

FOUR

# A NEW BEGINNING: 1947–1958



# A NEW BEGINNING: 1947–1958

Consolidation of a dedicated passenger car service essentially began with the establishment of the Central Storage and Transport Authority in 1947. The initiative came about because of the proliferation of government-owned motor vehicles during World War II. The number of Commonwealth motor vehicles had increased by thousands, particularly for the armed services, so that by 1949 there were more than 13,000 registered Commonwealth vehicles of all types.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, most departments had acquired, maintained and operated their own vehicles for passenger and goods services and arranged their own storage.

On 22 July 1946, Prime Minister Ben Chifley raised with the Minister of Munitions the idea of a central authority to manage the transport and storage needs of Commonwealth departments. The latter supported the idea and, on 21 February 1947, Chifley established a committee comprising Public Service Commissioner John Thomas Pinner, Department of Munitions representative Cecil John Gillan, and James Brophy, Assistant Secretary to the Department of the Treasury, to consider conditions under which a Central Transport and Storage Authority should operate. The committee met in Melbourne on 20 and 21 March 1947,<sup>2</sup> and recommended that a Central Stores and Transport Authority be established to handle all storage, passenger and goods transport for Commonwealth departments. The authority would operate in all capital cities except Canberra, where a pool already existed managed by the Department of the Interior.<sup>3</sup>

Prime Minister Chifley approved the idea and the Stores and Transport branches of the Munitions Department in each state took control of all storage and transport matters for all Commonwealth Government departments except the Postmaster-General's and Works and Housing Departments.

The Department of the Interior became the Central Transport Authority in the Australian Capital Territory under the same instruction. All transport was to be used solely for official purposes, and departments then in the habit of ordering transport from the government's current contractors were to place all future orders through the central authority. If the central authority could not meet the demand, only then could arrangements be made by that authority with a suitable contractor to supply the required transport.<sup>4</sup> The new arrangements with scales of fees came into force from September 1947.

John Jensen, Secretary of the Munitions Department wrote to Joseph Aloysius Carrodus, his counterpart in the Department of the Interior:

*The operation of the scheme will require some considerable expansion and re-alignment of the existing Munitions Stores and Transport organisation ... it would be very helpful, therefore, if you could make available the services of the Transport Officer, Department of the Interior, Canberra, for a period of several weeks, in order to consult with the officers of the Munitions Stores and Transport organisation.*<sup>5</sup>

The passenger service in the states and the Australian Capital Territory essentially comprised two levels, namely: a car-with-driver service for the Prime Minister and other ministers when on parliamentary business; and a taxi pool service for departmental personnel. The Central Transport Authority, whether in the states or Canberra, was also to be responsible for the provision of self-drive vehicles for government departments.



## Reorganisation and rationalisation

Departmental reorganisation occurred as the government focused on peace time pursuits. Accordingly, the Department of Munitions became absorbed into the newly-reconstituted Department of Supply and Development on 6 April 1948. That department became ultimately responsible for day-to-day administration of ground passenger transport. There soon followed another reorganisation when the Department of Supply and Development was abolished on 17 March 1950 and its functions were divided between the Department of Supply, the Department of Fuel, Shipping and Transport, and the Department of National Development. The Department of Supply became responsible for supporting Australia's armed services in defence production, research and development, purchasing, and transport and storage.

A procedure whereby, from 1 July 1948, the Department of Supply was provided with special funds to meet transport costs in the states was abandoned from 1 July 1950 because of excessive demand by departments.<sup>6</sup> Thereafter, individual departments were billed for the costs they incurred.

One of the Central Transport Authority's first tasks became that of rationalising the government's many transport fleets. This began with vehicles previously controlled by as many as 23 departments and authorities, and normally based within 40 kilometres of capital cities, being transferred to Stores and Transport Branches during 1947 and 1948 – the only exception being combat vehicles stored by the Army.

The vehicles surrendered to the new authority represented a motley collection with many of them not having been maintained regularly. There was an obvious need for fleet rationalisation. There were 28 different makes of vehicles in the central authority's 549-strong fleet in 1949, with 75 per cent of the vehicles consisting of 1941 – or earlier – models that had been operated under arduous war time conditions.<sup>7</sup> A 1947 memorandum indicated that:

*... more than half [the] vehicles recently taken over [were] found to be in very poor mechanical condition. Quite a number of vehicles are now surplus to requirements and it is our intention to quit as soon as possible the worst units in the fleet retaining a number as spares for replacement and meeting peak demands.<sup>8</sup>*

The Prime Minister's Buick, acquired in 1940, had also reached the end of its useful life. A new engine had been installed in March 1943, a reconditioned engine replaced that in 1945, and the car was re-ducoed in 1947. It had travelled 280,000 miles up until February 1948, when it broke down *en route* to Sydney and had to be towed ingloriously back to Canberra for repairs.<sup>9</sup>



Norm McCleer, who became a driver in Sydney in 1947, recalled that the local light transport fleet then comprised an assortment of Ford Prefects, Austins, Vauxhalls, Hudson Terraplanes, Canadian Chevrolets and Plymouths. The cars were mechanically sound but otherwise in poor condition. The Plymouths that were used for ministers and distinguished guests had rust in the doors and one of the Vauxhalls had a hole in the floor.<sup>10</sup>

The assorted collection of vehicles meant there were issues concerning valuation of the fleet, but no common basis for this. Some vehicles to be transferred were still on books at purchase prices; others with different rates of depreciation; while some 1941 models had been acquired in 1946 through disposal sales at pegged prices. The majority of cars had reached the replacement stage, but owing to the difficulty in obtaining new vehicles this had not been possible. The solution was to take all over under a common scheme of valuation regarding model, mileage and condition.<sup>11</sup>

Creation of the Central Transport Authority also involved relocation of drivers:

In all, 28 drivers were listed as being employed by Departments concerned in the initial transfer and of these 18 have transferred to the Central Authority. Of the balance, 5 were employed by the Department of Trade and Customs, 1 by Supply and Shipping, 1 by the Prices Branch, 1 by the Department of Commerce and Agriculture and 2 by Works and Housing. The Trade and Customs employees were originally engaged as searchers and watchmen, being employed temporarily as drivers. When faced with the transfer, they requested to be allocated to their original duties and it is understood that this request has been granted. Drivers from the Department of Supply and Shipping and Commerce and Agriculture have been retained by these Departments in this capacity with the consent of the Committee ...<sup>12</sup>



Drivers other than those for the Prime Minister had no standard uniforms apart from grey dustcoats that they were expected to wear. They were employed on a wages basis and any drivers to be transferred but who received salaries were to be absorbed into the Munitions organisation on a wages basis in accordance with the Munitions Agreement, otherwise they were to resign.<sup>13</sup> Cars-with-drivers were made available to government ministers and senior public servants, but services were also provided for patients of the Departments of Repatriation and Social Services.

The Repatriation Department had been established as early as 28 September 1917, during World War I, under the Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Act. It aimed to provide assistance and benefits to Australian soldiers after discharge from the services, children under 18 years of deceased and incapacitated soldiers, and widows of deceased soldiers. Many of its functions were transferred to the Repatriation Commission established on 1 July 1920. The government found its passenger car service ideal for meeting the travel requirements of clients of the Departments of Repatriation and Social Services.

The total number of cars taken over in Melbourne was 173, with 63 utilities. Twenty-two drivers in Melbourne transferred with an additional 22 drivers engaged to replace service drivers and others unwilling to transfer. Eighty-seven of the 173 cars taken over went out on hire to various departments without drivers, another 17 were out on hire with drivers, leaving 31 cars and 31 drivers in the Melbourne pool. The 'light transport section' in Melbourne became more formally organised with the establishment of small transport pools at Headquarters Transport Depot at Victoria Barracks and Western Market, City, and appropriate garage and repair facilities.

As many as 536 vehicles had been transferred to the Central Transport Authority pool by 31 October 1947, with another 170 still outstanding.<sup>14</sup> Even so, the new central authority was unable to meet all demands on it and a contract was concluded with City Motor Service Ltd for car hire services in Victoria for 18 months from 1 December 1947. The contractors were to be used only when the central pool could not meet demand and no department could order directly from City Motor Service, but had to place orders through the central authority.<sup>15</sup>

The passenger transport service was closely monitored to ensure efficient operations and prevent abuse. The Transport Officer in Melbourne reported on 31 August 1949:

*Since the inauguration of the Central Transport Authority, it has been our regular practice to co-ordinate all plane and rail passenger car requirements where practicable. It is not uncommon for representatives of three Departments to travel in the one car either to or from Rail and Airport terminals.*

*When two or more transport requisitions are received for the same destination and time, the Officer-in-Charge of the City Depot contacts the Head of each Department and enquires if any special reason exists as to preclude the carrying of other passengers in the same car. It is only on special occasions (which have been very few) that approval has been refused and in each case, the reasons advanced have been satisfactory.<sup>16</sup>*

Even so, public servants made little use of pool cars to travel to airports or railway stations; most of those travelling to airports were prepared to use buses provided by the airlines. In a two-week period in August 1949, the only pool cars to travel to the Melbourne airport were provided for the Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers John Dedman and Arthur Calwell.<sup>17</sup>

## New responsibilities

The Stores and Transport Branch took on additional responsibilities with provision of transport requirements associated with centres for Displaced Persons from war-torn Europe under the government's New Immigration Project. The latter required establishment of a small transport pool with garage repair and other facilities within each camp area. Refugee camps under control of the Department of Immigration were established at Bathurst, Cowra, Greta and Uranquinty in New South Wales; Bonegilla and Rushworth in Victoria; Woodside in South Australia; Holden and Graylands in Western Australia; and Brighton in Tasmania. In each instance, the pool was under the control of an experienced transport officer, with drivers and mechanics being recruited from among the 'New Australians'. As many as 34,300 migrants passed through these centres in the year to 30 June 1949.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, there was need for a small transport pool at Townsville in northern Queensland, where the Department of Works and Housing acted as an agent for the Department of Supply from 1 March 1950.<sup>19</sup>

## State operations

The Stores and Transport Branch of the Department of Supply was responsible for all government transport requirements in the states. In the period soon after World War II, the most significant section was perhaps that associated with heavy transport services that became identified with many of the major infrastructure projects in Australia. The branch operated a wide range of vehicle types from cars to utilities, to trucks and heavy transports, including fork-lifts, cranes, buses, ambulances, four-wheel-drive vehicles, fire tenders and garbage trucks. The so-called light transport fleet, which included car-with-driver services, also included vehicles on weekly hire to other agencies.

The immediate post-World War II years were characterised by austerity and the need for economy in government expenditure. The policy as it concerned Commonwealth cars was "to ensure that the use of official transport be curtailed to the maximum extent consistent with the efficient functioning of Departments".<sup>20</sup>



In March 1950, the Menzies government appointed Leslie Arthur Schumer, Managing Director of Yellow Express Couriers and a member of the Commonwealth Road Transport Committee, to review the operations of the Stores and Transport Branch. The committee recommended the appointment of a Transport and Stores Board of Management and curtailment of some specialised activities. The Board of Management appointed to advise the Minister on the Stores and Transport operations included: A H Priest, Assistant Secretary (Planning) who acted as chairman; Albert Victor Halfpenny, Acting General Manager; J Curran, Director of Finance; L A Murphy, Superintendent, Engineering; and Schumer as Business Adviser. The first meeting took place on 10 October 1955 and was opened by Deputy Secretary Cecil Ambrose Stinson, who spoke of major improvements in management since June 1953, especially economies in operations and the modernisation and standardisation of the fleet.<sup>21</sup>

The determination of a vehicle standardisation and replacement program was one of the first issues addressed by the board. The board promulgated a policy for the regular replacement of vehicles at its second meeting on 14 November 1955. The legacies of World War II loomed large, with the replacement policy being underpinned by the idea of maintaining a fleet that was as modern as possible because it was “intended as a war nucleus ... so that in the event of an outbreak of war the Branch would not be faced with the inevitable problems associated with the operation of old vehicles”.<sup>22</sup> The policy was clarified and 18 months later replacement of vehicles was to be determined by their age and mileage travelled. Ford Customline cars were to be replaced after 130,000 kilometres or after three years; Holden cars were to be replaced after 80,000 kilometres or three years. The updated policy was aimed at savings in administrative and maintenance costs.<sup>23</sup>

Few ministerial car drivers were recruited directly to the light transport fleet. They generally transferred to it from other parts of the department and gained the driver's position by a process of promotion as vacancies occurred. Jim Cochrane in Melbourne, for instance, joined the department as a 17-year-old kitchen hand at a munitions factory in 1947. He transferred from there to the factory's transport section where he drove forklifts and trucks and, two or three years later, began driving the manager in a car on weekly-hire. He transferred to the Stores and Transport Branch at Maribyrnong in 1960, first as a weekly-hire driver at the ammunition factory and later as a pool driver. Jack Hutchinson in Sydney followed a similar path. He joined the department in 1949 aged 15 as an apprentice mechanic. Ten years later he transferred to heavy transport and, later still, to the light transport car pool.



Bill Burrridge with one of the first fleet Holden cars, Perth, 1949.





Norm McCleer and Max Bradford were exceptions who began working directly in the car pool in 1947, but they were among the many returned servicemen who received preference in employment. Herb South was the senior driver in Sydney at the time and the one who tested the skills of new recruits before they were employed.

Having won a position as a driver, promotion was strictly in accordance with seniority. New drivers in the larger cities were generally allocated to pools such as those servicing the Repatriation Department, where they gained a detailed understanding of city traffic and preferred routes at particular times; many patients inducted drivers into short cuts in the process of being taken to and from hospital. There were no limits to areas such drivers could cover and the knowledge they gained was more extensive than that gathered by taxi drivers and couriers, who generally worked within defined districts.

Others began driving for particular departments. Norm McCleer began working for the Customs Department which was a regular client in Sydney. Max Bradford in Adelaide with an Austin 8 Tourer was assigned to the Department of Post-War Reconstruction.

The essential car-with-driver operations were similar in each state. They remained part of a larger transport operation that provided light, medium and heavy transport services and maintained workshops that also performed work for other organisations such as the Army. Drivers were generally allocated to one or other of these operations but could be called upon to work elsewhere at times, particularly during major state visits when there was a need to maintain normal operations. There were times when Max Bradford was called upon to drive heavy vehicles to Woomera.

The Department of Supply was provided with special funds to meet transport costs in the states from 1 July 1948. This was abandoned from 1 July 1950 because of excessive demand by departments. Thereafter, departments were to pay for the services they used.<sup>24</sup> Hire charges were based on cost plus a small margin to act as a buffer against fluctuations in demand. There was no advantage to the branch in building profits in a trust fund because the trust fund was reviewed annually with surpluses paid to the Treasury.<sup>25</sup>

The most significant of the routine car-with-driver operations involved the transport of ministers while on parliamentary business. Max Bradford became a ministerial driver after four years of driving with the Department of Post-War Reconstruction. There was also a large proportion of work taken up with the transport of returned servicemen requiring attention at repatriation hospitals, and transport of physically handicapped people for the Department of Social Services. Special vehicles were required for the latter.

Work undertaken for the Repatriation Department became a major feature of the car service, except in the Australian Capital Territory. Returned servicemen and women could only be treated at Repatriation General hospitals in each capital. This meant that drivers ranged throughout each state transporting patients to and from hospital, frequently having to stay away from home overnight and with patients often travelling for hours to undergo a procedure that might take only minutes. Depots were maintained at each repatriation hospital that largely operated independently of the central car pools. The hospital depots had their own reservations and allocations staff who sought to ensure the most efficient use of vehicles by maximising the number of passengers in each vehicle.

However, there were differences between the various state operations, despite the overwhelming similarities.

The New South Wales car-with-driver operation was generally the busiest of the state operations because of the greater number of ministers based there when parliament was not sitting. Consequently, there was an increase in the number of large cars based in Sydney in 1956 following a rise in the number of New South Wales Cabinet ministers, and the entitlement of Sir Earle Page as a former prime minister to 'ministerial privileges'.<sup>26</sup> There was also extensive work associated with the Repatriation Department and Concord Hospital. Moreover, Sydney was the preferred gateway to Australia for many visiting dignitaries who were provided with transport services.

There were several depots in Sydney for the light transport fleet. Those required for the department's normal business were located close to the city's central business district, as in each of the capitals. The main Sydney depot was at McElhone Street, Woolloomoolloo, but its capacity was limited to 120 vehicles. Consequently, a small depot garaging 34 cars had been established at the Commonwealth offices in Phillip Street in 1947. This had to be relocated in 1958 to another property at 56 Phillip Street, pending replacement of the government offices there.<sup>27</sup> There were an additional six sub-depots in the suburbs.

The McElhone Street depot featured a garage that accommodated 107 vehicles on week nights and up to 120 vehicles on weekends by using aisles. The garage included washing bays, fuelling points and an oil store. Office staff, including 10 clerical and allocation staff, were accommodated on the mezzanine floor.

Victorian operations were also very busy across the whole of the Stores and Transport Branch because of many government factories in and about Melbourne that were managed by the Department of Supply. There was also a particular emphasis on large events. The Governor-General always attended the Melbourne Cup, where he arrived after being driven down the main straight at Flemington. There was also a need to transport ministers to the Victorian Football League grand final on the last Saturday in September each year. The light transport fleet in Melbourne operated from a depot that had been established on parklands at Albert Park in 1953. The Repatriation Department pool in Melbourne was based at Kingsway, South Melbourne.



S Baker and  
G Guilfoyle  
greeting  
Lt-General  
Doolittle  
at Essendon  
Airport, 12.5.1956.

Operations in South Australia were divided between those in Adelaide, and others provided 560 kilometres away at Woomera in support of the Joint Anglo-Australian Project that was formalised on 1 April 1947, with the object of developing and testing guided weapons. The main repair workshops were established at the war-time explosives factory at Salisbury, which became the southern administration base for the weapons project and was formally transferred to the Joint Project on 29 March 1949. The total South Australian vehicle establishment – excluding that at Woomera – stood at 467 vehicles in April 1957; there were another 378 vehicles at Woomera.<sup>28</sup>

The South Australian establishment of light and medium fleet drivers increased from 18 to 41 in June 1958 after the Stores and Transport Branch became responsible for transport services at what had become known as the Weapons Research Establishment, Salisbury.<sup>29</sup> This became a major depot, with a workshop responsible for as many as 300 vehicles.

South Australian operations were managed by Keith Loffler, from May 1956, from the light transport depot established at 61 Currie Street in 1948. Land was acquired at Richmond in 1956 for a new depot, but this was later considered unsuitable and, in late 1957, a city property in Grote Street was acquired for the Adelaide depot.<sup>30</sup>

Operations in Brisbane, Perth and Hobart were smaller versions of those in the larger states.



## New world politics

World War II had precipitated a realignment of Australian foreign relations after Prime Minister John Curtin's declaration on 27 December 1941, when he indicated that Australia's future would be more closely aligned with that of America and the Pacific rather than Britain. This realignment was reflected in the services provided for distinguished visitors.

The Americans were keen to maintain their ascendancy in the Pacific after the war and, to this end, President Eisenhower sent his Vice-President, Richard Nixon, on a goodwill visit to Australia and East Asia in late 1953. Nixon became the highest-ranking American to visit Australia when he and his wife flew into Sydney on 15 October aboard a United States Air Force Constellation aircraft. Nixon's party included a military aide, a naval aide and a State Department representative.

The Nixons stayed with the United States' Consul-General while in Sydney where they attended the NSW Parliament, a civic reception at the Town Hall and a state dinner at the Hotel Australia. The guests of government travelled from Sydney to Melbourne where there were similar activities, along with a visit to the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the main stadium for the forthcoming Olympic Games. The Nixons proceeded to Canberra on 19 October for talks with Prime Minister Robert Menzies and other ministers. Here travel between the various functions was by means of a motorcade comprising two police motor cyclists as escorts, five Commonwealth cars for the official party and a car containing detectives. The visit included a tour of the Australian War Memorial and the Australian National War Memorial to America, as well as an afternoon at Uriarra Station near Canberra to watch a demonstration of shearing and wool-classing.<sup>31</sup>



From top:

Prince Philip's Lagonda alongside HMS Britannia, at North Wharf, Melbourne, at the time of the Olympic Games, 1956.

Drivers at Perth city depot, 1953. Left to right:

Norm Jones, Frank Hale, George Dean, Freddie Hanson, Frank Thompson, Jack McDonald Snr.



## Royal Visit 1954

The Nixons spent a mere six days in Australia, little more than a brief interlude compared to the tour by Queen Elizabeth II that took place the following year.

The plum jobs for Commonwealth drivers remained the 'Specials' associated with guests-of-government; the choicest jobs were those associated with Royal Visits. That of 1954 was the first major Australian Royal Visit since World War II, the first of the new monarch – indeed of any British reigning monarch – and one of the most extensive. King George had hoped to visit Australia in 1952, but because of ill-health plans were laid for Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh to visit instead. This tour had to be abandoned after King George died on 6 February 1952 and Princess Elizabeth became Queen. Similar arrangements made for the aborted 1952 visit were implemented in 1954.

The Queen and Duke of Edinburgh arrived in Sydney from New Zealand aboard the *Gothic* on 3 February 1954. However, the Commonwealth's light fleet drivers were virtually privileged bystanders for the Royal Visit of 1954. A special Army unit, the Royal Visit Car Company, comprising 10 officers and 100 other ranks, was given responsibility for driving the Royal visitors in vehicles provided from the transport pools. Colour-Sergeant Gordon Burling in a Daimler Tourer was the Queen's first driver in Australia after she landed at Sydney's Farm Cove.<sup>32</sup>

Commonwealth drivers undertook smaller jobs associated with members of the Royal household and other dignitaries in their home states, along with state police. There was a suggestion that the use of Army personnel was in part due to a strike by Sydney drivers in the late 1940s and a fear that they might use the occasion of the visit to press demands and perhaps jeopardise the visit.

The Royal couple subsequently visited every state of the Commonwealth, including country centres as well as the capital cities – except those in the Northern Territory – before departing from Fremantle in Western Australia on 1 April 1954. They travelled more than 14,450 miles, the longer stages by air, and were greeted by rapturous crowds wherever they went.

The crowds that gathered to witness the Royal Progress were unprecedented. Many were already gathered in Martin Place, Sydney, by 7.00 pm the night before the Queen was due to pass. Crowds even gathered on rumours that the Queen might travel a particular street and the movement of any vehicles bearing silver crowns attracted attention. On one occasion, the Ladies-in-Waiting visited some of Sydney's northern beaches and attracted crowds cheering and waving flags.<sup>33</sup>

The logistics of the tour, with the need to position the 115 vehicles, challenged the organisers. In effect, a main fleet was used in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and South Australia, and a secondary fleet in Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia.

The visit provided a major learning experience for all involved in its organisation. There had been complaints in New Zealand that vehicles carrying the Queen had travelled too quickly for crowds to catch more than a fleeting glimpse of their monarch. Consequently, drivers in the Royal progress in capital cities and country towns in Australia were instructed to travel between six and eight miles an hour. Vehicles travelled up to 20 miles per hour outside built-up areas where there might be people waiting, and up to 30 miles per hour on the open road.<sup>34</sup>

Royal visits and others by distinguished guests became more frequent as air travel became faster and services more frequent. Together they reflected Australia's changing place in the world and the region.

## Practices

Discretion was a necessary quality for all drivers. All adhered to the principle that 'What was learned in the car stays in the car'. This ensured that confidential information discussed in the car was never recorded. Still, it was evident that some foibles did become known. Dr Herbert Vere Evatt was prone to complaining when he considered the drive to be too rough and would ask drivers to let air out of tyres. Arthur Fadden was a heavy cigar smoker and insisted on sitting in the front seat next to the driver – much to the latter's discomfort.<sup>35</sup>

Driving could be very stressful at times, particularly when ministers required their drivers for long periods, often late at night. Tragically Gustave 'Gus' Heister died when his car crashed while returning to Sydney with Harold Holt, then Minister for Immigration and Minister for Labor. Gus had joined the transport pool in 1946 immediately after returning from the war. He lived at Beverley Hills in suburban Sydney and was married with two young children.

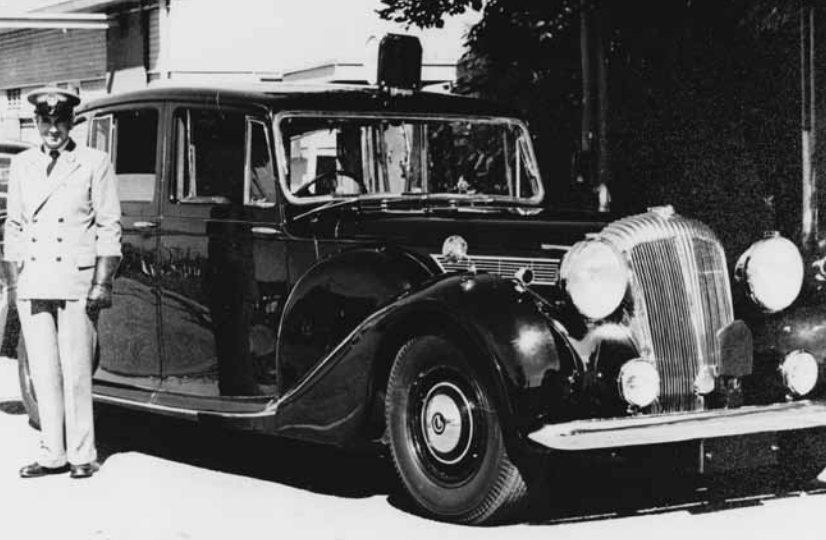
Prime Minister Robert Menzies had called a federal election for 10 December 1955. Holt believed himself safe in his Victorian seat of Higgins and spent as much time as possible campaigning throughout the country. He addressed a rally in Newcastle on the evening of 22 November 1955 and Gus was returning him to Sydney in the early hours of 23 November with Holt asleep in the back seat. Gus' car, failed to negotiate a bend in the Pacific Highway at North Sydney, hit a kerb, then a pole and finally the brick wall in front of the North Sydney Masonic Hall. Both Gus and Holt were taken to the nearby Mater hospital, but Gus died within an hour of being admitted. Holt had been knocked unconscious and required stitches to a gash in the back of the head. He remained in hospital for a week and, although safely returned at the election, did not resume official duties until the end of January 1956.<sup>36</sup>

The tragedy was a salutary lesson to all. A surprising aspect of the incident was that the scenario was not more common. Ministers could be very demanding, insisting on the services of a particular driver no matter the time of day. They failed to appreciate that drivers had to collect vehicles before even the passenger was ready to be collected, and could not complete the job until well after the passenger and the car had been returned. But drivers were also complicit. They welcomed the overtime work, often insisting that they were fit to drive though having had little rest or sleep. It was not unknown that drivers who stopped at traffic lights slept through cycles of the lights and had to be woken by passengers.

The pressure of shiftwork, which became more prevalent after 1949, interstate work, and considerable overtime, meant that drivers could have little stable personal life. Laurie Sullivan, for instance, had been involved in the 1954 royal tour that extended over eight weeks, when he was rarely home but living in hotels and motels.<sup>37</sup>



Army drivers with borrowed pool vehicles for Royal Visit 1954.



Driver wearing new double-breasted uniform, 1950.

## Care for drivers

All Department of Supply drivers were expected to be of good health. Consequently, the board endorsed recommendations for regular medical checks of all drivers following a report by the Senior Medical Officer of the Department of Health. Thereafter, drivers up to the age of 40 years were to be examined every five years; those between 40 and 50 years were to be examined every three years; with annual examinations for those between 50 and 60 years and twice yearly examinations for those over 60 years.<sup>38</sup>

A consistent theme in the history of the Commonwealth car service concerned the matter of uniforms. Stores and Transport drivers in the states began wearing grey double-breasted uniforms in 1950. The issue of uniforms was a matter of award negotiations that ensured a common approach for all drivers under the award. This need for uniformity became an issue in December 1955, particularly for drivers in warm conditions who had problems in maintaining a supply of clean shirts when the tunic was not worn. Negotiations ensued, with the drivers' existing annual issue of two shirts and four collars being increased to four shirts and eight collars.<sup>39</sup>

## Canberra services

As indicated above, the Department of the Interior had responsibility for parliamentary and public service travel within the Australian Capital Territory. All vehicles of departments except the Postmaster-General's, service departments and the Police, were transferred to the Central Transport Pool. Arrangements were made to ensure that operation of passenger transport services in the Territory conformed to procedures established in the states.<sup>40</sup> Still, operations of the two departments remained distinct, with some anomalies becoming apparent when distinguished guests were driven to and from Canberra. In August 1947, for instance, cars from Canberra were required to travel to Sydney to return with delegates to the British Commonwealth Conference in the national capital; another car was sent to Melbourne to drive the South African delegate and his wife to Canberra rather than have a car and driver from Melbourne undertake the journey.<sup>41</sup>

Holden sedans became part of the fleet soon after they went into production. By 1950 the ministerial and passenger car fleet in Canberra included 33 Buicks and 26 Chryslers. The Chrysler cars were the last of the model which meant that supply of spare parts loomed as an issue. Consequently, Charles Roach sought to sell these vehicles (and another Chrysler De Soto which had exceeded its economic life) and acquire 26 new Chrysler vehicles in 1950. He noted at the time:

*The purchase of vehicles to replace the Chrysler cars has been the matter of considerable concern for some time and in view of the Jubilee Celebrations commencing at the end of January 1951 and continuing to May 1951 and the possibility of a Royal Visit in 1952 and the necessity to provide a safe and reliable service for Ministers and passengers, it is recommended that the 26 Chryslers and the spare parts held in stock be disposed of and replaced with 26 new sedan cars.*<sup>42</sup>

During ensuing discussion Roach's preference became that for Chevrolet Styleline Sedans. He had been asked about Holden Sedans, but suggested that they would be too small for the varied class of work required.<sup>43</sup>

Still, Secretary of the Interior Henry Alwin Barrenger argued for the Holdens and these were ultimately approved. The press release of Minister Philip Albert McBride indicated:

*In the past it has been the practice to use vehicles of American manufacture on the Canberra transport pool. At present Buicks and Chryslers form the fleet. Apart from the fact that the purchase of Holdens results in savings in dollar commitments and in over-all expenditure, the Australian built vehicle has proved a satisfactory medium for public passenger transport.*<sup>44</sup>

However several Ministers complained when they were supplied with Holdens rather than Buicks. Consequently, an instruction went out that Holden cars would be used for all work with the exception of transport for Ministers. Buicks would be used for ministers of the Crown, the speaker, the president of the senate, and the leader of the opposition, except in an emergency and then it would be necessary to explain to the minister's secretary why a Buick could not be supplied.<sup>45</sup>

Demands on the service increased. In 1954 the Department of the Interior passenger car fleet in Canberra comprised 26 Buicks (1946 models), six Chevrolets (1952 models), 29 Holdens and a Packard. Normally cars were replaced after 130,000 miles, with consideration being given to the Australian content of competing vehicles in order to support local industries. On 13 October 1954 Cabinet approved the replacement of seven of the existing Buicks with current models and progressive replacement of those remaining which were no longer considered dependable enough for long distance travel.<sup>46</sup>

Individual departments were expected to meet costs for their use of car transport services in Canberra from 1 July 1958, after costs blew out from £4290 in 1942-43 to £108,000 in 1957-58.<sup>47</sup> Since 25 January 1942 the cost of motor transport services in Canberra had been met by a special vote in the estimates under the control of the Department of the Interior. This had been aimed at reducing expenditure by reducing the need for inter-departmental adjustments. This arrangement had effected some savings in accounting, but provided little incentive for departments to exercise economy in using the service. A memorandum explaining the need for the new charging arrangements suggested that, "The practice has grown up in some departments of providing officers called upon to perform overtime and week-end duty with transport by official car between office and home".<sup>48</sup> It noted that it had become common practice to provide an officer with official car transport between his home and the aerodrome when traveling on official duty, though officers in other capitals were required to use airline buses.



The Queen Mother, Queen Elizabeth, being driven from the Perth Airport, 1957.



Local conditions also boosted costs, two thirds of which were made up of the wages and overheads of an operation that extended over 24 hours each day, seven days each week. Local award provisions prohibited drivers working broken shifts, even though there was considerable variation in demand because of variations in parliamentary sitting days. Management endeavoured to make economies by integrating the car service with the public bus service and having 'spare' bus crews driving cars when not required during off-peak periods.

The need for economy was reinforced by the Auditor-General's report released on 19 August 1958 in which, among other matters, he condemned the use of Commonwealth cars for private purposes. The Prime Minister had issued an instruction for more economy in 1950, and reiterated this in 1957, because so little had been accomplished.<sup>49</sup> There followed an investigation by an interdepartmental committee representing Interior, Treasury and the Public Service Board. The recommendations that went to Cabinet sought to reduce use of the fleet to ministers and members of parliament.<sup>50</sup> Cabinet did not endorse the recommendation.

The operation of the car service in Canberra differed in many respects from that in the states, though in others it was very similar. It proved attractive to many drivers and already some drivers in Canberra had begun long careers in the service. They were part of the larger Canberra Transport Service that included buses and service on the buses had become the accepted prerequisite for promotion to passenger cars. Jules de Smet (Snr) had become a bus conductor at age 16 on 23 May 1939. He served in the Army between 1941 and 1946 but returned to the buses as a conductor, before graduating to driving buses and relieving on the passenger cars, and eventually becoming a pool driver. Others to have long careers driving cars were BA Bennett who commenced duties on 5 May 1936, while John Archibald Wilkinson and F Skerry began in 1937.

## Melbourne Olympics

The Duke of Edinburgh returned to Australia in 1956 to open the Melbourne Olympic Games. On this occasion the Department of Supply was requested to provide vehicles, transport officers and baggage attendants. This was to remain the norm and became the first major test for the service.

The prospect of the Melbourne Olympics with the requirements of the Duke of Edinburgh's visit, visiting naval fleets and anticipated heavy demand for visiting dignitaries, prompted acceleration of the replacement of 67 vehicles nearing their end of economical life. This increased the number of vehicles in the Victorian car pool to 154, which the Board Chairman considered the minimum requirement for the Olympic Games. The new cars included 52 new model standard Holden business sedans and 15 standard Ford Customline sedans.<sup>51</sup> The board also recommended purchase of nine Armstrong-Siddley Sapphire limousines to replace 10 Humber Pullman limousines. Humber Pullman C\*67903 was sold to the Northern Territory Administration to be used for the Duke of Edinburgh and later for other visiting dignitaries. Only a matter of months later, the secretary approved acquisition of an additional four Ford Customlines.<sup>52</sup>



The games also required additional drivers and many were drawn from states beyond Victoria. Norm McCleer was one of those drawn from Sydney. He and his colleagues had to drive to Melbourne and that in itself became an adventure, as he recalled:

*They filled the back [of each vehicle] with all these drivers and their gear and away we went to the Olympic Games. That was the time the flood was up in the Wagga area and so we pushed off in convoy. I think there were about four or five Armstrong Siddleys on the way to Melbourne. We stayed in Gundagai over night ... pushed off and couldn't go through Tarcutta, so had to go through Wagga. Where the flood had been, it had washed across the roads and made them all rough. So we were hurtling along with a full load of drivers; the motor must have jumped the engine mountings and holed the radiator. Keith Smith who was foreman of the depot at the time ... stayed back with me in Wagga while the rest of the drivers doubled up and went ahead. We contacted Sydney who arranged to send a radiator down ... so we had to wait until the next morning to get the radiator off the train and then we went on our merry way to Melbourne.<sup>53</sup>*



Opening of the Olympic Games at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, 1956.

Norm drove delegates from several embassies, primarily those from Japan, and managed to see many events. Max Bradford was one of those brought from South Australia. He and his car were allocated to the Royal Yacht Britannia for use by the captain and officers.

Several women were recruited as volunteer drivers for the duration of the Olympic Games. They were allocated to Holden vehicles and undertook largely routine but no less important jobs. The board recommended the advance issue of one tunic and one pair of trousers to 15 drivers selected to drive the Duke of Edinburgh and senior members of his household.<sup>54</sup>

There were many special visits the following year. The Prime Minister of Japan, Nobusuke Kishi, visited in November and December 1957, followed by Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in January and February 1958.

These later visits prompted the advancement of the car replacement program with the sale of 65 cars – 48 Holden sedans and 17 Ford Customline sedans – and their replacement by five Special Ford Customlines, 20 Ford Customline sedans and 40 Holden business sedans. The five Special Ford Customlines were to replace Armstrong-Siddley Sapphire vehicles to be withdrawn from use by ministers and used for the Royal Visit of the Queen Mother in 1958. Two of the Special Ford Customlines were to be delivered to Sydney and Melbourne for ministerial use after the visit, with the other transferred to Adelaide.<sup>55</sup>

By the late 1950s, the Commonwealth's car services, both in Canberra and the states, had been firmly established and their worth greatly appreciated, particularly on occasions when the government welcomed distinguished visitors. There followed a period of sustained economic growth that was reflected by that of the passenger car service.