

Some thoughts on scheduling

From Alan M Watkins

I think there is considerable interest in vehicle scheduling and, in practical terms, how things worked. I suspect, sadly, that a great deal of this information has been lost forever as I doubt even the companies involved retained the information once they had drawn up new versions, for example when routes/timetables changed. I've got all the Premier Travel vehicle schedules although these changed very frequently and were amended each day by "Daily Orders" and that was only a small company with just over 50 vehicles.

I can tell you now, having also worked for them, that no one would be able to work out the vehicle scheduling for Lincolnshire Road Car. If you take the long trunk route 103 Lincoln-Scunthorpe as but one example: no one would know that Gainsborough depot worked one a.m. down journey from Lincoln to Scunthorpe and made its way back to Gainsborough via a run to Doncaster in between.

MacBrayne had a fairly straightforward timetable on the face of it but it didn't always work like that. As but an example there most of the Uist services included a school contract and there were Sunday Church Service routes involving three vehicles which did not appear in timetables beyond about 1955.

The Glasgow vehicle on the duty Glasgow-Ardriashaig and return then switched to a service which never EVER appeared in any MacBrayne timetable - it worked the service to the Quay where the Belfast liners departed (in the summer a two or three vehicle job). This was a licensed stage carriage service with fare of 6d/3d in my time but it was only advertised by the Steamer companies and never by MacBrayne. The vehicles carried a window sticker BELFAST STEAMER.

I have the Premier records because they were thrown away (into a loft) and, as previously posted, I cleared the loft. I do however have literally thousands of the sheets Premier drivers had to fill in to detail the journeys they had performed (this is quite distinct from the conductors' waybills which I also have in their thousands). The driver had to record the mileage - the conductor did not.

When you were OMO - or D/C (Drive/Conduct as Premier Travel called it) you had to fill in both the Drivers sheet and the Conducting Waybill. Drivers also had a "fault" sheet which they had to hand in - I've some of those and a few are hilarious.

One reads: "Are you ever going to try and fix this bloody windscreen wiper" and another says: "Handbrake still doesn't work properly."

Some Premier crew duties dissolved mid-duty - with the crew driver taking over a Bedford to drive/conduct and the conductor doing something entirely different. There was one duplicate duty out of Chrishall on Saturday in which the double decker left dead with just the driver and the Duty Card note: "Pick up Miss Cutter (his conductor for the rest of the day) at Hinxton AA Box). Miss Cutter would be waiting patiently with her conductor's box at the roadside.....lovely lady whose Mum ran the village Post Office and a valued part-timer usually Wednesdays and Saturdays.

In quiet moments she enthusiastically carried on with her knitting and, like several other ladies, could have an intelligent conversation with you while knitting one, purling one and dropping one. Okay, I was young and easily impressed but I can't do that.

On many routes where parcels/goods were significant MacBrayne drivers/crews also carried a MacBrayne freight waybill because some of those deliveries - cash to banks in a strongbox for example - required a signature and sometimes a parcel or goods sent, for example, from Skye to Argyllshire was delivered not by a MacBrayne lorry but by a MacBrayne bus and obviously there had to be paper "tracking" of this.

As also previously posted MacBrayne neither had "Duties" nor "Duty Schedules." They only had "Routes".

This varied from day to day: the same journey each day could have a different "Route" number throughout the week as it was allocated by vehicle rather than service. So if MacBrayne had four out on private hire and one on a school contract before your departure you became Route 6. If the next day they only had two out before you the same journey became Route 3. The departure time of the vehicle determined the "Route" number.

What you did was contained on a card with no number marked ARGYLL ROUTE, or FORT WILLIAM ROUTE, or ACHNACARRY ROUTE.

In all cases, as with Premier Travel, you had to look at the Daily Orders to see, in their case, whether the official "Duty" had varied. The equivalent of railway crew being required to read the "Daily Notices" before setting off from the engine shed and exactly the same really.

In the height of the season MacBrayne had two buses from Campbeltown on a Saturday morning into Glasgow leaving at 7 a.m. This was in the timetable showing partly limited stop and marked JAS - July August September only. If the Friday night down journey to Campbeltown required a duplicate then the Glasgow duplicate crew overnighted in Campbeltown and worked back the next morning. If there was not sufficient to justify a duplicate to Campbeltown the night before then the 7 a.m. additional departure fell either to Ardrishaig who would set off light at about 5 a.m. something or, very occasionally, to Oban who would set off at 3 a.m. something.

For many years Premier Travel had a somewhat random service in the early hours of Monday morning - Express Service 33 leaving Cambridge Railway Station at 1 a.m for Oakington Aerodrome (Awaits arrival of train. Only RAF personnel arriving by rail may be carried on this service). This was a double deck job and was normally the lot of Sunday PT Duty 6 at Chrishall whose crew signed on at 1.10 p.m. and went dead to Barrington to start off Service 2 Cambridge-Royston. Their last stage run of Sunday was the 10.30 p.m Cambridge to Barrington. They then doubled back dead/light to Cambridge to await the train. (Pop into Drummer Street for a bacon roll from the bloke in the caravan on the way was good). This was a double run as if there was an overspill you doubled back to it again. If that happened you got back at Chrishall at not far short of 3 a.m. but after 10 p.m. you were on time and a half. There was no pre booking on this Express Service - it was a ticket job. One single fare only.

Talking about terminology as we are, the licence restriction "Only RAF personnel arriving by rail may be carried on this service" was, I think, more in the spirit of the thing than anything else. While most of them DID arrive back from Weekend Leave by rail this service was regularly hijacked by RAF lads who had NOT been on Weekend Leave but had simply been out on the lash in Cambridge on a Sunday night and had late night transport back home. I suppose I should have asked them if they had arrived by rail but I didn't and just rang off the ticket.

I digress as ever.