 1966. The newest SD FLF deliveries 2854-2857, 2860 and 2870 were rarely seen on 251 duties and it was more likely that SD and BD would provide a LD if there was a temporary shortage of Main Road FLFs

My last day as a SD driver was Saturday September 17th 1966 and a pleasant surprise was to be taken off my rostered duty of 386 which had started at 1624 to operate 440 which finished with the last bus from WGN to SND as detailed below:

1748	Sign On		
1818	SSY-WGN	251	2790SD
	Paid Meal break		
2146	WGN-SND	251	2791SD
0033	Sign Off		

My regular conductor was a student friend of mine, Jim Young (who sadly succumbed to Covid in 2021). We shared a flat in Westcliff and spent a very enjoyable and profitable summer. Thanks to Jim, my exposure to the many truly appalling non-career conductors at the depot, mainly other students, was minimised and we contrived to maintain high standards.

In 1966, the working week had been further reduced to 40 hours and each rota at each depot voted on whether it preferred 6 x 6.40 days or 5 x 8 hour days. Wood Green was alone in voting for a five day week which they soon regretted when instead of doing one rounder per shift, they found themselves with quite a few shifts which comprised two trips to Basildon separated by an unpaid meal break. A typical WG second half of such a duty was:

1031	WGN to BTC	151	hand over to SD crew	at 1216
1229	BTC to WGN	151	take over from SD Crew.	

Arrival back at WG was at 1414, thus with booking on and booking off allowances, two pieces made up almost exactly 8 hours. Basildon gained work as well and scheduling arrangements incorporating 4 depots must have been a nightmare with both through operations and handovers at Basildon having to be accommodated

The 251 was a very pleasant day out for a driver with easy timings virtually unchanged since 1930 and limited but predictable congestion at the London approaches, for which crews made appropriate allowance by judicious early running. Indeed it was rare for a traditional five-minute comfort stop (for SD and WG crews only) not to be taken at Brentwood. It was technically undemanding for drivers with good quality roads and, at night, street lighting for most of the journey. The stops at Gates Corner towards London, Wood Street, Walthamstow and Crays Hill from London required a snatch start from first gear which required a bit of skill but saved a lot of clutch judder.

At the time there was a chronic shortage of both drivers and conductors and overtime was plentiful. During my best paid week I worked 103.04 hours which became 151.30 with allowances for a total of £46.06 (about £735 in today's money), substantially more than I was being paid as an Assistant Traffic Manager at Yorkshire Traction six years later.

Notable occurrences were few and I recorded only 3. On Friday 29th July, I drove the 0725 Southend Victoria Circus to Brentwood duplicate in 2488SD as part of Duty 149. Normally, this would have terminated at Harold Hill Industrial Estate but during school holidays it only went as far as Brentwood, where, having parked 2488 in the garage, the duty picked up the 0927 251 back to Southend Seaway operated by 2759SD. The duplicate was unusual in that, together with its return afternoon working, it actually featured in the published timetable. Next driving a 2145 Southend to Wood Green 'slash' on Saturday 20 August in 2791SD, whilst on Thursday 8th September, 2351BN, a KSW5G was supplied as a changeover at Basildon Bus Station for 2761BN which had brake issues. Wood Green kept it back to operate the last Basildon 151, thereby returning it expeditiously to its home depot.

TUESDAY 7th JULY 1964.

This was quite a momentous day with two separate disruptions to the normal 251 Group service. First WG and SD banned overtime for the day to enable the TGWU to hold a special meeting to discuss the latest LT wage award. Fortunately nobody at BD was sufficiently bothered and the depot operated normally.

More seriously SD, CY, HH and BN held a one-day strike in solidarity with SCT who were striking to support of a driver who had been sacked for refusing to cover some Eastern National work within the Co-Ordination agreement. Although not on strike, WG and BD respected the established depot territories. 251 did not pick up passengers from Rawreth Carpenters Arms towards Southend although passengers already on board were carried to their destination. BD and WG buses then returned empty to Rawreth Carpenters Arms and then as normal to WG. 151 operated to and from Billericay and Wood Green only. The fate of passengers wanting to leave SD, it being a lovely sunny day, can only be imagined!

THE END

During this period Southend wisely changed its focus by dropping the 'on-Sea' and gradually reinventing itself as a commercial centre. This had a disproportionate impact on day tripper traffic and the 251 Group was in serious decline before the 1964 revisions, although this was not immediately apparent as it resulted in a reduction in duplication rather than a reduced service frequency. It then suffered multiple timetable and route changes and was finally withdrawn on 6 May 2000.

I returned to SD in October 1967 and Dave Crowley the Driving Instructor let me have a go in 2884 then in use as the 'driver familiarisation' bus as he was currently training all drivers on its

characteristics, specifically the semi-automatic transmission. Opinion was sharply divided between senior drivers who thought it unnecessary and an erosion of their professional skills and younger drivers who revelled in the ease with which gear changing could be made and couldn't care less about professional skills. In all other respects the handling was identical to other F series Lodekkas. Dave's view was that semi-automatic gears would be very useful in encouraging conductors to transfer to the driving grade but otherwise a waste of money on a solitary batch of crew operated double deckers and so it proved to be.

The 251 route at least is still remembered as a high frequency, high quality service and its ongoing popularity was demonstrated by the number of enthusiasts and non-enthusiasts with sentimental reasons for travelling on the 21st Century Re-enactment Running Days recreating its glory days of fifty years earlier.