

“All in a Day’s Work” Deregulation at Hadleigh Depot Paul Harvey

Paul was the Depot Controller at EN’s Hadleigh depot at the start of bus deregulation. Here he recalls some experiences from 40 years ago.

I joined Eastern National Southend (SD) depot on 13 August 1974 as Senior Travel Clerk until summer 1977, when I transferred to a Depot Management training scheme under the watchful eye of the current District Traffic Superintendent at the time. This involved learning traffic detail, operations, cashiers, audit and wages. In 1978 I was transferred to Hadleigh (HH) depot to cover the Traffic Detail Clerk’s role for holidays and upon his retirement gained the position on a permanent basis. I was then promoted to Senior Traffic Clerk in 1983 when the current holder secured the Traffic Superintendent role at Maldon.

During the summer of 1985 the company was divided into 6 operating districts with appointment of 6 new District Managers to focus on local activities. SD & HH depots became part of the Southend & District area under new District Manager Maurice Jordan, in readiness for deregulation on 26 October 1986 supported by a Planning & Schedules Officer.

Each depot had a Traffic Superintendent, where the company decided to rename these positions to Depot Controller from 1 October 1985 as part of the organisational review. These positions were advertised and I duly applied. I was interviewed and successfully appointed to the position of Depot Controller Hadleigh depot. A review of office/supervisor positions was undertaken.

Upon appointment I was involved in a number of planning meetings on the services which the district would operate from deregulation. The 400 & 402 (Southend to London) services were at threat of being cancelled but the management team including me managed to persuade the District Manager to keep the services going. Overall 80% of bus services for the company were registered from 26 October 1986 until the first change date of 26 January 1987.

Eastern National introduced new liveries for vehicles during summer 1986 in preparation for privatisation. The old HH travel office was relaunched as the Bus Shop during October 1986. The company was purchased by its management team from NBC in December 1986.

SD & HH depot services were part of the Southend & District coordination area which ceased on 26 October 1986 after 30 years. Only the Southend & District Travelcard remained, though not accepted on ECC tendered journeys. Bus services were split between Eastern National and Southend Transport on a formal agreement ready for deregulation. Southend Transport kept service 3A (Southend to Canvey). The profitable service 3 (Shoeburyness to Canvey) remained with Eastern National upon deregulation, the SD vehicle line and Southend Transport vehicle line all transferred to HH.

Most services were registered, with lightly used evenings and Sundays cancelled. These services and journeys were tendered by Essex County Council. For example affecting HH depot, Castle Point Bus Co secured service 5A, three Sunday morning journeys from Benfleet to Canvey Eastern Esplanade, and the Wed & Sun service 404 from Canvey to Rochford Station serving Southend Hospital.

Right: Castle Point MDW 388G, an ex-Newport CT Atlantean/Alexander, on the Sunday 404 in Rochford East Street on D-Day.
Richard Delahoy



UMBH secured the weekday evening and Sunday 24 service between Southend & Thundersley. New EN services were registered as X15 (Canvey to Romford) operating Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays using 1118 Leyland Tiger Alexander from HH, and X51 (Southend to London Oxford Circus) from SD. Other long-distance services 251, 400 & 402 remained with timetable adjustments.

As always, duty card content was actively reviewed by Trade Union representatives before posting for the road staff. A smooth changeover was experienced on D Day, with most drivers continuing to report for duty without any real concern. Some drivers were more knowledgeable on the change of operating environment than others. Printed timetable leaflets were produced for individual services. I put together a service change booklet for the Southend, Hadleigh & Canvey areas outlining all the service changes for our staff and passengers. A new timetable booklet titled "Canvey Connections" was printed dated 26th October 1986. At this time HH was experiencing competition from Castle Point Bus Co who were operating 4 M-F peak time routes between Canvey Island and Benfleet Station. An inspector was rostered to supervise EN operations during M-F late afternoon/early evening at Benfleet Station.

The second stage of deregulation was 26th January 1987 where bus operators could register changes to those services that were introduced on 26th October 1986. Eastern National was no different, where changes were registered affecting SD & HH depots. The operating Districts were reduced to 4, merging Southend, Hadleigh and Brentwood into one District. Later the District was renamed South Essex which included Basildon. Simien Coaches registered a new service from Benfleet Station to Canvey Island using step entrance coaches, a fixed timetable was registered but not always adhered to. Smaller operators as well as EN and Southend Transport were securing Essex County Council tendered services in the area.



Edition 2 of the "Canvey Connections" timetable booklet was printed, dated 29th March 1987 which included new Canvey Circulares 26A/26B which didn't last that long. The cover photograph of this booklet (left) involved arranging for a Network SouthEast train, running out of service from the Shoeburyness depot, stopping just before Benfleet Station. A Leyland National was parked on the road bridge while Essex Police stopped the traffic. We had a very small window opening to get everything staged and photographed before regular timetabled trains were due.

[The Editor adds: I always thought that was a lucky shot with no traffic in the way, it had not occurred to me that it was a set up! But looking closely, I can see the Police holding the traffic back. Now we know the truth . . .]

Also printed was a timetable booklet titled "London Road Buses".

On the 28th June 1987 Southend London Road/Victoria Bus Station closed, where the bus operations were transferred to the new SD depot at the original Prittlewell Works and Coach depot. The small coach unit was transferred to HH depot as there was insufficient space at the new SD depot.

On 6th September 1987 HH introduced new service 26 operating Mon to Fri between Canvey and Rayleigh via Thundersley. It's interesting to note that First Essex have changed today's service 27 from Canvey to Southend to operate to Rayleigh & Hullbridge from 31st May 2026 partly in the footsteps of the 26.

While I was at HH depot over the many years I developed the private hire panel of drivers to undertake private hires and support to the Coaching unit providing second drivers for express services and excursions. We were providing rail replacement buses for Network SouthEast when trains weren't operating. Many Saturdays during the summer one driver would provide a second driver to the Ilfracombe and separate Bournemouth express coach service from Southend. Our Leyland Tiger 1118 was actively allocated with drivers every Saturday on the express service to Great Yarmouth from Southend, operating as part of the National Express network, then the Highwayman network. Private hire vehicles were 1118, 1400 (Lynx), 1928 (National 2), 3085 & 3109 (VRs). We lost 3109 to London and it was replaced with a normal early Leyland National.

On a number of occasions Essex Police hired single deck buses from us at HH to provide transport from Rayleigh Police Station to London where the officers were required to support the Met Police force on policing events. Drivers had free range of which Leyland National they wanted as there were no regulations to adhere to and it was a long day.

I moved on from Eastern National to Basildon Council in September 1989, but competition continued with bus services from HH with many more service changes introduced over the years and still happening today. The staff at the time coped well with the new way of working, though Benfleet Station with four operators providing registered bus services, especially late afternoon peak time, caused concern at times. HH even managed to provide duplicate journeys on services to the Island where gaps occurred in the timetables, thus ensuring waiting passengers didn't use other operators' services.

Right: The ugly face of deregulation. Paul mentions the peak hours competition across Canvey to Benfleet Station. Here is TOE 438N of Castle Point Bus Co, an MCW bodied Bristol VRT new to West Midlands PTE, but latterly with NBC company National Welsh. It remains largely in faded poppy red, with fleetnames and advertising crudely disfigured. Seen at Benfleet station on arrival from Canvey on the first morning of the service. They ran 4 different routes across Canvey. Simien Coaches were also later to run a similar service.



Below: Southend coach operator UMBH (Upson Minibus Hire) won the Essex contract for Sunday services 10 & 12 to Canewdon, Wallasea and Paglesham, as well as the 24 referred to above. In another shot in East Street, Rochford on D-Day itself, Ford R1114/Duple coach OMJ 792M displays a handwritten "blind" in the windscreen on its way from Wallasea to Southend. Our *Southend Busman* extra newssheet of the time recorded that UMBH subcontracted the operation of 10/12 to Southend Radio Cars with an 8-seater C623 HJN from November 23, without the County Council's permission. Their operation on 10, 12 and 24 was very short lived! Both **Richard Delahoy**.

