

“Southend Transport”

- the legal entity and its ownership

The Southend Corporation Transport undertaking was a department (the Passenger Transport Undertaking) of the County Borough of Southend-on-Sea (from 1974, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council), managed by the Transport General Manager and reporting to the Council's Town Clerk, under the scrutiny of the elected Council members through the Transportation sub-committee. Under the provisions of the 1985 Transport Act, the business was established as a separate company, Southend Transport Ltd, 100% owned by the Council but managed at arm's length and no longer directly answerable to the elected members. On October 26th 1986 the company acquired the assets & liabilities and operations of the Passenger Transport Undertaking and commenced trading. At this stage it was wholly owned by Southend-on-Sea Borough Council.

The company was put up for sale early in 1993 and on 24 June 1993 the Council sold its shareholding in the company to Branksome 169 Ltd, an off the shelf company owned by four individuals (David Martin, Richard Stanley, Dawson Williams and Gordon Watt) connected with the emerging British Bus “group”. Branksome 169 Ltd also went on to acquire Colchester Borough Transport in November that year. The price paid for Southend was not published; however Branksome's accounts show a total of £1,006,000 paid for both Southend and Colchester and it is known that Colchester was sold for a nominal £1, so Southend Council did generate just over £1m from the sale, plus repayment of the outstanding loans.

On 21 February 1994, ownership of Branksome 169 Ltd passed to Broomco (728) Ltd (later to be renamed Londonlinks Buses Ltd on 6/12/94), this latter company being owned by four Channel Islands based investment companies, apparently also connected with the British Bus “group”. On May 5, 1994, ownership of Broomco (728) Ltd then passed to British Bus Group Ltd and ST formally became part of that group.

The subsequent changes of ownership within the Group are complicated and not particularly relevant, but on August 1st 1996 British Bus Group Ltd was in turn acquired directly by Cowie Group plc, which then changed its name to Arriva plc on November 6th 1997.

Southend Transport was placed under the management control of various parts of the British Bus/Cowie/Arriva group, including management from Reigate by London & Country, then by Leaside Buses Ltd c. June 1997 (exercised through County Bus & Coach Co Ltd at Harlow); from 1/8/98, control was transferred from Leaside Travel (by then renamed as Arriva London North) to Arriva The Shires Ltd (still exercised through County Bus - by now named Arriva East Herts & Essex) and finally, from November 23, 2001, control moved to Arriva Southern Counties Ltd at Maidstone, where it remains at the time of writing [March 2025], currently trading through Arriva Kent Thameside Ltd.

There have continued to be legal, management and O Licence changes over time, but we should note that the legal entity Southend Transport Ltd had its name changed to Arriva Southend Ltd on 2/4/98. A week later, a dormant company, Luton Bus Ltd, was renamed as Southend Transport Ltd, to protect rights to the name. However, that company was dissolved on 7/1/03 and thereafter Arriva had no claim on the “Southend Transport” name. Similarly, Arriva Southend Ltd was wound up in August 2017.

That's not quite the end however, as a brand-new company named Southend Transport Ltd was registered on 7/10/03 by a third-party, to protect rights to the name and the history and tradition that goes with it. A local enthusiast has owned that company since November 2004 but it has never traded and there is no current intention for it to become active.

Notes compiled by Richard Delahoy, 2025.

An extract from his book, X1 Southend to London, the rise and fall of a deregulation phenomenon