

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ADVERTISING ON LONDON TRANSPORT

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Introduction

The huge number of vehicles and vast daily traffic of London Transport has offered massive advertising potential for over a hundred years. In particular, the Underground has a unique, enclosed but very busy surroundings in which the advertisements dominate, and act as an ever changing backdrop to the daily journey.

The purpose of this little monograph is to say something of the historical background to today's advertising environment and how it has developed, together with a survey of the organizational arrangements within which it has sat, and the management structure which has developed the medium.

Advertising and Transport

The origin of the modern railway goes back to 1830 when the Liverpool and Manchester Railway opened. Within fifteen years a railway-building mania was in progress and within a further fifteen years the backbone of our present day railway network was largely complete. In spite of the enthusiasm for railway construction, and the constant flow of new funds from eager investors, it became obvious that the return on investment generated solely from the carriage of goods and passenger traffic was not overly generous, and railways were thus encouraged to exploit their assets harder, if necessary by developing new sources of income to supplement their main area of business. An obvious opportunity was



Reverse of 1898 Metropolitan Railway Ticket

the letting of surplus space to third parties for shops and stalls, and the wall space for advertising purposes—both generated useful income and, arguably, provided new facilities for passengers.

The Early Underground

The early railways of the formative London Underground soon recognised the value of commercial advertising income; both the original steam operated lines were soon to employ advertising contractors. The Metropolitan Railway (opened in 1863) awarded an advertising and bookstall concession to James Willing, who retained the concession until 1907 when it passed to W.H. Smith; it might be noted that at that time Smiths paid to the railway no



This turn of the Century picture of Charing Cross (now Embankment) clearly shows the diversity of advertising sizes and formats in use.

less than 75 per cent of the advertising receipts. Willing subsequently held a concession to advertise on the Metropolitan's tickets and intriguingly had rights to advertise on sites *between* stations.

On the Metropolitan District Railway (opened in 1868 and generally called the "District") a similar theme was followed. For many years the Partington Advertising Agency were sole concessionaires for District Railway advertising, both by means of posters and in the District's publicity ; this agency had purpose-built offices above Temple station, as well as in Paris. Instructions issued by the District in the 1880s indicate that their staff were allowed to travel free on the District, together with reasonable billposting accoutrements, although these had to go in the brake van ; it was carefully explained that anything not intended for use at the District's stations themselves would have to be paid for at the commercial rate.

Willing's interest in ticket advertising evidently waned quickly ; the Metropolitan Railway, together with advertising agents S. Davis & Co of St Swithin's Lane, experimented with a revival of this medium in 1915, together with some imaginative double-royal

posters drawn by John Hassall RA which drew attention to the existence of this advertising opportunity. This, too, seems not to have been overly successful. Ticket advertising then disappeared until the 1990s when it reemerged on a sporadic basis. The logistics of ticket advertising makes it a difficult medium notwithstanding its obvious benefits.

Electrification and the arrival of the deep level tube

The turn-of-the-century arrival of electric tube railways created a new mood—and new opportunities. Unlike the older steam-hauled lines the new tubes ran in single-bore tunnels presenting a wonderful advertising opportunity opposite the platforms on the trackside walls. The innovative City & South London Railway (opened in 1890) was undoubtedly carrying some commercial advertising by 1895 and possibly earlier, and cross-track advertising was very much in evidence by 1899. London's second tube line, the Central London Railway, was certainly carrying such advertising very shortly after opening in 1900, as photographs clearly show. The cross-track advertising comprised a surprisingly wide range and untidy assortment of sizes, including 16-sheet, and another large size of similar area but

square, together with some smaller sizes ; platform wall adverts seem to have come along a little later. A photograph of Liverpool Street of around 1914 shows an even more remarkable cross-track display showing two lines of adverts, the top reaching well up into the crown of the roof.

It was the various lines of the Underground combine (the Underground Electric



Cross-track advertising at this just-opened Central London Railway tube station clearly dominates. The assortment of sizes suggests a desire to accommodate advertisers as much as possible.

Railways Company of London Ltd) which were to really influence events—this company owned the three tube lines which opened between 1906 and 1908 (later to be known as the Bakerloo, Piccadilly and Northern Lines) and from January 1913 took over the City & South London and the Central London Railways, already mentioned.

Initially there appears to have been no commercial advertising on these three lines, although a small quantity of the company's own publicity was posted, perhaps by local staff, on station exteriors and a minimum number of other sites. The new tubes (all American owned) prided themselves on their orderly appearance. However, it is known that from 16th July 1907 commercial cross-track billposting began at Edgware Road (Bakerloo) station ; instructions were published at the time requiring the train which stabled there overnight to be put elsewhere to give access to the walls. By implication cross-track billposting was now undertaken on the whole of the Bakerloo Line from around the same time. This advertising was evidently managed on a concession basis by Messrs Wyman's, who also held the bookstall concession on that Line. Messrs Partingtons undertook cross-track advertising posting on the Piccadilly Line from October 1907, and Messrs Willings on the Charing Cross, Euston and Hampstead Line from November 1907 (though Smiths, also in the billposting business, already held the

bookstall concessions on these two lines). In summary, then, by the end of 1907 virtually the entire Underground system was exploiting its commercial advertising opportunity.

In December 1907 stationmasters were sent brushes, buckets and paste, together with instructions making it clear that they were expected to use station staff to paste 'traffic' bills (those were non-commercial posters generally promoting their own company's facilities). An advertising department was in evidence at Westminster Bridge Road station (now Lambeth North), and bills and posting instructions were despatched from there. In January 1908 the three UERL Lines began accepting 'traffic' bills from a multiplicity of other railways, and sites had to be found, mainly in the lift access passages. Platform posting was avoided except for the company's own bills, but sites nearer than twelve feet to the tiled station name panels were prohibited areas. The billstore also provided black blocking paper. There was clearly some external enterprise at play at this time for in February 1907 procedures were tightened in the face of a spate of 'fly billposting' which had occurred. There is also evidence of (probably commercial) advertisements being placed in glass frames in the lifts by January 1908, though who fixed them is unknown.

In March 1908 the billstore was moved to Piccadilly Circus. Instructions stated that the new billstore handled

Strand Station around 1930 showing the 16-sheet cross-track and smaller format platform wall posters.



general bills and foreign bills, but not station-related bills which were stored at stations after being logged in at the billstore. Although there is no reference to commercial materials (presumably these were all handled by the contractors), an organization now clearly existed which could handle such material as and when the need arose.

Development of advertising on the Underground

Commercial advertising on the UERL tubes had clearly developed rapidly by the time of the first World War. Advertising had not only sprung up on the platforms (predominantly in double-crown format, and multiples thereof) but new stations opened at around that time even had advertising locations built into the tilework—a feature generally continued thereafter. Nevertheless, platform advertising did not follow the immensely cluttered style of the Victorian railway poster displays and used a more ordered simplicity. In the years following electrification of the Underground's sub-surface steam operated lines in 1905 a degree of order was gradually imposed on the platform advertising arrangements, though this was not completed until the 1930s.

The exact dates following which adverts appeared in any numbers on UERL tube platforms (as opposed to the cross-track sites) has not been possible to establish; nor is it known definitely who would have sold the space. Logic suggests the poster contractors would have been best placed to sell platform space alongside cross-track. There is slight evidence of contractors doing platform bill-posting too, at least until the early 1920s.

However, by 1925 the UERL (which by then owned all the deep tube lines and the District, but not the Metropolitan) was definitely both selling and fixing all space itself. A 1925 ratecard states: *As a force in the development of Business, the Advertising*

Department of London's Underground stands unique. The whole of the Advertising is now under the direct control of the Companies, whose single aim is to give service. This strongly hints that until not long previously other parties also sold space and managed sites. The Commercial Advertising Department had established offices at Cranbourn Chambers, above Leicester Square station, and had evidently joined the staff of the Traffic Advertising Agent, who had been there at least since 1921.

The billstore for traffic bills had at some point prior to 1920 moved from Piccadilly Circus to Charing Cross (now Embankment) on the District Line. There was a so-called Boardstore at Whitechapel, where it appears that (amongst other things) advertisement boards and hoardings were kept. This too dates back to at least 1920 although it was closed in 1928 when the materials were moved to Charing Cross. By the late 1920s it was confirmed that it was the duty of station staff to post all 'traffic' bills (and bills for so-called foreign railways) while the commercial advertising staff posted all commercial bills. Reference was made to the existence of a billstore at Aldwych which it appears was not used for traffic bills; possibly this was the commercial advertising store, leaving the Charing Cross bill store for traffic posters only.


All this required dedicated staff. In 1928 there were five supervisory grades of publicity staff on the railways, and four 'wages' grades (Advertisement Hand, Bill Poster, Bill Poster Driver and Charge Hand Bill Poster). The lowest grade (Advertisement Hand) was paid an hourly rate of one shilling and twopence halfpenny for a 48 hour week, or £2.88 a week. The highest grade (Bill Poster Driver) was paid 64 shillings a week, or £3.20. The highest grade of supervisor (Head Office Inspector 1) was paid after several years service 138 shillings and sixpence a week, or £6.90 a week. In addition

Examples of the promotion of the Underground poster opportunities from a 1928 Ratecard

**CAR PANELS
OVER THE WINDOWS**

SIZE 24" x 11"	PRICE 30/- to 40/- each per annum
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EVERY PASSENGER ENTERS A CAR
TRAVELLING TIME IS THINKING TIME




**1,500,000
DAILY**

**16 SHEET POSTERS
FACING PLATFORMS
ON THE NEW EXTENSION LINES**

SIZE 80" x 120"	PRICE £18 to £24 per annum
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NEW SITES IN NEW DISTRICTS
—ATTRACTING THE NEW BUYERS



**1,500,000
DAILY**

there were some junior staff (under 21) who were paid substantially less. These rates of pay bear broad comparison with operating staff such as porters and guards (for wages staff) and station foreman and the less senior station inspectors in the case of Head Office Inspectors. Head Office Inspectors wore a uniform consisting of a full suit, cap and extra pair of trousers (all supplied annually), with an overcoat every two years and Mackintosh and leggings every three years. Advertisement Hands received a jacket, a vest, two pairs trousers, a cap and two suits of overalls each year, and an overcoat every two years.

It is instructive by comparison to look at how things were going on other railways in the late 1920s. By that time the main line railways were increasingly losing confidence in the abilities of the poster contractors, and one by one they were managing the commercial advertis-

ing themselves (in that respect the Underground Group were just following the same line). One reason was that the contractors had a tendency to offer over-generous tenders in order to gain the business, then fail to live up to expectations later ; this problem also afflicted the bookstall business, perhaps because the main players (including Smiths and Wymans) were each involved heavily in both. On the other hand it is said that the railways' view of advertising and advertising contractors was steeped in prejudice and ignorance, with quite unrealistic expectations being made.

The London underground railways seem to have been a little more enlightened and it is interesting to look at the relationship between the Metropolitan Railway and their contractor (Smiths). The Met was not infrequently concerned that advertising takings could

be better, but usually accepted the explanations given with good grace. In 1926, for example, just such a probe was made and the answer was received that it was a combination of factors dominated by a depressed economy ; it was the year of the general strike, and that of course had adversely affected railway traffic too, reducing advertising values. A large advertiser (*Nestle's*) had withdrawn from Met stations after refusing a substantial rate increase from previously over-favourable rates entered into by Smith's predecessors—interestingly it seems it was the Met itself which had objected to Smiths continuing an advantageous rate in order to retain *Nestle's* custom (throwing some light upon the way the Smiths contract was managed). In addition it seems that advertisers were slowly but relentlessly abandoning the railway station in favour of roadside hoardings. The age of the motor car was dawning and this would affect the placing of advertising profoundly. Specifically, it seemed the Met was becoming an uncompetitive advertising location by comparison with alternative sites, the poor lighting on the dingy Inner Circle stations being cited as a specific example, with persistent overcrowding not helping.

Tellingly, a report done by Smiths shortly afterwards observed that advertising on the Met had more endemic problems. In particular it consisted of *'many shapes and sizes of poster and iron plates displayed in an indiscriminate jumble'*, and were often ill-designed—especially badly lit—for advertisers. It was noted that Smiths advertising contracts were made on a national basis which was not tailored to the particular demands of Underground stations ; the jumble of non-standard sizes cannot have helped at all. Perhaps the Met were right to be suspicious of Smiths abilities. However the Met itself was not faultless. Smiths were making proposals for change, but *'Any proposals they might make for improvements, however small, had run the*

gauntlet of a railway bureaucracy which had to pass and sanction them'; Smiths accordingly regarded themselves poorly remunerated for the effort required (all this, of course, could equally apply today, and has probably ever been thus!).

But neither was Smiths exactly on the ball. Smiths 'canvassers'—they would have been called 'salesmen' today—were paid on a commission basis and this resulted in effort going into the larger advertising contracts, that tended to involve national coverage. The Met's contribution ended up merely adding value to these larger campaigns and there was little incentive to push the Met's strengths on their own, much to the Met's irritation. This structure (which must have been only too evident to the management of all the railways) reflected a time when competition was less intense, and was perhaps in need of overhaul.

By accident of history the Met found itself responsible for advertising sales on the Hammersmith & City Railway, and were doing satisfactorily without any sales contractor ; Smiths realized that their services to the Met were not indispensable. They also noted that railway advertising was not a major part of the Smiths business, and there was little management effort expended to raise its profile. The conclusion was inescapably that the Met would be better off handling its own advertising ; that it did not do so until after it had been absorbed by London Transport was simply because the contract still had time to run and both parties tried to make it work in the meantime (with partial success). The lessons are interesting and have equal application today to any contractor with long term aspirations. Do not ignore the client and his concerns. If the client has a unique offering to make, do not simply lump it in with national contracts. If a specialist business is run, make sure it is not suffocated within a vast corporate

framework which cannot give it the support it needs to develop and keep up.

The Underground Poster

The majority of the commercial advertising on the Underground during the 1920s and 1930s was based on a paper size called ‘crown’, which was 15 inches by 20 inches. Lift and escalator panels were actually slightly larger than crown, which may have allowed for their being fixed into frames which would have required an edge margin. However the smallest poster size actually used was the double-crown, or 30” by 20”, portrait format. These typically occupied¹ platforms and corridors in blocks two rows high, and for neatness they were pasted onto black backing paper which defined the overall billposting area. Sometimes advertisers (often cinemas) preferred a larger size and the quad-crown (30” x 40”, landscape) was used, and these would be pasted across a pair of adjacent double-crown sites.

At some point around the First World War² cross-track billposting developed on a large scale and the format was standardized at a size called 16-sheet—this represented an area 16 times that of a double-crown and hence were 120” (10ft) high, and 80” (6ft 8ins) wide. Since that size was unmanageable, either to print or fix, the posters were divided into four 4-sheet portions, which the bill poster had to post with some care to avoid unsightly joins, a particularly challenging task at certain stations which had curved surfaces with uneven tiling beneath, and bearing in mind the paper shrinks as it dries.

The ‘captive’ audience on escalators or in lifts generated the lift (or, later, the escalator panel)³, which medium emerged generally around the time of the first world war, although the Central

London Railway may have had them from the start. These were an odd size of 16½” x 22½” and went in glass fronted frames. At first the escalator frames were angled to face oncoming traffic, but from the 1930s when escalators increasingly became reversible the frames were mounted flush (although on the Morden extension, opened in 1926, escalator panels were mounted on raised plinths of triangular section, so that alternate panels were angled either towards or away from passengers).

Advertising and Road Services

The first recognised omnibus (or bus) service in London was run in 1829 and proved immediately popular. Over the coming decades bus services burgeoned all over London, for many years run mostly by small operators. The London General Omnibus Company (the ‘General’, initially a French company) began operations in London in 1856 and slowly came to dominate the scene. In 1912 it was taken over by the Underground Group of companies, and its services were co-ordinated with the Underground railways.

The early buses were essentially small single-deck horse drawn vehicles, and third party advertising was unusual, the bus operator wanting to display his own brand as prominently as he could, together with route information. However, the economics were improved by taking passengers on the roof—initially they had to climb up but on later vehicles a primitive stairway was installed at the rear. Most buses around the middle of the nineteenth century had a central bench on the top deck dividing it into two, and passengers sat looking over the sides of the bus, across a safety rail. When it was discovered that women could not be prevented from venturing onto the top deck it was felt that a ‘modesty board’ was required to fill in the space under the safety rail and prevent over-exciting

¹ When did they start. Seen W’loo Jan 1923

² When did they start. Earliest seen W’loo Jan 1923

³ Escalator seen Paddington 1925

passing pedestrians ; these were fitted in the 1860s. It was this modesty board that offered the first serious opportunity for commercial advertising, and thus was born the first 'bus sides'. It is apparent from a contemporary painting of the 1890s that some interior advertising was also carried on the lower deck roof.

Later horse buses, and the first thirty years worth of motor buses, remained open top, but as vehicles got larger the advertising opportunities expanded too. From around 1904 to 1910 there were many types of motor bus in use, but early photos show much evidence of the ubiquitous 'double front' advertising displays on those vehicles which supported this format (many horse buses also carried 'double fronts' in latter days). An early photograph of a General vehicle sports a 'bus side' reading *For Advertising Spaces on these omnibuses Apply to the Secretary of the Company at 6 Finsbury Square E.C.* suggesting that in early days (at least) the General sold its own commercial advertising displays.

A form of advertising which lasted until enclosed staircases became standard after the 1939-45 war was the 'stair banner' which followed the curved and sharply angled rear staircase. Less successful forms included what has been described as window transparencies, which occupied the lower deck top-lights of a number of vehicles ; it is apparent from photographs that some of these were paper slips, possibly posted inside and out and a possible precursor to modern interior bus panels.

Trams began to emerge in London in large numbers from the 1880s, and these horse-drawn vehicles were not unlike the contemporary buses, though generally the fact of moving on rails meant they could be larger. It appears that tramway advertising (including advertising on modesty boards) closely echoed that on buses. Electrification of tramways from the early years on the twentieth century appears to have

produced little change in the advertising, but the emergence of larger vehicles from around 1912 produced greater possibilities and a number of new formats are evident, notably on the curved upper panels around the curved vehicle ends (four per vehicle).

From around 1924 both the trams and the motor buses had their own separate rate cards, no doubt reflecting the different 'audience' each system carried, though they were done in the same style and originated from Underground's commercial advertising officer at Cranbourn Chambers. Intriguingly, one bus rate card seen from this period is in French.

Some features of the 1924 rate cards may be of interest. For example it was stipulated that 'double front' posters (always sold in pairs) could not be printed in black and white as police regulations forbade it—they flanked the black-on-white route boards with which they might be confused (this also applied to the 'lamp space' on the rear). The rear of the back seat was also available for an advertisement, but here enamelled iron signs were still used. Iron signs were also used on the flat ends of some trams. Some bus interior poster sites were odd shapes in order to follow the roof contour, and there was a very wide range of different sizes and shapes across the bus and tram networks.

London Transport

In 1930 the commercial advertising offices moved from Cranbourn Chambers to the Underground's new head office building at 55 Broadway, where space was provided on the Ground floor, East Wing, the area now occupied by shops. This area remained in use by commercial advertising after the formation of the London Passenger Transport Board (London Transport) in 1933, in due course absorbing the commercial advertising functions of the Metropolitan Railway, the London

County Council tramways and numerous small bus companies. At this time it appears that although the commercial advertising

activity was essentially a single business separate commercial advertising officers existed for both Underground and surface transport modes, and their principle activities related to advertising sales. So far as the bill posting itself is concerned it seems to have fallen to the publicity staff to arrange. This is perhaps understandable notwithstanding the bulk of the work being commercial ; the publicity staff had long had an organization in place to manage the storage and distribution of traffic bills and in essence commercial bills were no different. This general arrangement was to last for many years.

London Transport's enlarged commercial advertising department continued to sell advertising space on the former UERL lines, the former 'General' buses, and the former London United and Metropolitan Electric Tramways. Initially the commercial advertising of the Metropolitan Railway and various other bus and tramway concerns remained in the hands of existing commercial advertising contractors, who continued as agents of LT until their contracts expired.

As in earlier ratecards statistics were much in evidence. *London Transport comprises 2000 square miles in which 11,430 railway cars, buses, coaches, trams and trolleybuses run 1,323,000 miles in ever 20 hours to serve a population of 9,500,000 people*, it said. *The Commercial Advertising Service of this new organization offers advertisers of all classes a direct means of addressing 3,463,000,000 passengers a year, or 10,000,000 passengers a day.*

The rate card clearly indicates that not all advertising was yet directly sold and lists the contracting agents as:

*A modified ratecard shows Griffiths & Millington as contracting on the entirety of the former London Country buses and makes no mention of Squire ; it is not clear which of the two cards (if either) is correct as only proofs have been seen.

The principal sites on the Underground (less the Metropolitan Line) were 16-sheet cross track, 5-sheet streamers (150" x 20") on platforms and corridors, a selection of assorted sized car cards, lift & escalator panels, platform double-crowns and a variety of solus sites. Prices were quoted for each format, and in most cases a range was quoted, suggesting the prices varied between stations

The bus sites included the familiar 'double-fronts' and 'double rears', sold in pairs beneath the top deck windows,

Frank H. Mason & Co Ltd	Former LCC, West Ham, Erith and Leyton Tramways
Frost-Smith & Co.	Former East Ham Tramways
Griffiths & Millington Ltd*	Former London General Country Bus Services (Southern services)
Henry Squire & Co*	Former London General Country Bus Services (Northern services)
J.W. Courtney Ltd	Former Croydon and Ilford Tramways
W.H. Smith & Son Ltd	Metropolitan Line

The first London Transport ratecard was produced early in the new regime and closely followed the style of the pre-1933 bus ratecard, suitably expanded. There were numerous photographic displays of the various advertising sites and typography remained in the unusual sans serif type used at the Curwen Press.

both at 23" x 22" but with an alternative double-front size of double-crown. The familiar Bus Sides were available at 12' 6" by 21½" (nearside) and 17' 6" by 21½" (offside). An assortment of rear panels were available depending on type of bus, and 'stair bands' were a prominent offering on

open staircase buses. An assortment of interior adverts was also available, including what was described as the 'mirror space' (of double-crown size, portrait) on a site which was evidently once devoted to a mirror, alongside the staircase housing on the lower deck.

Trolleybuses offered a comparable range, with both side adverts at the 17' 6" length. Rear panels were available, but not 'double-fronts' or 'double-rears', or, apparently, interiors. Trams offered more variety. Tram sides were of the 12' 6" length except on what was described as 'old-type' cars where an odd size of 20' by 20" was used. The rounded ends allowed 'end' panels to be displayed on certain cars which were 66" x 22", which could also be used on the former London United trams as 'corner' panels; 'corner' panels on the former Metropolitan Electric trams were 72" x 20".

The 1939 Rate Card shows some development on the Underground. Firstly the 4-sheet format (60" high by 40" wide) seems to have emerged for use in ticket halls, corridors and platforms, though the 5-sheet 'streamers' were still available. 4-Sheet sites were partly obtained as new sites and partly by conversion from (2x2) blocks of four double crowns. Secondly the display of posters could now be on a general distribution basis, or on a selected basis at a higher cost (and individual sites could be chosen if booking for 6-months or more). Thirdly the contracting agent for the Metropolitan Line had disappeared, and LT managed that Line directly, including the joint lines to Watford and Amersham, the Hammer-smith & City and East London Lines; the former Great Northern & City Line was also still listed amongst the Metropolitan Line stations. The Northern Line was divided (for advertising purposes) into two sections, north and south, the former being the old London Electric Railway portion from Kennington to Edgware and Highgate via

Charing Cross, and the latter the former City & South London Railway portion from Euston to Morden via the Bank; this may reflect something in the way the advertising was managed in former years, or simply be a survival of the need to keep the former two railways' finances separated until 1933.

A brave attempt had been made to portray car card sizes⁴ as fairly standard features and the pictures show 'standard' sizes in the latest trains as either upright (10⁵/₈" x 23¹/₈") or broadside (24" x 11"); inconveniently (it was to prove) the latest Metropolitan and District Line trains of O, P and Q stock perpetuated the door pocket positions of the earlier trains (roughly 19" wide by 26" high, together with miniature frames above these of the same width by around 6" high, and which were to become even less popular). The reality was clearer in the accompanying tables which show no less than 13 different types of varnished car card, many of which were of different, though depressingly similar, sizes (and 9 types were used on the District Line alone!); life in the billstore must have been interesting.

On the road the situation was much as it had been in 1933, but with staircase banners now gone (with the demise of open toppers) and new buses adopting standard positions. The taking over of the former tram contracts revealed a painfully large range of interior positions (taking trams and the buses together), and must have made the job of selling space and managing the bills daunting. Even on new vehicles positions such as bulkhead front centre panels were different on the trolleybuses from the new buses, an inevitable consequence perhaps of the different designs of the vehicle. In the Country area the advertising was still handled by Henry Squire and Griffiths

⁴ When were these first mounted on card and not pasted

& Millington, to whom enquiries were still referred.

A 1938 Rate Card has been seen produced on behalf of the Commercial Advertising Officer for the purpose of securing adverts in LT's various timetables, both bus and rail; sales enquiries are referred to Index Printers, to whom the job had evidently been delegated, though it contains a flyer inviting other enquiries to be referred to LT.

Nationalisation and British Transport

In 1948 Britain's surface transport systems were nationalised, and the British Transport Commission presided over London Transport, the former main line railways, hotels, ports and ships, and had varying levels of interest in a host of provincial bus companies. The day-to-day passenger and goods businesses were devolved to a number of operational executives, the London Transport Executive effectively taking over the LPTB's operations.

The Commission also established a number of central services, including Legal, Police and Property. Another of these services looked after all the Commission's commercial advertising interests. At first the function was simply referred to as the Commercial Advertising Department, and its head office was by happy historical co-incidence soon established at Cranbourn Chambers, above Leicester Square station. In 1960 the service took the somewhat more serviceable name *British Transport Advertising*, and Cranbourn Chambers was renamed Transad House.

BTA looked after the whole of the Commission's varied advertising interests, including those of London Transport. Although the LT space was sold by BTA, LT's Publicity Officer continued to store and fix the commercial bills. The net sales revenue for LT space amounted to over half of BTA's business, and was transferred to LT as advertising income. In 1948 the net

advertising sales of BTA amounted to £2.2 million, of which £1.3 million was attributable to London Transport. By 1962 BTA's net revenue was £2.33 million of which £1.37 million was generated by LT (£771,473 by buses and £600,385 by rail). This disappointing increase in revenue did not auger well: although gross sales had increased by a quarter during this period, costs had more than doubled.

The BTC's ratecard comprised sets of leaflets for the various services on which people might want to advertise, the leaflets being available for ring-binding in a hard folder entitled Media and Rates, which also included some statistical information; London Transport pages featured significantly, with sections devoted to Central Buses, Country Buses and Railways. The individual sections included not only the rates but photographs of various vehicles with the advertising positions highlighted. During this period there was rapid movement towards standardisation of both road and rail vehicle types, with consequential simplification of advertising positions (some of the more obscure of which were just abandoned).

The British Transport Commission was abolished at the end of 1962 and the new London Transport Board took over BTA's interest in selling the advertising for LT bus and rail services. BTA itself retained its mixed transport portfolio (less LT) and was established as a limited company under the umbrella of nominees of the British Railways Board (British Rail) on the one hand, and the Transport Holding Company (later National Bus Company) on the other; it continued to provide services to ports and waterways for a while on an agency basis. BTA established new offices in Newman Street, whilst LT's Commercial Advertising Department remained at Transad House. With the wind-down of the National Bus Company in the mid-1980s, British

Rail decided that BTA should become fully independent, a measure completed in 1987 with a management buy-out. BTA continued to provide services to British Rail and a number of bus companies, but with limited further diversification.

London Transport Advertising

Commercial advertising flourished as a revenue-generating department under the London Transport Board. In 1970 control passed from the government to the Greater London Council, at which time LT's country bus services were transferred (as London Country Bus Services Ltd) to the still new National Bus Company. Although LT briefly continued to sell the commercial advertising control was soon assumed by LCBS and later by BTA, who sold the advertising for the remainder of the NBC group.

Although for many years the department continued to be known as the Commercial Advertising office, to the outside world the new name London Transport Advertising was promoted. Within LT the commercial and traffic advertising store was concentrated at Griffith House in the early 1960s but was transferred to a new central billstore at Chiswick Works in 1968. A few years later a further billstore was opened at Baker Street in Allsop Place. At the same time responsibility for billposting was transferred to the new post of Distribution and Advertising Service Manager (later Distribution Services Manager) who was based at Chiswick Works; this job involved the carriage of large quantities of parts and materials around the LT system and it made sense to include the logistics of organising the advertising billposting too. At about this time the Publicity Officer's bus and rail staff responsible for allocating posters to individual buses and trains (the bus allocation staff alone consisted of some 18 people) were transferred to the

Distribution and Advertising Service Manager.

Some commercial advertising functions appear to have removed from Transad House to the LT head office at Broadway in around 1969, though the advertising sales force remained for some years more at Transad House. In the summer of 1977 the commercial advertising functions were consolidated under a new Commercial Advertising Manager in a premises called Lindsay House in Shaftesbury Avenue, together with responsibility for the billposting operations including the Baker Street and Chiswick billstores and the staff. For the first time responsibility for the entire operation rested in one place. Publicity bills continued to be stored and posted by the commercial advertising staff as agents for the Publicity Officer, an arrangement which continued until 1998.

In 1984 LT Advertising moved from Lindsay House to premises in Jamestown Road, Camden Town, which had its own on-site billstore facilities, allowing the billstores at Chiswick Works and Baker Street to be closed (although a new store was opened at Ferry Lane, Walthamstow, primarily for bus fixing use).

When London Regional Transport was formed in 1984 it was required to establish subsidiary companies to run the principle operating businesses, and London Underground Ltd (LUL) and London Buses Ltd (LBL) were formed in 1985. The provision of central services remained with LRT, including LT Advertising, eventually forming a part of the LT Trading group which apportioned net advertising revenue to LUL and LBL as the case may be. A little later, advertising services were also provided for Victoria Coach station and the Docklands Light Railway.

Although LTA predominantly focused its advertising at the travelling public, there were various sites on LT land which could carry advertising

hoardings facing the street, and in this respect they were more usefully employed selling general roadside packages rather than anything particularly aimed at LT's passengers. For some years sales of these sites were subcontracted out, but in the early 1980s the management and maintenance, as well as the sales, were tendered as a package to the roadside contractors. The contract was won by London & Continental (later taken over by Mills & Allen), though the contract was actually managed by LTA. A number of uncompetitive sites, mainly those under 48-sheet size, were not required and were abandoned, taken back by LTA or went to other contractors.

LTA steadily developed the transport medium. For example, during the 1960s there was considerable simplification in the range of train-borne car cards, and by the late 1970s there was only one standard size. It was a similar story on the buses, though external adverts were given more area from 1978 when the DMS was introduced, facilitating the 'T-side' format which exploited the new space behind the staircase on the offside (this later spawned the concept of the "L-side" format on comparable positions on Routemasters). Not all was plain sailing. In the early 1980s LTA experimented with a polyester material for long-running bus-side adverts, a particular example being for Harrods. It was with dismay that they were later found to be quite impossible to remove, and had to be painted out—there are probably still some Routemasters around today with Harrods adverts under several layers of paint!

The demand was shifting towards larger and higher quality formats. In 1970 the first 48-sheet cross-track displays appeared as a number of 16-sheet sites were re-formatted—this was subsequently done on a large scale as the 48-sheet sites could always be sold as 16s. Nevertheless the market for 16-

sheet sites is still buoyant even though the format is now very rare outside the Underground. From 1990 some 48-sheet sites were combined and sold as 96-sheets, producing highly spectacular display areas. In the 1980s some revolving 'ultravision' units were installed around the network (often over escalators), mostly 12-sheet size but a few were 48s.

Even more innovative was the arrival in the early 1970s of some all-over advertising buses, though LT said at the time "*although revenue from this type of advertising, originally pioneered by London Transport, is valuable, the number of buses painted overall will be strictly limited*". The initial bus entered service on Route 11 in August 1969 and was decorated in an imaginative London theme advertising *Silexine* paint; the contract was for a year. But it was not until April 1971 that the next one, for *Yellow Pages* entered service, followed by 27 others (all but one were Routemasters) until 1976. Equally special was the fleet of 25 silver painted Routemaster buses run during 1977 as part of the Queen's Silver Jubilee celebrations, each one sold to a single advertiser at a premium. Something similar was done on the occasion of the Royal Wedding in 1981, and there was a golden bus for LT's Golden Jubilee in 1983.

Internally illuminated advertisements became popular. Amongst the earliest examples were illuminated offside 'bus-side' panels on the later batches of Routemaster buses from the early 1960s. From 1967 some illuminated car card positions on Underground trains began to appear. Both these features were allowed to lapse in the 1980s as the practicalities became onerous. Some lightbox 'spectacular' units appeared in the late 1970s and 1980s, often odd sizes and generally over escalators. A major improvement was the introduction of illuminated lightboxes of so called 6-sheet size from around 1990—nearly

1400 had been installed by 1995, mainly converted from traditional 4-sheet sites.

More innovative ideas were not necessarily as successful. Video screens (with sound) at Leicester Square did not really achieve the objectives required, and the screen locations tended to cause bunching on crowded platforms. A later 'video wall' was built at Heathrow Terminal 4—this time without sound being used—but again proved unsuccessful and created a maintenance problem ; both were removed after comparative short service.

Privatisation

By the early 1990s it was felt that the existence of a substantial (by now nearly 300 people) commercial advertising organization within LT was becoming increasingly anachronistic. In any case LT Advertising was a business that needed to grow if it was going to remain competitive, but it could not, by law, offer its services to outside siteowners. Furthermore the mounting likelihood of bus privatisation would make it impossible within the restrictions of the 1984 LRT Act for LT Advertising to service these buses once privatized.

The outcome was a decision to sell the business as a going concern. As a preliminary the department was established as a limited company, wholly owned by LRT, in mid 1993 ; the company was called LTA Advertising Ltd. The management of the Mills & Allen and other roadside sites remained with London Transport and were not transferred to LTAAL. Secondly, London Underground and the bus subsidiaries of LBL entered into negotiations with LTAAL to draw up advertising contracts, as there had not been any previously and it would be these contracts which put a value on LTAAL. The contracts were signed in the summer of 1994.

TDI

The bids for LTAAL were evaluated during the summer of 1994 and finally resolved into a decision between a management buyout team and a consortium (known as LDI Ltd) consisting of Hambro Group Investments and TDI Advertising Inc., a large American billposting company who specialised in transit advertising but were quite unknown in the UK. In the event the LDI bid won the day and on 15th August 1994 LTAAL passed from London Transport to LDI, with TDI operating the contract on LDI's behalf. TDI installed a new managing director and provided considerable additional sales support, but the company otherwise traded as before from the same premises in Camden. Early in 1995 LTA Advertising Ltd was renamed TDI Advertising Ltd and subsequently the financial arrangements were changed so that the LDI intermediary was dissolved and TDI in the UK became directly owned by its American parent.

TDI has been both aggressive and successful not only in developing the existing London contracts but also in seeking new business from British bus companies. In addition might be mentioned a postscript to the BTA story. In the spring of 1995 negotiations were in hand for the acquisition of BTA by Maiden Outdoor Advertising, another billposting contractor but not one who had experience in the transport sector. The sale was completed in late summer, and the railway advertising sites (all on the British Rail network) were soon re-branded as Maiden sites.

However, in November 1995 TDI purchased BTA from Maiden (less the railway sites which stayed with Maiden) and renamed the company TDI Transit Advertising Ltd. This transferred to TDI the advertising business from a large number number of bus operations around the country which were formerly part of BTA's National Bus Company portfolio. This opportunity

was to give TDI control of two-thirds of the bus advertising in the UK. TDI was also successful in gaining control of most of the transport advertising in Eire and has also been expanding elsewhere in Europe. All this is controlled from the Jamestown Road headquarters and some regional offices. The considerable increase in sales effort from Jamestown Road meant that in 1997 the billstore was moved to the refurbished facility at Ferry Lane, to make space.

Under TDI there were many new innovations, including the first all over advertising train, for *United Airlines*, which ran on the Piccadilly Line from 1995 ; a further train, for *Yellow Pages*, entered service in 1997, both for a year's contract. Some buses have also been liveried, this time using 'contravision' technology which allows window areas to be incorporated into the advertising space whilst allowing passengers still to see out. These 'fully wrapped' buses are not allowed in revenue service with London Transport, but are used for charter work.

Developments have also taken place with sales of 'whole station' advertising. Wembley Park was the first, completely sold to *Snickers* for Euro '96. On this occasion the entire station was repainted green for the 2-week event and all traditional posters given over to the sponsor. In addition a number of temporary new sites were created, including (it is believed) the first sponsored litter bins on the Underground. After the event, the entire station was put back to normal. In a similar vein both Earls Court and Southfields have been sponsored, respectively for the Motor Show, by a manufacturer, and Wimbledon Tennis, by *Nike* and *Diet Pepsi* ; in the latter example with the station being themed as a tennis court.

Other innovations have included advertising on train interior strap hangers, the re-introduction of stair riser advertising, and more off the wall activities like advertising over tunnel

mouths, convex mirrors and the launch of an ice-cream brand on the Victoria Line, with free samples. For the future, electronics will have a part to play. Already buses have appeared with a form of illuminated paper, which glows when a current is passed through. For the underground, dot-matrix displays already complement illuminated 6-sheet adverts, the *Evening Standard* being the first to use the medium to carry its current headlines above a static display ; the dot matrix indicators are constantly refreshed by new messages transmitted over the radiopager network. Displays incorporating coloured plasma-screens are already under test and offer the opportunity to change large adverts by remote control.

Enter Viacom

In 1995 events in America began to alter the course of TDI which was at that time still independently owned by its creator, Bill Apfelbaum. In that year TDI group sold out to the American-owned Infinity Broadcasting corporation who were seeking to expand their media strengths and also had an outdoor advertising arm, though TDI continued to operate under its existing name and with a significant degree of independence.

In 1996 Infinity was acquired by the massive CBS corporation as part of a programme of diversification but in 1999 (when Infinity also acquired advertising contractor Outdoor Systems) CBS was itself purchased by the even larger and more acquisitive Viacom Group (that includes familiar names such as Paramount and Blockbuster). Although Infinity's outdoor advertising businesses was initially unchanged, in August 2001 they were consolidated under the new name Viacom Outdoor.

The wind of change also crossed the Atlantic and TDI in the UK was formally relaunched as Viacom Outdoor. The UK management structure

was largely unchanged and has continued its successful policy of innovation and expansion and is now one of the UK's major advertising players. Also run from its Camden Town offices is its European operations which now extends to Northern Ireland, Eire, Holland, Spain, Finland, Italy and France.

Despite all this change the UK arm of Viacom Outdoor continues to manage the advertising opportunities on the London Underground, Docklands Light Railway, Croydon Tramlink and the multiplicity of London bus operators with enthusiasm and a level of experience that can be traced back over a century.

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