

= London Country North East =

London Country North East was a bus operator in South East England and London . It was formed from the split of London Country Bus Services in 1986 and operated a fleet of around 350 buses from six garages , with its headquarters located in Hatfield .

The company was the last subsidiary of National Bus Company to be privatised , being sold to the AJS Group on 22 April 1988 . Later in the same year it was split into County Bus & Coach and Sovereign Bus & Coach .

= = Formation and early history = =

In the run @-@ up to deregulation , London Country Bus Services (LCBS) was broken into four smaller companies on 7 September 1986 . Three hundred and fifty buses , the garages at Hatfield , Hertford , Stevenage , Harlow , St Albans and the isolated base at Grays formed the new London Country North East (LCNE) company .

Early difficulties with staff conditions and wages , which the company was attempting to simplify from the complex contracts arranged by LCBS , led to strike action by staff in February 1988 . Performance levels on contracted routes were already below those expected by the local councils who had awarded LCNE the contracts , and by London Regional Transport . Following the strike three of the company 's London contracts (routes 292 , 298 and 313) were terminated and awarded to independents .

On 22 April 1988 , London Country North East was sold by the National Bus Company , the last of 72 subsidiaries to be privatised . The buyer was Alan Stephenson 's AJS Group , which had been formed by the management buyout of West Yorkshire Road Car Company . As part of the sale LCNE 's property was bought by Parkdale Holdings and leased back to the company ; some was sold for redevelopment , while the remainder was later sold back to LCNE . Parkdale Holdings later went out of business having changed their name to Pavilion Leisure .

A month later LCNE was banned from registering new services for six months by the Traffic Commissioner for failing to operate service in accordance with registrations made . Following poor financial results , AJS decided to split the company in two .

= = Division = =

In 20 months of existence London Country North East had lost £ 5 @.@ 5 million , on a turnover of £ 14 million . Two operating subsidiaries were created to help improve the situation , under the control of a single holding company , initially called the London Country Travel Group and later renamed to South of England Travel Group . Its chief executive , Bob Howells , had previously been West Yorkshire Road Car Company 's traffic manager . A third company , Cambridge based Premier Travel Services , was added to the group in 1989 but was sold to Cambus in 1991 . Both subsidiaries continued to be owned by AJS until 1991 , when they were sold to new owners .

= = County Bus & Coach = =

County Bus & Coach took over the former London Country North East garages at Harlow , Grays and Hertford . Under AJS 's ownership it was managed by Graham Willet , previously London Country Bus Services ' chief engineer . The company enjoyed some expansion : small independent Sampson Coaches and its garage at Hoddesdon were bought in February 1989 ; however , as a result of this , Hertford garage was vacated and sold for redevelopment by its owners Parkdale Holdings . The Debden and Wyatts Green depots and some local routes of the former East Midland owned Fronrunner operation were acquired in July 1989 . County Bus & Coach 's fleet policy was to use Mercedes @-@ Benz minibuses on most routes , including in Grays when Lakeside Shopping Centre opened and when two London contracted routes were run ; there is some evidence that passengers did not like these vehicles , and their use is thought to have reduced patronage in the

area .

AJS group was wound up in 1991 , and the company 's director Bob Howells bought County Bus & Coach through a new holding company , Lynton Travel Group . County Bus & Coach was relaunched with three new local identities : Grays garage became ThameSide , Harlow became TownLink , and Hoddesdon became Lea Valley . One small operator , Davian Coaches of Upper Edmonton , was acquired a few months after and merged with County Bus & Coach .

The company was one of the beneficiaries of the collapse of London Forest , gaining three routes in Walthamstow . The services of Golden Boy were also taken over , in September 1992 , although this deal involved no vehicles and no garage . In July 1993 , Lynton Travel purchased 41 @-@ vehicle independent Citibus Tours , based in Chadderton near Oldham . Other changes made in 1993 included the opening of a new garage in Grays to replace the previous building , and a totally new garage at Ware which replaced that at Hoddesdon . Two more operators were taken over in 1994 , namely coach operators Airport Coaches of Stansted Airport and Biss Bros of Bishops Stortford .

However , on 7 October 1994 County Bus & Coach was sold to West Midlands Travel , who had also acquired the former London Buses subsidiary Westlink . In November 1994 County Bus & Coach became only the tenth operator in the UK to introduce low @-@ floor vehicles into service , when four Dennis Lance SLFs with Wright Pathfinder bodywork were introduced to route 502 Harlow to Romford . West Midlands Travel was taken over by National Express in 1995 , and the new owners decided not to keep their London companies . Westlink was the first to be sold , to London United in September 1995 . One year later , County Bus & Coach was sold to the rapidly expanding Cowie Group .

After also taking over British Bus on 1 August 1996 , who owned most of the other former London Country Bus Services company , in November 1997 the Cowie Group was rebranded as Arriva .

County Bus & Coach 's garage at Grays was transferred to Arriva Southend in 2000 , with that company becoming part of the Arriva Southern Counties operation in 2002 . The rest of County Bus & Coach 's routes , garages and vehicles became Arriva East Herts & Essex . This was later combined with the former Luton & District and London Country North West operations to form Arriva Shires & Essex , in which form County Bus & Coach continues to trade .

= = Sovereign Bus & Coach = =

Sovereign Bus & Coach took over three former London Country North East depots in the 1989 split , namely Hatfield , Stevenage and St Albans . These were quickly joined by the operations and Stevenage depot of Jubilee Coaches , an independent which had previously taken several contracted routes from LCNE , but found it had bid too low for the routes and could no longer fulfil its operations . Hatfield garage was closed in 1989 , and a new site established at Welwyn Garden City . Another operator , competitor Welwyn Hatfield Line , was taken over in January 1990 and retained as a separate subsidiary for several years . Most of Sovereign 's Stevenage operation was sold to Luton & District (successors to London Country North West) in 1990 . In 1991 the owning AJS Group was wound up . Two directors formed the Blazefield Group , and purchased Sovereign Bus & Coach and most of AJS Group 's other operations . At the time Sovereign operated 76 vehicles .

Some expansion followed . In October 1991 a new offshoot , Sovereign Buses (Harrow) , was formed to operate a number of London Regional Transport contracts won by the company . In August 1994 , the company 's position in London strengthened with the acquisition of the 43 @-@ vehicle Borehamwood Travel Services , which brought tendered route 13 run with AEC Routemasters , under Sovereign operation . BTS was renamed Sovereign London and merged with the Harrow operation .

The company 's fleet and operations remained largely static until 3 November 2002 , when Blazefield sold Sovereign London to Transdev .

Sovereign contracted further in 2002 with the sale of the St Albans operation to Centrebus . Centrebus sold the depot to Uno in March 2008 .

By 2002 , Sovereign 's fleet amounted to just 45 vehicles . Stevenage depot was closed and a smaller garage in the same town acquired , with Arriva Shires & Essex taking over the old site .

Finally , in January 2005 , the remainder of Sovereign was sold to Arriva Shires & Essex . Having previously acquired the successors to the former London Country North West , London Country South West and London Country South East companies as well as County Bus & Coach , Arriva now owned all of the former London Country Bus Services apart from the St Albans operation .