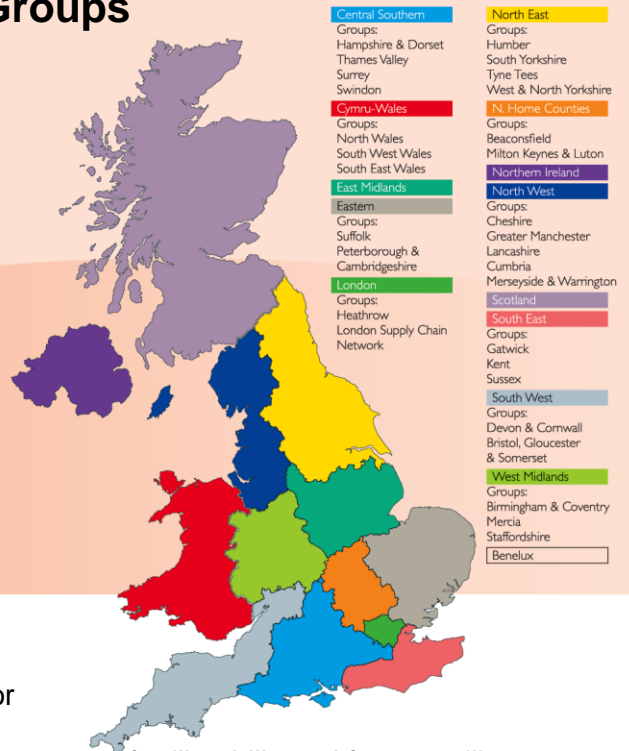


News from the Nations, Regions & Groups

CILT(UK) North West Region Lancashire Group

24th March 2011

Rossendale Transport – A Truly Independent Bus Operator



Rossendale Transport – A Truly Independent Bus Operator

Rossendale Transport operates in the Rossendale Valley, an area of rolling hills and former mill towns centered around the valley of the River Irwell, which nestles in the East of Lancashire. The area has a population of approximately 65,000 spread between the larger towns of Rawtenstall, Haslingden and Bacup. The district combines urban and rural aspects and is in close proximity to the much larger metropolitan area of Greater Manchester.

Formed in 1986 Rossendale Transport is one of only 11 remaining municipal bus companies in the UK. The others are:

- Lothian Transport,
- Blackpool Transport,
- Halton Borough Transport,
- Warrington Borough Transport,
- Nottingham City Transport,
- Ipswich Buses,
- Reading Buses,
- Newport Bus,
- Cardiff Bus, and
- Thamesdown Transport.

Proud of its heritage and strong links to the local community, Rossendale Transport works tirelessly with Rossendale Borough Council to provide the people of Rossendale Valley with a first class bus service which management describe as an 'urban rural' service.

In addition to provision of local services within the valley, Rossendale Transport's area of operations also encompasses the nearby towns of Blackburn, Burnley, Bury, Rochdale, Todmorden and Manchester City Centre which it services with its fleet of 110 vehicles, operating from its depots at Haslingden and Rochdale. The company has 250 staff and is the largest single employer in the Borough of Rossendale, in some cases employing 3 generations of one family.

The visit began with our arrival at Haslingden Bus Depot where delegates were warmly welcomed to Rossendale Transport by Mathew Parkes the Finance Director and guided to a meeting room, where, suitably refreshed, introductions to other members of the Rossendale Transport Board were made.

Alastair Nuttall, Operations Director supported by Edgar Oldham, Managing Director and Brendan O'Reilly, Commercial Manager, started his talk by taking us on a historic bus journey back to the early 1900's, with slides depicting vehicles in splendid livery operating at Rawtenstall, Haslingden and Bacup, moving on through the evolution of the bus from a horse drawn vehicle to its modern day counterpart featuring low floor access, low emission engines and ergonomic seat design for passengers and drivers. However not all has changed and the narrow streets of the local mill towns still exist, which is where the company deploys its smaller more maneuverable vehicles, well suited to providing these communities with a fast and efficient service.

Alastair then explained the logistics involved in the company's relatively recent relocation of its major bus depot, from its somewhat cramped conditions at Rawtenstall to its new site at Haslingden. In order to reduce costs, much of the work was carried out on a self help basis and fell to a small group of dedicated employees, who through ingenuity and determination succeeded in moving much of the equipment and stores themselves at no additional cost.

The benefits of the bus depot relocation became obvious as we were split into small groups, and suitably donned with high visibility vests were escorted around the site. Moving between the office complex, parking, stores, servicing and engineering areas it was evident that the site had ample space to park the fleet and effect repairs, albeit not all buses were able to be parked under cover, which in winter requires some clever planning and inventive deicing methods. The refueling and wash down facilities were in full use as the night shift staff went about their business of ensuring a full turnout for the following morning's services.

Councilor Anne Cheetham then gave a very informative talk explaining the councils close working relationship with Rossendale Borough Transport and her strong belief that local residents are best served by a local operator. In response to a question regarding takeovers by larger operators she advised that attempts had been made to acquire Rossendale Transport but the proposals tabled simply weren't commercially viable or attractive to the council.

Questions were also raised in the ensuing debate regarding the redevelopment of the Rawtenstall Bus Station. Councilor Cheetham advised that no firm decisions had yet been made as to its design or construction date but added that redevelopment of the bus station which is tied in with redevelopment of the local shopping area would go ahead once the overall development of the site had been approved.

The event was concluded with Councilor Cheetham presenting all those in attendance with a commemorative edition of Rossendale Transport – A Centenary Celebration.

In thanking Brendan O'Reilly, Councillor Cheetham and the other members of Rossendale Transport management team for their time, excellent presentation and site tour, the Group Chairman Simon Reynish CMILT added that all concerned had found the event very informative and would cherish their new found copies of Rossendale Transport history. His comments were supported with a warm round of applause from those attending.

