

Key Dates

Leeds Improvement Act 1866 – Various road improvements and enabled the Corporation to purchase the borough turnpike roads and abolish tolls.

Leeds Improvement Act 1869 – This gave the Corporation regulation powers over the buses, drivers and conductors.

Tramways Act 1870 – this allowed the Corporation to oversee introduction of a new tram system. It included a 21-year monopoly for bidders.

1877 – First trials to replace horse trams with steam trams on the Leeds to Kirkstall route.

1891 - Electric tramway using overhead cables (first in Europe) introduced. It ran between Sheepscar and Roundhay.

1893 - Leeds Tramways Company license expires after 21 years, leading to the Corporation purchasing outright in order to resolve performance issues.

1906 - First motor buses, operating between Headingley and Adel.

1911 - Trolley buses introduced, running to Farnley.

1928 – Last trolley bus ran as more expensive than motor buses.

1934 – First cats-eyes in the world introduced in Drighlington.

1947/8 – Bus nationalisation.

1959 – Last tram in Leeds ran on the Crossgates to Kirkgate route

1965 – First parking meters introduced in the city.

1986 – Bus deregulation

2021 - West Yorkshire Combined Authority take on strategic role for transport across West Yorkshire.

Opening times

Monday – 9.00am – 8.00pm

Tuesday – 9.00am – 8.00pm

Weds – 9.00am – 8.00pm

Thursday 9.00am – 5.00pm

Friday – 9.00 – 5.00pm

Saturday – 10.00am – 4.00pm

Sunday - Closed

For more information

Local and Family History

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Leeds City Council Papers: Transport

Our Research Guides list some of the most useful, interesting and unique items in at Leeds Central Library. Many others are listed in our online and card catalogues. Items marked * may require 24-hours notice to view.

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Background

Leeds Corporation (now Leeds City Council) has been deeply involved in the development of the fast-growing city in the 19th century and onwards (health, sanitation, transport, education, gas & electricity utilities etc).

During this time, various Acts devolved power to the Corporation, enabling it to actively shape the city's growth and to address local issues. Over 200 years of Council papers are lodged in the Central Library, and these give details of how it has contributed to making the city what it is today.

Transport

The period charts the change from horsepower through to the combustion engine, and the Council's role as a key enabler: from licensing road users to infrastructure, running services (e.g. tramways), traffic management and strategic planning. Many of these papers are annual publications, while others are for specific activities.

Annual Papers

Financial Accounts (1850 – present day)

For much of the 19th century, accounts were broken down into Highways (road adoption, maintenance, and improvements), which lists which roads were worked on each year, and Tramways/Transport, which lists the expenditure, and income for the various modes of transport where the Council played a role.

In 1900, it shows that horses, steam and electricity were all used to drive the trams, and that while steam was cheaper than horses, electricity was significantly cheaper than both. In 1950 passenger income on the trams and buses was £2.17m (£95m in today's money) and this generated a profit of £200k (£8.8m)

Committee Reports (1878 onwards)

Committee Reports match the accounting headings but give much more detail. In 1900, the Tramways Committee reports that the number of working horses had fallen by 14 to 579. In the same period, the rolling stock had increased by a third. By 1950, the number of passengers carried was 252m and the miles run by vehicles was 22m. This compares to 28m and 3m respectively in 1900.

Highlights from other Council transport papers include:

Traffic Management

- In 1908, a bye-law was introduced instructing people to drive on the left.
- Further bye-laws include: Traffic lights (known locally as robots) were introduced in 1928 as were a plethora of parking restrictions in the 1920s and 1930s as cars become more numerous and again in the 1960s as car ownership becomes universal.
- In turn this led to the pedestrianisation of Briggate in 1972 and more recently the introduction of cycle lanes throughout the city

Infrastructure

The Outer Ring Road was built in the early 1920, and papers show:

- Much of the labour was funded by government grants. In 1921, half of the labour costs, £50k (£3m in today's money) were grant funded.
- In 1922, a land purchase near Pudsey for the road was offset by the sale of the rhubarb roots on the land for a sum of £834 (£60k in today's money)!
- The M621, linking the city to the M1, was completed in 1971. Prior to its opening, the Council ran bus trips for people to go and see the new motorway.

Licensing

- This was a key role for the Corporation from its earliest day. In 1886 the licenses in force were: Hackney Carriages (159), Omnibuses (250), Tramway Cars (60), Traction Engines (12), Omnibus Drivers (527), Hackney Carriage Drivers (267), Conductors (229) and Tramway Engine Drivers (26).

Running services

- The Corporation took over the tramways at the end of the 19th century and ran them until their closure. It also ran buses of many different types. In 1950, it had 396 tramcars and 391 motorbuses and manged 4,270 staff to run the services.
- William Vane Morland was appointed General Manager of Leeds City Transport in 1931 and oversaw many improvements to the network and rolling stock. His proposals for an underground railway in Leeds were not realised – an early taste of things to come.