

David Robert Morris of DRMBUS

‘The Little Country Lad’



With New Update for 2013 into 2014

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(Transport Geographer)**

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DRMBUS

2013 and towards 2014

If 2013 was a difficult year for bus operators then watch out in 2014. All the indications are that the restraint and reduction in local authority budgets is going to be the most severe yet. Along with other services, the money available for the support of rural buses looks set to take a hammering, possibly withdrawn in its entirety. Many authorities, especially those whose area is primarily rural, are reaching crisis point.

But the country bus is of critical value to the communities it serves, far more critical than in an urban situation where high frequency services offer a wider choice of travel time and location. The withdrawal of a country bus service can have a devastating effect on community and individuals alike, especially at a time when other services such as shops, post offices and public houses are rapidly disappearing.

Country bus operators have done much to assist the local authorities in cost reductions during this time of financial pressure, but they can only go so far and that point has most probably been reached. The next squeeze could possibly see the wholesale withdrawal of local authority supported bus services. Worcestershire have already declared their intention in this respect and Herefordshire looks set to follow. The effect is likely to leave huge swathes of Herefordshire without any public transport leading to increased rural isolation and

deprivation, especially for the young and the elderly. This in turn can have a knock on effect in terms of migration of young people to towns and cities. This then leads to an imbalanced rural population with a greater dependence by the elderly on social services.

But enough of doom and gloom. Although there are small operators out there who are not going to survive, for many, including DRMBUS, 2014 is going to be a year of considerable retrenchment and consolidation of existing operations based on a commercial core business. But it can also be a positive time; a time to assess the overall company performance, tighten the purse strings and move the business into a more efficient and advantageous position for future growth.

With this in mind, David Morris is not burying his head in the sand. He is continuing to invest in capital schemes that will further improve the company's overall performance. Such schemes involve the installation of a 'rolling road' in the workshops and in 2014 the introduction of state of the art ticket machines with monitoring systems. In addition there has been riverside reinforcement work at the garage which will provide more bus parking space. An updated website and APP enables passengers to access timetables, download the DRMBUS calendar and other company information.

www.drmbus.com

Most importantly, David Morris has not forgotten the commitment to DRMBUS passengers in terms of the high standard of the fleet. DM63DRM, a new tri-axle Scania OmniLink bus purchased with 100% capital allowance is due on the road in January 2014. This brings the total of these modern, comfortable single-deck vehicles in the fleet to four. David explains that these vehicles are vital to his principal services where they can accommodate peak loads and have helped reduced costs through not having to provide duplicate vehicles. Such cost savings invariably also benefit the local authority.

Eccentric as he is, David Morris seems to have developed a passion for orange. Last summer saw the launch of his 'Summer Madness' Campaign. This winter sees some new orange symbols on the buses. When asked about the 'orange tick' he drily remarked.....*'That's a tick for being sensible and using the right form of transport. Besides which it makes people notice the buses and provides a talking point..'* During the Christmas period and in festive spirit, DRMBUS traditionally offers its passengers free returns for the price of a single.





David Morris with the new six wheel Scania Omni-Link at the Scania works at Gdansk in Poland.

DRMBUS with David Morris, Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, in control moves into 2014 with a degree of caution but with a hint of optimism. He says:

‘Consolidation with a degree of contraction if necessary is going to be the key. The large PLC’s are having to do it and although I am a lot smaller, the same principles of economic management apply. Perhaps this is even more important for a local independent operator at a time of financial restraint. But we shall be ready to spring forward at the right time’

Consolidation or not: The Little Country Lad’s traditional all action TRADE HOG ROAST is on 23 July 2014 from 10.00 onwards at the bus garage.

The Beginning

Deep in Herefordshire, that most rural of English counties, there lies the small town of Bromyard. Nestling alongside the meadows of the River Frome and facing the Downs, it is a sleepy place. The town has a long history dating back to Norman times and beyond. The name can be traced back to the Saxon and Old English for a broom enclosure. The word broom refers to the broom tree, once commonly used for building and fencing.



The town of Bromyard from the Downs; the DRMBUS garage and David's home is at Broadbridge, bottom right

Ask most people in other parts of Britain as to where

Bromyard is and they will scratch their heads. It is an unpretentious place that goes about its business in a quiet but confident way. Not a great deal happens in Bromyard and yet this small town has a knack of producing and nurturing entrepreneurs whose unconventional and often eccentric ways can and do appear bewildering to the modern day businessman and banker used to the economics of the big city.

Take Mr Pettifer for instance. This enterprising local had acquired the first motor vehicle in Bromyard in 1896. By the 1920's the firm had built up a fleet of a dozen vehicles. They ranged from small motor brakes to converted ex War Department lorries and twenty eight seat Daimler charabancs. Regular road motor services were started to both Hereford and Worcester as well as adventurous excursions to the seaside.

Pioneering bus services in Bromyard and surrounds continued when in 1966 Mrs Lilian Morris, at the request of Bromyard Chamber of Commerce started a service from the villages and hamlets of Bredenbury, Thornbury and Hampton Charles into the town. Her husband, Bill Morris, who drove the bus and saw to the mechanical matters, was also the first person to introduce a combined harvester into Herefordshire when he branched into the agricultural contracting business. But what is even more interesting is the fact that Mr and Mrs Morris were to produce two sons, one of whom was destined to continue and develop the tradition of pioneering bus services and equally importantly to stamp that individual Bromyard and

Herefordshire business mark on the bus industry in Britain with his company, DRMBUS.



Early days; an AEC Reliance with Duple Continental bodywork in the fleet of Morris's Coaches of Bromyard with a very young David Robert Morris at the wheel. David Morris went on to form his own company DRMBUS. He continued the trend of buying heavyweight vehicles, when most Herefordshire operators ran Bedfords and Fords, adding AEC, Leyland, Volvo and now new Scania buses to the fleet,

(photographs above and above right courtesy of Wactonbus)



Morris's Coaches was a staunch purchaser of AEC vehicles. On the left (FTP 515D) was the first AEC Reliance in the Morris's Coaches fleet. The coach on the right (GUY 269C) was one of a pair in the fleet. Shown below, David on the right with mum, dad, brother Clifford and a Ford Thames.



David Robert Morris of DRMBUS

With a history in and early experience of bus and coach operation it was only natural that David Morris would want to form and run his own business. This came about in 1984 when David set up under the operating name of DRM Coaches. Originally the firm had a mix of coach, local bus and contract work but in the 1990's and in the aftermath of the Herefordshire Trial Area and bus deregulation David decided to pull out of the coach business and concentrate on the development of local bus services. This he has done with considerable success and in so doing has entered into the upper echelons of the bus industry with his distinctive, often flamboyant and nearly always outspoken style.

Through his involvement with the Confederation of Passenger Transport he is well known for his perceptive, blunt, appraisals of the state of the bus industry. He speaks often about the future of rural bus services with the growing difficulties facing small country bus operators. This is well illustrated in the matter of concessionary fares reimbursement. Here, by taking the matter straight to the Department of Transport, David was vociferous in making the very important point that the application to rural operators of a reimbursement factor based on urban operating parameters would in effect cause a serious loss of income thus threatening the very existence of country bus companies. David is not one to mince words. His approach on this issue is direct and clear.

'My concern here is that I strongly feel that RURAL services have been entirely overlooked. Should the reductions, as evidenced, materialise, the perception is that we the small operators are being edged out by the big five who serve mostly urban areas and can cream off the new higher percentage rate for city services whose fares are lower than ours. They can fill the same seat four times or more per journey than us giving them an unfair monopoly advantage. It is clear to me that all my hard work over the last few years in generating passenger use of local bus services is rebounding on me and whilst I will still receive some income from pensioners passes I do feel seriously disadvantaged in the rebate factor bearing in mind the nature of rural operation with long journey lengths and higher operating costs'.

'The population of Herefordshire has a noticeable skew towards an upper age bracket. This is especially the case on DRMBUS route 476 between the market town of Ledbury and Hereford.

Ledbury, in the eastern part of Herefordshire has become over the years a desirable retirement location for middle class people from both London and the Midlands. This is echoed in the DRMBUS passenger mix which indicates a revenue split of roughly 33% each for fare paying, local bus contracts with schools and concessionary passes'.

In the matter of concessionary passes David was successful in

securing a revised formula which was welcomed by a number of small operators in their negotiations with local authorities. David continues to be instrumental in highlighting the value of concessionary passes in sustaining rural services and also maintaining vital rural accessibility, especially for the elderly and the young.

But the campaign is not over, for David is determined to have the voice of the small country bus operator heard. His representation to the Competition Commission for their Local Bus Services Market Investigation forcibly pointed out the fact that the large bus companies are primarily urban and inter-urban operators and it is the small operator that continues to be the mainstay of country bus operation. In this respect David's definition of the small independent operator is that of around the ten vehicle size. He also identified the fact that the larger bus companies benefit from considerable economies of scale in operating costs and also the advantage of profitable urban networks. This can pose a perceived threat to the small operator should he decide to expand his operating area and seek to increase his market share. This in turn leads to a genuine reluctance amongst the smaller operators to enter new markets where they may be seen muscling in on urban or inter-urban operation.

David was not slow to point out that it was the Herefordshire Trial Area that was the test bed for bus service deregulation. in the 1980s and although there was an initial flurry of



DM58DRM, the first six wheel Scania Omni-Link in the DRMBUS fleet is seen unloading from the 476 service in the City of Hereford. Noticeably a higher than average number of passengers are holders of concessionary passes.

competition this was mostly in the city. There has been very little competition on routes since then, especially the country routes as they invariably cannot sustain more than one operator. However, where there are two operators on a route, as on the 420 service from Bromyard to Hereford which DRMBUS runs commercially and shares with First Midland Red, then relations are cordial and friendly.



Loading the 420 service for Bromyard at St Peter's Square, Hereford (left). Although the route is shared with First Midland Red, the timings do not clash. Also some of the DRMBUS journeys run via a different route serving the

village of Bishops Frome. Within Bromyard they serve the Winslow estate which has proved valuable in terms of improving public transport accessibility.



DRMBUS at work: at Tarrington on the 476 (above) and passing the Wye Valley Brewery at Stoke Lacy on the 420 (below).



With the publication of the recent Government document 'Green Light for Better Buses' in March 2012 David is somewhat disappointed that only scant attention has been paid to rural transport. His comments were;

'It seems as if the country bus operator and his tradition of serving country people is slowly being forgotten in favour of community transport schemes. This can be understandable given the devastating effect on public finance of government policy and the emphasis being put on the voluntary sector to provide services. However, the whole policy is misguided and the danger is that years of valuable experience and good relations between passenger and operator will be lost'.

The shift from direct subsidy to the concept of better bus schemes, voluntary partnership schemes and the like may well work in the urban areas but may not necessarily be appropriate for the country bus. We just have not got the population density and hence the passengers to sustain services without financial help.

In Herefordshire the operating margins of local bus companies have been squeezed by the recent local authority expenditure cuts. In the last two rounds of budget cuts the operators have been willing to implement cost savings in an attempt to maintain services at an acceptable level. However, there are limits to how far the operator can go in reaching Herefordshire's subsidy reduction targets and that limit is

rapidly approaching. The worst case scenario is that Herefordshire will be left with just a small number of inter town services that at present are operated commercially.'

David Morris sees the secondary country routes such as his service 672/673 between Bromyard and Ledbury to be most under threat. He would like to see a proactive approach to new partnership schemes from the local authority. He is a firm believer in talking with local authorities on ways and means of sustaining rural bus services.

'Over the years I have suggested a number of schemes based on a partnership of local authority, bus operator and community groups for maintaining a network of village routes feeding into a main inter-town service. In the case of bus service 476 the creation of an interchange hub at the Trumpet Inn I consider would be feasible. Although the Trumpet is indicated as a park and share node on recent Council publicity funded by the sustainable transport grant there is little mention of any innovative public transport schemes.'

If you are to attract people onto the buses, especially in a rural area where costs are invariably higher, then you have to make the service offered attractive, interesting, comfortable, easy to use and economical.' These are principles which David adheres to with the comprehensive network of services he operates in Herefordshire.



David Morris sees the secondary country routes such as his service 672/673 between Bromyard and Ledbury to be most under threat. He would like to see a proactive approach to new partnership schemes from the local authority.



Interestingly it was David's parents who started a minibus service for the thinly populated areas around Bromyard. This Austin J2BA (registration 603 CYD) was acquired in 1958. The minibus is seen here parked in the grass in Bill's yard at Pannier Lane. Increasing passenger numbers had seen it replaced on service work by medium sized Ford coaches.

(photo courtesy of Wactonbus)

David Morris considers there are very difficult times ahead for the country bus operator and would not be surprised to see a number disappear over the coming years. In many instances the owners are reaching an age when they have had enough and not many young people want to continue in the business. However, he is adamant that, even now at the vintage age of sixty eight, he will be there to the end, pink jacket, Caribbean shirt and whatever other outrageous apparel he has acquired.



The enigmatic, flamboyant David Robert Morris, founder and Managing Director of DRMBUS Bromyard Ltd. His choice of dress is well, IMPECCABLE!!



DRMBUS: Keeping a High Standard

Ask the passengers, ask the locals, ask the local authority officers and the message that you will get is that DRMBUS has the best fleet of buses in Herefordshire. David Morris is proud of this and exceptionally proud of the standard of bus service he provides. He is the first to admit it has not been easy progressing from the mixed fleet of older vehicles he operated in the late 1990's to his modern selection of Scania Omni-Link and Omni-City buses. But then, David has the advantage of being a Bromyard man and as indicated earlier the town has a record of spawning successful entrepreneurs. Unlike many companies, including the big ones, David is adamant that profits from the operations are consistently ploughed back into the company and hence all the assets are entirely owned by DRMBUS. (Fleet list on back cover)

The proof of this business philosophy can be seen on the road with the Scania Omni-Link six wheel buses used on the main commercial services. A third new six wheel bus has just joined the fleet. These buses are considered by the passengers as being very special. Standardisation on Scania vehicles has paid considerable dividends in reduced maintenance costs and good vehicle availability. Breakdowns are rare but invariably they do happen and David is proud of his staff and the team work that maintains an excellent service reliability. Investment in the workshop has meant that for a small bus operator his facilities are equal to those of bigger companies.



From this (left), an old Volvo B10M with Alexander bodywork to this (below) a line up of modern Scania and Volvo buses.



This modern set of lifters capable of dealing with the new six wheel Scania vehicles are the latest investment in bringing the workshop facilities up to the standard demanded by twenty first century local bus operation.



At the Scania works a smiling David Morris stands in front of the latest addition to the DRMBUS fleet, a third six-wheel Scania Omni-Link. There are not many small operators who can claim such an ongoing record of new vehicle purchases.



With further Scania purchases under consideration the last of the Leyland Lynx buses in operation in Herefordshire have finally been withdrawn. David and Steve Palmer, the DRMBUS Chief Mechanic, are sad to see them go.

Taking the serious side of the bus industry further, David is a long serving member of the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) and sits on that organisation's Parliamentary Bus Commission. He is also a member of the Association of Local Bus Managers (ALBUM), the Road Haulage Association (RHA) and Bromyard Chamber of Commerce. He is also well known for his fundraising and charity work.

With such a presence in the industry it is incredible that David can juggle the time between his national commitments and the running of a successful small bus company. But he does, and he does with success not just in managing and developing DRMBUS but also with his continued and valuable views on matters that seriously affect the small operator.

David Morris's chief object in life remains the economic welfare of DRMBUS and most importantly the well-being of his loyal staff. To maintain this and take the Company through the difficult times of 2012 and beyond he has a number of key points in his management approach to the country bus business. Four key areas stand out. These are, 1. financial control with good vehicle maintenance; 2. having and keeping a loyal staff; 3. good service reliability and keeping the travelling public informed; 4. maintaining cordial and helpful relations with local authorities. Attention to detail is one of David's principal hobby horses and he is keen to point out that the above key areas are backed up by a number of detailed points which include:

1. Running a tight ship and getting on with the job.
2. Maintaining a customer friendly operation with good drivers, clean vehicles and timetables which allow a more relaxed journey without as David puts it *'the rock 'n' roll when fighting to keep up with a tight schedule'*.
3. Keeping fares at a reasonable level in a difficult economic climate.
4. Clearly advertising and making available free copies of the service timetables.
5. Maintaining a 90% plus reliable service, give or take a few minutes when Hereford City traffic gets out of hand.
6. Keeping the passengers informed if things do go wrong when services are disrupted through road problems.
7. Providing incentives for family travel which is considered important in a country area where local wage levels are below the national average.
8. Reducing fares at Christmas as a thank you to passengers for their loyalty, a long standing gesture with DRMBUS which is talked about with affection by the customers.
9. Keeping the services safe by not tolerating unruly or anti-social behaviour.
10. Being at the end of a phone and answering enquiries promptly and courteously.

All the hard work above has led to DRM achieving a number of national awards; a Personal Award as Owner/Manager in September 2010; Small Bus Operator of the Year in October 2011 and Runner up Independent Bus Operator of the year in November 2012. He is a finalist in the 2013 awards.



Clear, easy to read timetables and fares information are displayed on the buses whilst eye catching signage ensures that the Company's buses are noted on the road (above).



Of course, what better advert for DRMBUS than David Robert Morris himself. Here he is with mirror image. Oh no! Two 'little country lads!!'



A very pleased looking David Robert Morris with a gift from the staff, a die cast model of a Scania Omni-Link six wheel bus painted specially in DRMBUS livery. He may be a bit cantankerous and awkward at times but the staff have a high regard for their leader and what he achieves.

The Author, Gareth Calan Davies and the last AEC Reliance in service with DRMBUS.

'David and I have known and worked with each other for many years. He is a good friend, truly the last of the colourful and enigmatic British busmen'.



David Robert Morris is a champion of the country bus and the small operator, a stalwart in their defence and a force that will ensure they have a voice in future transport policy.

The Little Country Lad is becoming
A LEGEND IN HIS OWN TIMES



The determination to survive and progress.
David Morris (MD) and Steve Palmer (Chief Mechanic) with the justifiably awarded Small Bus Operator of the Year prize in 2011 and a finalist in the 2013 awards.

DRMBUS Services

DRMBUS operates regular services in the Ledbury, Bromyard and Hereford areas. These include:

Ledbury-Hereford (15 return journeys Mon-Thu; 16 return journeys Fri and Sat; 5 return journeys winter Sundays).

Bromyard-Hereford (6 return journeys Mon-Fri; 4 return journeys Saturdays plus 3 return journeys school weekdays).

Bromyard-Ledbury (3 return journeys Mon-Fri).

Bromyard-Leominster (1 return journey Fri only)

Holme Lacy College (1 return journey college weekdays)

DRMBUS Fleet List

DM63DRM	Scania OmniLink Tri-Axle	2014
DM12DRM	Scania OmniLink Tri-Axle	2012
DM10DRM	Scania OmniLink	2010
UK09DRM	Scania OmniLink Tri-Axle	2009
DM09DRM	Scania OmniCity	2009
DM58DRM	Scania OmniLink Tri-Axle	2008
GO07DRM	Scania OmniLink	2007
DM55DRM	Scania OmniCity	2005
GO03DRM	Scania OmniCity	2003
DM51BUS	Volvo B6BLE	2001
MOI9565	Volvo B6BLE	2001
W1 DRM	Volvo B10BLE	2000

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