

IN BRIEF

NEG sells at Stansted National Express Group (NEG) opened an 'all-in-one' sales desk at London Stansted airport on Thursday (9 July), bringing together its coach and rail ticket sales. The opening was performed by NEG Chief Operating Officer Ray O'Toole and BAA Stansted Managing Director Stewart Wingate. The new sales outlet has five retailing positions and is located close to the international arrivals area. Staff will also sell Oyster Cards and provide promotional incentives for tourist attractions, such as 2-for-1 deals.

End of era in Coventry After 30 years' service, the last MCW Metrobuses in Coventry, operated by National Express-owned Travel Coventry, have been withdrawn. Introduced from 1979, the locally-built buses took part in a farewell running day, with the last one – a 20-year-old F-reg example – being hauled into the depot after its last journey on a rope, pulled by some of the many employees who have driven the bus over the years.

TfL tender results The latest round of Transport for London (TfL) tender results provides a small boost for bus manufacturing. Metroline has retained the 237 route, with a PVR of 20 new double-deckers. Travel London (which is now owned by NedRailways, see pages 4-5) has retained routes 235 and H26, with a combined total PVR of 23 existing single-deckers. All contracts, which are based on conventional diesel-engined buses, start in January 2010.

Biofuels from waste? The first biofuels produced using new generations of biomass raw materials could be available in commercial volumes from 2010, German Deputy Environment Minister Michael Mueller has announced. Germany is building test plants to produce commercial volumes of second-generation biofuels from a wide range of biomass materials ranging from wood chips and other forest products, to straw, hay, vegetable waste and low-grade crops.

Almex design prize? The ergonomic, user-friendly design of the almex.optima cl - the ticketing specialist's new onboard unit - has been nominated for the Design Prize Germany 2010 - the highest official German award in the field of design and presented by the Federal Ministry for Business and Technology.

Bus Éireann talks on Talks resumed on Monday (13 July) at the Labour Relations Commission to resolve a threatened strike over cost-cutting measures at Bus Éireann. The company wants to make 320 redundancies and cut services, to stave off €30m losses this year due to falling revenue.

70 years of OB Bedford OBs will be gathering at the Vauxhall Heritage Centre, Luton, on 16 August to mark the 70 anniversary of the type. Already 27 OBs have signed up for the event and at midday they will participate in a road run to Bletchley Park. Owners are encouraged to simply drop in and drive. There is no fixed time for vehicles to be on display. Access is via the GM UK car park entrance in Park Street and will be open from 1000hrs and 1630hrs.

Hodson investment A share transfer at Hodson Coaches, Navenby has seen new investment in a business that operates 13 Setra and Mercedes-Benz coaches and a couple of taxis. Alistair, June and Tim Gooseman are new directors from a haulage, storage and warehousing background, but John Carter emphasised that he and Managing Director wife Stephanie Carter remain involved in the business for the foreseeable future. It is business as usual with the same staff and coaches explained Mr Carter.

HCT retains AccessBus HCT Group subsidiary CT Plus (Yorkshire) has retained operation of the Leeds AccessBus services for another five years. It has been running the operation under contract to Metro since October 2006 and also covers more than 40 Mybus routes in Leeds and Wakefield. HCT Group has a turnover of around £16m and employs 450 staff in London and West Yorkshire.

Chinese hybrid to debut at Coach & Bus Live

New entrant to make Western European debut at the NEC in October

EXCLUSIVE by Mel Holley

A new entrant to the UK market has chosen October's Coach & Bus Live show at the NEC, Birmingham, as its European launch-platform for its first offering – a hybrid bus.

It follows the signing of European distribution partner, Foton Europe Ltd, which has been established as the official sales arm of Beiqi Foton Motor Corporation, China, to import market and support its range of buses and coaches.

From its head offices in Coventry, the company will be the sole agents for Foton within Western Europe, Poland and Turkey.

The first vehicle to be introduced

into the UK and Ireland will be a 12m hybrid bus, and Foton Europe Ltd will be using Coach & Bus Live on 7-8 October to literally pull the covers off its new bus, and officially launch the product.

As yet pricing and specification are to be confirmed, however, Foton Europe says the vehicle – which will be a two-door single-decker – will "represent exceptional value for money," and will be "significantly cheaper" than competitors.

The bus, which will use 'branded' driveline components, will be powered by a Cummins engine.

Coach & Bus Live Show Director Mark Griffin told **routeone**: "We're delighted that yet another vehicle manufacturer has chosen to launch a new product at October's Coach & Bus Live show.

"Over the last few weeks we've been learning more about the vehicles planned to be launched and it's clear that visitors will be treated to a really good display of new products. Already, visitor

registrations are off to a flying start. "With the government's £30m support for hybrid buses announced last week - bridging the capital cost gap between conventional buses and hybrids - it's good to see that a number of manufacturers are bringing hybrid products to the UK market.

"With only a small handful of stands yet to be allocated, our indications are that the show will be sold out, and with other major vehicle exhibitors, including ADL, Arriva, BMC, Esker, EvoBus, King Long, MAN, MCV, Plaxton, Optare, Wrightbus and Volvo all taking space, we're looking forward to a really exciting event with plenty of good vehicle offerings."

Foton's UK operation will be backed up and supported by BMC PLC, which already has an existing dealer and parts network in place.

BMC Group Managing Director Phillip Hodgson told **routeone**: "With significant amounts of money being invested into the UK economy for environmentally-friendly transport solutions we feel

the time is now right to introduce a hybrid vehicle that represents value for money whilst still maintaining quality and reliability.

"Our decision to bring the Foton vehicle to market shows our commitment to offering our customer base the widest range of passenger carrying vehicles possible"

Foton is very successful within its home market and has recently completed delivery of the world's largest single hybrid bus order, shipping 900 hybrids to Beijing Public Transport Group, contributing to the Chinese government's aim of having 60,000 alternative-energy vehicles in operation in 10 of the country's cities by 2012.

Foton Motor was founded in 1996 and is based in Changping District, Beijing. It builds a range of small passenger vehicles, trucks and buses and has 29,000 employees. It already has distribution networks in Australia, Russia and the USA, where Foton-America Bus Co Inc assembles



Chinese built hybrid bus to make its European debut at Show

vehicles locally, on Chinese-built underframes, to meet 'buy America' laws.

Foton, which is listed on the Shanghai Stock Exchange, is also investing Yuan 5bn (US\$730m) in a new design and production facility for alternative-energy vehicles and powertrains. It will have capacity to build up to 5,000 hybrid-electric buses and 400,000 engines a year.

● The organisers report that sales for Coach & Bus Live continue to make good progress with over 120 exhibiting companies and 90% of all available stand space sold. Those interested in the few remaining stands should contact the Coach & Bus Live sales team quickly on 01926 833052, email: info@coachandbuslive.com or visit www.coachandbuslive.com

Independents' Cornish 'ticket to ride' partnership



Through ticketing scheme is supported by county council

Cornish independents Western Greyhound and Hopley's Coaches have got together in partnership with Cornwall County Council to enhance the experience of bus passengers over the common section of their routes. Passengers travelling between Chiverton and Truro can now buy just one ticket to ride on either Western Greyhound and Hopley's Coaches services into and out of the Truro.

The 'Ticket to Ride' follows on from a similar scheme that involved a third operator which was only valid as far as

Threemilestone. However, the new 'Ticket to Ride' scheme now allows return travel anywhere on the route between Truro and Chiverton, including Truro Station, the County Hall complex, the large Royal Cornwall Hospital, Truro College and Threemilestone on any Western Greyhound 587 and Hopley's 304 buses on that corridor.

The new tickets can be purchased on either operators' bus and then the return journey can be made on any of their returning services.

All parties - pictured at the

launch (left to right): Nick Hopley (MD, Hopley's Coaches), Matt McTaggart CC (Executive Member, CCC), Stephen Nicholson (Principal Transport Officer, CCC), Mark Howarth (MD, Western Greyhound), Robin Orbell (Director, Western Greyhound) – welcomed the joint initiative.

Matt McTaggart, Cornwall's Executive Member for Strategic Planning and Transport, said: "This is an excellent example of bus operators meeting the needs of their passengers. By working together to offer this joint ticket, passengers can now access a high frequency service along this corridor, giving them a greater choice of return travel options."

Nick Hopley, Managing Director of Hopley's Coaches, said: "Hopley's is pleased to be part of this initiative with Western Greyhound, and are confident that the public will benefit from this scheme."

Western Greyhound Managing Director, Mark Howarth, said: "We are delighted to be able to offer this helpful inter-ticketing to the travelling public. It makes total sense as it will enhance the passengers' experience by not having to wait for a specific operator's bus on their return journey."

Optare bosses buy millions of shares

Directors at Optare bought millions of shares in the company last Friday (10 July).

Chairman John Fickling bought nearly 1m shares at 5p a time as did Chief Executive Jim Sumner. Collectively, the board now holds 3.6m shares (3.4% of the company) and 2.25m in share options. The shares closed at 4.5p on Friday, valuing Optare at £5.15m.

Directors Mike Dunn, David Stonehouse and David Maughan

also bought sizeable stakes of 355,644, 200,000 and 97,111 shares respectively.

In May Optare reported a loss of £12m in 2008 reflecting costs of integrating Optare and Darwen (the former East Lancs operation) in difficult trading conditions.

Optare has manufacturing facilities in Blackburn and Leeds as well as service centres in West Thurrock near London and Cumbernauld near Glasgow.

Roy Stanley, with a holding of

30.3% of the company's current issued share capital, is restricted from purchasing further shares under Rule 9 of the City Code on Takeovers and Mergers.

In a statement John Fickling said: "This reflects our collective faith in the future of the business which, even at this difficult time for the bus industry, has strong potential for growth and development which gives us the confidence to buy further shares in Optare at this time."

Don't miss your FREE poster!

Designed to help operators who run regular services to claim Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) our exclusive FREE poster – produced in association with Tangerine – is included in this week's magazine.

The poster - intended for your office wall - explains what BSOG is, which services are eligible and how to go about claiming it. It also gives the latest information about the

changes to reimbursement and new 'green' elements of BSOG that the government is introducing.

The poster can also be downloaded, free of charge, from the **routeone** website www.routeone.net/downloads/bsog.pdf and we have a limited number of spare copies available if you'd like another one: call us on 01733 405730 or e-mail simon.warby@routeone.net with your name and address.

