

SCT Memories - The 1967 Bus Strike: Part One, by Paul Bateson.

The "famous" Southend bus strike took place 50 years ago. This article, adapted from notes prepared by Derrick Giles, the Traffic Superintendent, recalls the events that resulted in the 40-day strike and how Southend Corporation Transport reacted.

In October 1967, following the breakdown of the National Joint Industrial Council for the Road Passenger Transport Industry, the Transport and General Workers' Union gave orders to municipal busmen:

- (a) To ban standing passengers
- (b) To ban voluntary overtime
- (c) Not to co-operate in the further implementation or extension of one-man operation.

Most Southend Corporation Transport (SCT) staff acted upon these instructions from Friday 3 November 1967. As the action was taken nearly three weeks after it was first recommended management was prepared.

Services 16 and 17, which usually required five vehicles throughout the day on Mondays to Saturdays, ceased to be operated by the Corporation. Super Coaches, Upminster took over operation of Service 17 (Temple Sutton – Eastwood, Woodcutters Arms) and operated the full timetabled service, which required three vehicles daily. On the first day, the service was worked by single-deck buses, two Leylands and a Ford. Later, coaches and ex-London Transport and Eastern National double-deckers were operated. SCT Setright speed machines were used to issue tickets from green Bell Punch stock rolls. Destination blinds were also ready.



Picture Super Coaches 441 (HUH 15) was a former Western Welsh Leyland Tiger Cub with Weymann bodywork. It was operating route 17 at the Cliffs Pavilion, Westcliff on 12 November 1967.

Paul Bateson

Coaches were hired for school contracts. On the first day, these were supplied by Channel Airways, Westcliff (1); Victoria, Leigh-on-Sea (2); Cook, Westcliff (1); and Reliance, Benfleet (1). This enabled full services to be maintained elsewhere and it was found possible to reinstate certain peak time journeys on Service 16.

The hire of vehicles for stage work did not meet the approval of the road staff and from Tuesday 7 November 1967 all but a very few came out on strike. Eastern National's Southend garage supported the action by the SCT crews and came out on strike as well, although Hadleigh and Canvey garages began in the morning by operating without entering the centre of Southend. The strike soon spread to these garages and others turned short at the co-ordination area boundary (Rettendon, Turnpike Corner; Rawreth, Carpenters Arms and Tarpots Corner.

The strike, which was later recognised as official by the Union, did not mean that Southend was without buses. SCT immediately began operating emergency timetables on services 1, 3, 4A, 4B, 7 (Southend – Rayleigh), 7A, 8 (Southend – Hockley), 18, 23 and 29.

The only front-entrance double-deckers in the fleet, ten Albion Lowlanders numbered 323 to 332, had a panel behind the driver's cab removed and were one-man operated by the few drivers working, Inspectors and Office Staff. The latter included me!

A poster reading:

PLEASE PAY DRIVER
WINDOW BEHIND CAB
THERE IS NOT TIME TO
GIVE CHANGE OR TICKETS

was displayed. Vehicles were immediately hired from independent bus and

coach operators. At first a Conductor was generally provided for these vehicles but later certain hired coaches were one-man operated.



Albion Lowlander 326 displayed the Please Pay Driver poster whilst on route 3 at Benfleet Station on 11 November 1967. **Paul Bateson.**
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Throughout the strike, which lasted for 40 days, services were increased as further vehicles became available. Limited services were operated on Sundays and evenings on Mondays to Saturdays throughout the strike on Services 3 (Southend – Canvey); 4B (extended to Great Wakering) and 7 (Southend – Ashingdon). Otherwise services operated generally between about 6:00 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. (0600 – 1830) on weekdays only. The X90 operated normally on Sundays.

Individual letters appeared in each window of the garage that spelt VOLUNTEER BUSMEN ACCEPTED and the Corporation took on many part-time staff and continued to engage full-time staff. This enabled more and more Corporation vehicles to be operated and by the end of the strike about 25 such vehicles operated at peak-times giving a total of about 50 vehicles running under Corporation control. Something like two-thirds of the normal takings were by then being paid in, amounting to well over £1,000 a day on weekdays.

One of my favourite memories of the strike was the comment from Peter Newman, at that time the owner of Super Coaches and now well known as Chairman of Ensign Bus. "There is nothing wrong in being called a "Scab", he told me. In response to my puzzled look, he quickly replied, "Scab stands for *Southend Corporation Auxiliary Busmen!*" This has stuck with me ever since!

Buses were eventually introduced on the following routes:

16 Nov 1967	6 (Southend, Central Station – Southchurch, Newington Avenue
20 Nov 1967	21, 22/22A, 23A (All M-F peak periods only)
22 Nov 1967	8 (Extended from Hockley to Rayleigh)
25 Nov 1967	6A (Southend, Victoria Circus – Eastwood) & 7 (Full route, Shoeburyness – Rayleigh)
30 Nov 1967	16A (Evening M-F peak only)
6 Dec 1967	25A (Evening peak only)

Duplication was also provided on Super's service (17) between Southend and Temple Sutton from 13 December 1967.

Duplicated timetables were displayed throughout the town and distributed to the public. Eleven Monday to Saturday and one Sunday edition were necessary as the timetables were increased in accordance with the availability of vehicles and staff. The emergency timetables generally worked well and relief buses were introduced where delays and overcrowding took place. Attempts to prevent the special services from operating were to no avail, although the firing of shots at Corporation buses, especially on Canvey Island (Service 3), provided an unusual hazard.



picture This Strachan-bodied Ford R192 was used by Super Coaches on Service 17. It was pictured at Temple Sutton on 12 November 1967.
Paul Bateson.

This story concludes in the next issue.

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Another of my memories is that I regularly drove Service 3 to and from Canvey, ensuring that I picked up all waiting passengers. This resulted in a Lowlander full of standing passengers on both decks as I went along Benfleet Road. The Union complained to the Police and in turn I was instructed not to carry standing passengers on the upper deck. The next day I did leave passengers behind as a result. As this bothered me, the following day I seem to recall that I crammed everyone on board but with the polite and jovial instruction, "Please do not stand on the top deck. Sit on someone's knee and be friendly. I want to get you all on board!" As it was still dark on this morning trip, I also made sure the interior lights were switched off each time I passed the Police Station! This seemed to work. Leaving Canvey, I caught the school traffic and I actually carried over 100 school children by the time I reached Canvey, Haystack. With no power steering, it was quite an effort making turns!

After a few days of the strike special cards were displayed on hired vehicles showing the service number and terminals. These were yellow with black lettering. Until the strike, it was considered that normal high-bridge buses could not be safely operated under the High Street railway bridge in Southend. In the turmoil, a Broadway RT was allocated to service 29 and almost immediately Super Coaches commenced operating ex-London Transport double-deckers under the bridge.



picture The Thatched House Group provided VDY 466, a Duple Firefly-bodied Bedford. It was seen boarding passengers at the London Road (South) bus stop in Southend on 29 November 1967. **Paul Bateson.**

The following operators provided vehicles for stage work:

Brightways, Southend. This operator had recently taken over the business of Caten and owned three coaches. It generally provided two coaches. (8.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Broadway, Wickford provided its three ex-London Transport double-deckers. An RT (brown and cream), RTL (ex-London red) and RTW (brown and cream). A coach was also operated on the first day. (7.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Button, Hadleigh (Daws Heath) was a one coach operator. (14.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Cook, Leigh-on-Sea (Highways) was another one-coach operator. (10.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Dover, Brentwood (Midas) usually operated an ex-Silver Star Leyland Atlantean in red livery on Service 3 and two coaches, one regularly on Service 23. (7.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Essex Coachways, Stratford provided two coaches reinforced on Saturdays by an ex-Wilts and Dorset Bristol KS still in red livery. (8.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Kirby, Rayleigh operated up to four coaches. (16.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Leighton, Barking and Ellis, Barking (Thatched House Group) provided eight coaches, six of which operated regularly on Service 3 and two on Service 8. Occasionally vehicles were sub-hired from other east London coach operators. (22.11.67 – 16.12.67).



picture Former Tyneside GTY 170 is shown on the forecourt at Southend, Central Station on 25 November 1967. That's Malcolm Morgan, SCT Traffic Clerk, alighting after a spell as a Conductor. **Paul Bateson.**

Parsons, Wood Green (A.1) generally provided one coach. (11.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Pathfinder, Chadwell Heath supplied two coaches, regularly used on Service 6A. (27.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Reliance, South Benfleet generally provided one of its coaches. (7.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Snow, Great Wakering (Cheldon) provided one coach on the first day only. (7.11.67).

Super, Upminster generally concentrated on its own service (17) but appeared on Service 23 on the first day. (7.11.67).

Thorn, Rayleigh generally operated three coaches, one sub-hired from Stock, Hockley (Rayleigh Grey). (14.11.67 – 16.12.67).

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Wells, Hatfield Peverel provided two double-deckers on Saturdays, an ex-Aldershot and District Dennis Lance and an ex-Tyneside Leyland PD2, both in original livery. It also provided coaches on occasions. (25.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Weston, Wickford generally provided one of its two coaches but on occasions both. (22.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Westways, Maldon was a vehicle dealer that appeared to commence operation in order to provide Southend Corporation with an ex-Eastern Counties Bristol K which operated on Service 4B. Later a front-entrance AEC Regent III, ex-Creamline, Borden came on the scene. (20.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Whitwell, Southend provided its two coaches, but generally only one. (9.11.67 – 16.12.67).

Young, Newbury Park (Redbridge) provided one coach but ceased operation before the termination of the strike. (8.11.67 – 2.12.67).

During the strike school contracts were generally sub-contracted to Channel Airways, Southend; Cook, Westcliff; Supreme, Hadleigh and Broadway, Wickford.

Gilbert, Stanford-le-Hope (Avro) replaced Victoria, Leigh-on-Sea on a school contract when this operator gave these up in favour of Royal Mail work sub-contracted by Eastern National. Gilbert operated on stage work on one evening only. (12.12.67).

The strike came to an end on Saturday 16 December 1967 and normal services resumed on Sunday 17 December 1967. My seven weeks out on the road came to an end and I had to resume my regular duties in the Traffic Office.



Kirby, Rayleigh operated 5710 WX, a Plaxton Embassy-bodied Ford Thames. It was pictured on layover at the SCT garage on London Road on 9 December 2017. **Paul Bateson.**

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