

# The Stourbridge Scheme

In May 1974, the Executive had created a specialist section, with a particular brief to carry out market research, known as the Field Survey Unit. A number of major area revisions to bus services had taken place but the first to use fully the expertise of the Field Survey Unit was the Stourbridge scheme.

The PTE bus services in Stourbridge were all inherited from Midland Red, who still had a presence in the town on a handful of out-County routes. The PTE bus services comprised three important routes, to Birmingham, Dudley and Kingswinford, a number of weaker services serving some of the smaller population centres that are a feature of the Black Country, plus a range of local services (distinguished under the Midland Red numbering system with the prefix S) which ran the risk of withering away because their short length did not necessarily generate good loads. Stourbridge was thus a typical Midland Red town network with a considerable density of services often running on low frequencies which contrasted with the higher frequency but less dense network pattern encountered elsewhere in the WMPTE area.

Also requiring consideration was the role of the railway in the town. The principal facility was the Birmingham – Kidderminster line which called at Stourbridge Junction, some distance from the centre of the town. The centre was linked by the Junction – Town Station shuttle, a single diesel unit which met each train on the Birmingham line. Development of the Birmingham line was not in doubt, although the effect of any improvement to the rail service on the 130 Stourbridge – Birmingham bus route had to be considered.

The question of whether to retain the Junction – Town rail link or replace it whilst revising the bus network was probably the most important decision to be made in the Stourbridge scheme.

Buses in Stourbridge centre all terminated within a close proximity but were divided into three sites. This was not an ideal arrangement, worsened by the fact that one of them was the PTE garage itself where the need to maintain a good quality environment for the passengers did not equate easily with the efficient operation of a bus garage.

Following the extensive market research exercise, a much altered bus network was introduced to Stourbridge on 5th December 1976. The Town – Junction rail link was retained, as was the 'rival' 130 Stourbridge – Birmingham bus service, which served a different set of intermediate points to the railway. Indeed, most of the bus routes to neighbouring towns survived largely unaltered but the town services were extensively revised. In some cases they were incorporated into services reflecting the increased demand for facilities towards Dudley (now the administrative centre for the district) and Brierley Hill. The S prefix disappeared as the town routes were revised and numbered into the 2xx Black Country series.

The opportunity was taken to increase the proportion of one-man operation at Stourbridge garage. The relatively small garage had complete responsibility for the 130 service, which was still double-crew worked, generally with BMMO D9s. Simply to convert this service to one-man operation would have rendered too many conductors surplus at one

time. Therefore, under the Stourbridge scheme, the 130 was indeed converted but conductors reappeared on other services from Stourbridge. D9s and thus their conductors ousted from the 130 became the mainstay of the new 294 service (Stourbridge – Pedmore Fields – Lye – Brierley Hill – Dudley) and made a surprising entrance on the 'Khyber Pass' 258<sup>1</sup> (Stourbridge – Brierley Hill via Vicarage Road), previously worked by one-man single deckers. D9s also took over from double-crew single deckers on the Pedmore Fields local services, now numbered 298 and 299. As indicated by the previous existence of double-crew saloons, Pedmore Fields had not been blessed with double deckers before December 1976 and a considerable amount of tree pruning was required. The distribution of conductors onto a number of shorter routes would enable the single-manning programme at Stourbridge to proceed less painfully in future.

These changes coincided with the first big influx of new PTE standard buses into Stourbridge garage. Plans were also on the way for a new, single, bus station adjacent to a reconstructed Town station, making ingenious use of the site presented by two of the existing bus termini and the railway station. This new bus station, opened in May 1980, would allow the garage to be used solely for its proper purpose and for the improvement of inspectorate and crew facilities. The rail service to Birmingham was to be improved and park and ride facilities provided at the Junction station were extremely successful. Thus the visitor to Stourbridge ten years after the PTE takeover would recognise very little from Midland Red days – a new bus and railway station, a much altered bus network and a complete change of vehicle stock. Even the town had changed with the completion of the ring road – about the only items that stayed the same were the diesel trains!

<sup>1</sup>Service 258 travelled along Amblecote Bank which was being reclaimed from industrial spoil. Large scale housing development was planned and the continued operation of 258 was largely an act of faith. In the event, however, development was very slow and the 258 could be a very lonely run indeed – along Hillfield Road very little life could be seen on either side – hence the 'Khyber Pass' nickname!

Left A reminder of the old regime at Stourbridge with Midland Red AEC Regent II double deckers (BMMO AD2 class) 3111 and 3109 providing local services from the Town railway station in the late 'fifties. Right Stourbridge Town Station in December 1977. The canopy to shelter waiting passengers has long gone but the faithful diesel railcar prepares to shuttle another load to the Junction Station Robert F. Mack/M.R. Keeley





The Stourbridge scheme showed the benefits of evolving new bus networks using market research and the majority of subsequent major revisions used this approach. The WMPTE method leaned heavily on household interviews, thus discovering travel patterns currently not met. This differed considerably from the National Bus Company's well-known MAP projects, which were mainly based on on-bus surveys. However, as in all market research exercises, success depends on correct interpretation of the results and resisting the temptation to go beyond the territory for which information has been collected. Services in Wombourne, Kingswinford, Gornal and the Straits estate were also revised on 5th December and, whilst the changes caused remarkably little difficulty, any problems that did occur tended to involve the areas not covered by the market researchers.

The Pedmore Fields circular, numbered S48 (clockwise) and S49 (anticlockwise), was worked by single deckers with conductors until the Stourbridge revisions. BMMO S23 models 5969 and 5929 load at the Vauxhall Road bus station in August 1976. No.5969 is a recent transfer to Stourbridge, unable to display the S prefix, whilst 5929 has the grille from an S17. M.R. Keeley



The ex-Midland Red Leyland Leopards at Stourbridge were transferred elsewhere in 1976 — most moving to Yardley Wood, including Weymann-bodied 5160 seen here in April 1974. Stourbridge to Wolverhampton service 256 was modified in the revisions; some buses now going via Cot Lane into Kingswinford as service 255. M.R. Keeley



The 294 was a new service introduced with the Stourbridge revisions. It exploited the growing demand for Dudley, taking a circuitous but useful route via Pedmore Fields, Lye, Quarry Bank and Brierley Hill. Its usual vehicles were initially BMMO D9s, displaced from the 130 service. No.5342 negotiates the busy High Street in Brierley Hill in September 1977. M.R. Keeley