First World War Battle Bus returns to the Western Front

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The B-type ‘Battle Bus’ has been restored and camouflaged into its wartime livery with the help of a £750,000 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant.

The commemorative tour highlights the contributions and sacrifices made by transport workers during the conflict and gives the public an opportunity to find out more about the role of London buses on the Western Front. It also offers a unique glimpse into the past as the bus (one of only four surviving B-type buses in the world) recreates this journey for the first time in over a century.

The bus will travel via Folkestone and the Eurotunnel visiting the following destinations:

- 19 September Poperinge
- 20 September Ypres
- 21 September Zonnebeke
- 23 September Arras
- 25 September Peronne
- 26 September Albert

The bus will arrive at each venue with a special destination board made of tulip wood and carrying the name of the town; the board will later be presented to a local town dignitary to mark the commemorative visit.

Sam Mullins, Director of London Transport Museum, said: “The London bus drivers’ contribution to the war effort of 1914-1918 is a little known aspect of the First World War. Our centenary commemorative tour of the Battle Bus is made all the more poignant when due to the fact that London was only a day’s travel away from the Western Front and the guns of war could be heard as far away as the capital.”

Sue Bowers, Head of HLF London, said: “This legendary vehicle quite literally links the Home Front with the Western Front. It has now embarked on a journey through time from Folkestone to Flanders fields as a superbly restored testament to the courage of London bus crews – civilians pressed into service along with their vehicles – who gave unstinting support to the war effort a century ago.”

The First World War was the first time motorised transport was used in a war. The converted ‘Battle Buses’ would be driven to the Western Front, often by the same men who had driven them along the streets of London only weeks before.

The buses were camouflaged by removing advertisements and signage, boarding up the windows and painting the exterior khaki. Military markings were stencilled onto the body, War Department headlamps fitted and each bus was equipped with a pickaxe and shovel.

The buses were used to transport troops behind the lines and also served as ambulances, anti-aircraft gun carriages, freight lorries and even messenger pigeon lofts. The ‘Battle Buses’ often got into difficulties on narrow muddy country

roads, and usually had to travel by night because their height made them so visible. Despite this, they were extremely reliable, and as London's first standardised bus with interchangeable mechanical parts damaged vehicles could more easily be salvaged for repairs.

Often the Battle Bus drivers and mechanics would work under perilous conditions. William Mahoney, an army driver between 1916 and 1917, recalled: "Bang! Crash!! Nearly on us. Nine men killed and 14 wounded only 50 yards away. My engine would not start so we had to stay and repair it, the shells pounding around us".

Goodbye Piccadilly – from Home Front to Western Front

As part of the First World War centenary commemorations a special exhibition - Goodbye Piccadilly – from Home Front to Western Front, which runs until March 2015, is on at London Transport Museum. It explores the contribution of London's motor buses and their drivers and mechanics in the First World War and the lives of people living and working on the home front in London. Goodbye Piccadilly presents a unique perspective on the First World War, exploring how the conflict accelerated social change, how it impacted on the lives of Londoners, particularly women, and the essential role made by bus service staff and buses to the war effort at home and on the Western Front.

The restoration and conversion have been made possible as part of a HLF project, which also covered other activities including an apprenticeship and community outreach programme. The project has also been supported by London Transport Museum Friends and public donations.

Notes to editors

The B-type No.B2737 Battle Bus

One of only four surviving B-type London buses, bus No. B2737 was built at the AEC Works in Walthamstow in 1914 and served on route 9 out of Mortlake garage in south west London operating between Barnes and Liverpool Street. At this time a single ticket cost 3½d.

The B-type bus No. 2737 cost around £250,000 to restore and was made possible with a grant from the HLF with additional funding being provided by the London Transport Museum Friends and public donations. The restoration is part of a five-year First World War commemorative project which includes an apprenticeship programme and collections support, as well as a programme of learning and participation which will ensure that communities across London will have the chance to see and learn about B2737, B-type buses and their role in the First World War through community exhibitions and a touring programme.

About London Transport Museum

London Transport Museum is situated in the heart of Covent Garden and filled with stunning exhibits; the museum explores the powerful link between transport and the growth of modern London, culture and society since 1800. Historic vehicles, world-famous posters and the very best objects from the museum's extraordinary collection are brought together to tell the story of London's development and the part transport played in defining the unique identity of the city.

The museum is an educational and heritage preservation charity. Its purpose is to conserve and explain the history of London's transport, to offer people an understanding of the capital's past development and to engage them in the debate about its future. The museum's charity number is 1123122.

About Year of the Bus

During 2014 Transport for London and London Transport Museum celebrates the 'Year of the Bus' - a series of engaging events, exhibitions, recreations and activities that will reconnect Londoners with their bus network and remind the world of the incredible role it plays in this great city. For details of these events visit Transport for London's Year of

the Bus webpage.

Year of the Bus is supported by and delivered in partnership with Exterion Media, Abellio, Arriva London, Clear Channel UK, Go-Ahead London, Metroline, RATP Dev UK, Stagecoach, Wrightbus, Optare and telent Technology Services.