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Cover Illustration: No. 1 (YU2974) was a 1928 Albion PK26 with Vickers 28-seat bodywork. (LTHL collection).

First Published 2019 by the Local Transport History Library.

With thanks to Grace’s Guide for illustration.

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The Metropolitan Railway was a passenger and goods railway that served London from 1863 to 1933, with a main line that ran through North West London.

In 1919 in order to boost its profits the Metropolitan Railway set up a separate company - The Metropolitan Railway Country Estates (MRCE) - to manage and develop the land it owned adjacent to its railway tracks into housing estates, which would create a ready market of commuters in and out of London. This in turn, it was hoped, would result in a significant increase in ticket sales.

Housing estates were developed at Neasden, Wembley Park, Northwick Park, Eastcote, Rayners Lane, Ruislip, Hillingdon, Pinner, Rickmansworth, Chorley Wood and Amersham between 1919 and 1933. Advertisers coined the phrase 'Metro-land' and painted an image of rural charm within easy reach of the city, to entice people to settle there. People came in their droves, sold the dream of a new home on the edge of beautiful countryside but with modern conveniences, including a fast rail service to central London.

But with these housing estates in close proximity to the Metropolitan's stations, there was nothing to warrant a bus service. At Neasden, which was not particularly well served by the London General Omnibus Company (LGOC), it was suggested that a circular service connecting Neasden and Wembley might be a good idea, but nothing came of it.
1917 advertisement extolling the virtues of Metro-land. (Graces Guide).
At Watford, however, the situation was slightly different. The Metropolitan's Watford station was someway distant from the centre of the town and also from the Junction Station of the London, Midland & Scottish Railway. This was due to the reluctance of Watford Council to have a railway line crossing Cassiobury Park, which the Metropolitan's would have had to do to reach the centre of Watford, as a result passengers were faced with a substantial walk. This provided the Metropolitan with the opportunity to introduce a motorbus service.

Watford Council granted the railway company four licences and on 2nd November 1927, a circular service between the Station and St. Mary's Church (for Watford Market Place) commenced. Four Albion PK26 buses with Vickers 28-seat bodywork were purchased for the service, liveried in the Metropolitan's teak (brown), but relieved with white roofs. The fleetname 'Metropolitan Railway' and the company's coat-of-arms were applied to the sides.

In 1928, the four mainline railway companies received powers to operate motorbuses, but the Metropolitan was refused, ostensibly because of the proximity of its operations to those of the LGOC.

The Metropolitan Railway became worried that Watford may now withdraw the licences, since it was running the service without the legal powers to do so. It hastily formed a separate company 'The North West Land & Transport Company' to take over the existing route at Watford and to seek further extensions and feeder services. To avoid problems applying and procuring licences it was proposed to acquire a 50% stake in a local bus company, which was the policy of the other railway companies.
In November 1929, after a number of local operators had been approached, a new company was formed - the Lewis Omnibus Co Ltd - in which the Metropolitan Railway had a 50% stake. This enabled the railway company to pass the operations of the North West Land & Transport Company to the new company and gain access to Watford Junction station. The four original Albions and a fifth, which had been purchased in 1929, were also transferred, bringing the separate operating life of the Metropolitan Railway to an end.

On 1 July 1933, the Metropolitan Railway was amalgamated with the Underground Electric Railways Company of London and passed to the newly formed London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB). On the 1st October 1933 the Lewis Omnibus Company was also absorbed by the LPTB.

Bus Fleet List
1927-1929

This listing is in the format - Year into stock; Fleet No; Reg. No; Chassis; Chassis No; Body; Seating.

1927

1; YU2974; Albion PK26; 5044F; Vickers; B28F
2; YU2975; Albion PK26; 5045C; Vickers; B28F
3; YU2973; Albion PK26; 5045J; Vickers; B28F
4; YU2972; Albion PK26; 5056G; Vickers; B28F


1929

5; UV5761; Albion PKB26; 5086B; Vickers; C28F

No. 5 to Lewis Omnibus Co., Watford 11/29 (re-numbered A5).
The Metropolitan Railway’s No. 1 (YU2974) and staff, outside Watford Station when new in 1927, complete with white wall tyres, which did not last long (as seen on the cover photograph of the same vehicle). (LTHL collection).
Additional information, corrections and photographs are always welcome. Our general email address is: lth.library@gmail.com.