



THREE

DEPRESSION AND WAR:

1929-1947



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The extension of entitlements to use the government's passenger car service enhanced the need to control access to the service. This was complicated by the dual centres of government administration, and by the seat of government in Canberra where there were few public facilities. It was complicated, too, by increased use of passenger vehicles in the service of the government, especially during the period of World War II.

Defence Department drivers in Melbourne provided transport services for ministers while on official business and also for high ranking departmental officers and official visitors to defence facilities. However, this was only part of the broader transport section's responsibility. It later became responsible for the removal of furniture for defence personnel who had been transferred to new posts around Australia.

The service for ministers provided by the Defence Department could not always meet all the demands placed on it. Consequently, these services were complemented by arrangements with private hire car companies for other transport demands of government. The Blue Wren Taxi Company in Melbourne won the contract in 1930, but lost this to Wilson's Car Hire Service in 1931. Wilsons were required to provide chauffeur-driven Cadillac or Packard Saloon vehicles to seat seven passengers when used as taxi cabs, and a Marmon Tourer with seating for seven when a touring car was required.¹

A similar arrangement prevailed in Sydney, where the Uneeda Motor Service, in Paddington, won the tender for motor car hire services for Commonwealth departments in Sydney for the period from 1 July 1932 to 30 June 1933.² The New South Wales

State Contracts Control Board arranged the contract on behalf of the Commonwealth when Pyke's Drive Yourself Service Ltd and McLeod's Garage Ltd won the government contracts from 1 July 1936. Drivers performing services for the Commonwealth were expected to wear a driver's uniform and peak cap; return trips on runs to Canberra were to be charged at 50 per cent if returning empty.³

The transport requirements of the prime minister and other ministers in places beyond the major capitals and the Federal Capital Territory were provided by private operators with costs being billed to the Defence Department; as in the instance when Prime Minister James Scullin visited Kalgoorlie in August 1930.⁴



Transport personnel including women drivers at Welshpool, Western Australia, 1945.

Canberra

Arrangements differed in the Federal Capital Territory where the Commonwealth Government was responsible for all municipal functions and the Department of Works and Railways for operating transport services. These had become more formalised by 1930 and were managed through five agencies, namely: a city omnibus service for the general Canberra population; special duty cars; goods transport; fire brigade vehicles; and motor cycles. The special duty cars provided two key services: a car service for ministers, members of parliament, official visitors and senior government officials, and a general taxi service for departmental personnel.

The special duty cars in 1930 comprised seven 4-cylinder Armstrong-Siddley cars purchased between 1925 and 1927 that included five different models — all in poor condition; eight 6-cylinder Armstrong-Siddley cars all purchased in May 1927 and in fair condition; two 4-cylinder Crossleys purchased in 1926 and 1927, one broken down for which the department was unable to obtain parts; and four 4-cylinder Ford sedans, on two models, all now obsolete. Together there were 21 special service cars of 10 different models with six recommended for disposal.⁵

At the same time, there were departments with vehicles of their own. For instance, the Customs Department acquired a Vauxhall car and engaged chauffeur P Watson for the exclusive use of the Minister for Customs in the period prior to the 1929 elections. The car and driver were transferred to Prime Minister James Scullin after the elections, but he believed the exclusive use of a vehicle by a minister was unnecessary and directed that the Vauxhall be put at the disposal of all ministers. Ministers were required to telephone the ministerial messenger, and only if the car was engaged should they secure a vehicle from the Federal Capital Commission's garage. This was judged to make major savings in motor car hire. The Postmaster-General also indicated that the vehicle set aside for his use in Melbourne should be used by other ministers when in Melbourne.⁶

In 1930-31 there were six Armstrong-Siddley Sedan cars available for ministers, officers of the Federal Capital Commission and the civic administration. Three sedans and one touring car were available for departmental requirements and, when necessary, cars were hired from local car drivers for use in peak periods.⁷

The Federal Capital Commission persisted until 1 May 1930 when the Scullin Labor government abolished it, partly as an economic measure to quell constant criticism of the autocratic administrative style of the Commission, and partly because of traditional Labor antagonism to administration by boards and commissions. In accordance with an ordinance under the new *Seat of Government (Administration) Act 1930* the government established the Federal Capital Territory Advisory Council to advise on matters concerning the Territory. It comprised the permanent heads of the four government departments responsible for the national capital – Home Affairs, Health, Attorney-General, and Works and Railways – and three elected representatives. Administrative arrangements changed once again when the Department of the Interior was created on 12 April 1932, following an amalgamation of the Department of Home Affairs and the Department of Works and Railways. The Canberra transport services and the operation of ministerial cars became the responsibility of the new department and were to remain so for more than 40 years. The services grew and became increasingly formal once the parliament and head offices of several key departments moved to Canberra.

Prime Minister's Department fleet

Once the economy began to recover, the Prime Minister's Department developed a small fleet of vehicles of its own for exclusive use of the Prime Minister – and other ministers when available – as ministers increasingly availed themselves of the car service. These vehicles were located in Canberra, Melbourne and later, in Sydney.

In 1932, Cabinet decided that there should be a Hudson sedan based in Canberra for use of the Prime Minister – then Joseph Lyons – with the driver having a residence close to the Lodge and an official telephone. Chauffeur Watson, the driver of the Vauxhall sedan now to be used by ministers, was also to have an official telephone. The two cars, along with three Armstrong-Siddley sedans, were to be garaged at Parliament House when parliament was sitting. Cabinet also decided that cars attached to the Postmaster-General's Department in Melbourne were to be used for ministerial purposes, otherwise ministers were to order cars from Wilson's Motor Services; the appropriate department was charged for the use of official vehicles.⁸ There were no Commonwealth cars in Sydney, so cars were hired as required.⁹

The Prime Minister's 'fleet' in 1936 comprised two Humber saloon cars: one of them (FCT*1) based in Canberra and driven by Raymond Tracy for the exclusive use of the Prime Minister; and another in Melbourne (Vic 2966) under the care of drivers Mr Tarrant and Mr Duncan.

The Prime Minister's Humber Pullman Saloon (FCT*1) in Canberra had been purchased by Prime Minister Lyons while in England in August 1935 on the occasion of the King's Jubilee celebrations in London. This vehicle was garaged at the Hotel Kurrajong and maintained by the Transport Section of the Department of the Interior. All costs were borne by the Prime Minister's Department, along with those of Driver Tracy who was employed by the department.

There was also a Humber Saloon (Vic 2966) made available to the Prime Minister when he was in Melbourne, though this could also be used by ministers and senior Commonwealth department personnel when available. This vehicle was garaged and maintained at the postal garage under the supervision of the Superintendent of Stores and Transport. Costs were met by the Prime Minister's Department with Drivers Tarrant and Duncan being supplied by the Postmaster-General's Department.¹⁰ The Humber in Melbourne was traded in for a new Vauxhall during 1937.

The government had acquired an additional Humber in 1936. This replaced FCT*1 and Driver Tarrant transferred from Melbourne on loan to the Prime Minister's Department to take responsibility for the vehicle. On 7 October 1936 the Prime Minister's Department finalised arrangements for the earlier vehicle, renumbered FCT*3, to be transferred to Sydney permanently "for use primarily of the Prime Minister, and then for the use of Ministers and Commonwealth Departments". Driver Raymond Tracy transferred from Canberra to Sydney with the vehicle that was garaged at Victoria Barracks.¹¹ Again, all costs associated with the vehicle and the driver were borne by the Prime Minister's Department.¹² Tracy had previously worked as a driver in Sydney in 1932.

Cabinet also decided that ministers could make their own arrangements if they preferred.¹³ This situation persisted at least until 1939 and the advent of World War II. Meanwhile, Cabinet had authorised the acquisition of a Cadillac in July 1938 for the Prime Minister's use in Canberra; this was registered as FCT*1 and driven by Driver Tarrant. The Humber that the Cadillac replaced was transferred to Melbourne to replace the Vauxhall. The 1936 Humber was traded in for a new Buick in July 1940 and registered as C*6.¹⁴

The Cabinet insisted that vehicles be returned overnight to a central garage. However, it was willing to make exceptions where these were deemed appropriate, as was the case with driver WT Brown, the Prime Minister's driver in Melbourne, who was frequently kept working late at night, then required early next morning. Having to leave the car at the postal garage meant public transport trips home later at night and back to the garage early next morning, leaving him little time for sleep. Cabinet gave Driver Brown authority to take the car home as occasions warranted.¹⁵

The prime minister's drivers were already supplied with uniforms from the Commonwealth Clothing Factory. Driver Tarrant in Canberra had been supplied with a double-breasted blue suit with a chauffeur's cap featuring a small gold crown. In 1937, Prime Minister Lyons insisted that Driver Brown be issued with a similar uniform.¹⁶

Consolidating change

Entitlements to use of cars-with-drivers grew from time to time. In 1935, the Department of the Interior's ministerial fleet in Canberra comprised 12 vehicles, including: six Ford V8 sedans, a five-passenger Vauxhall sedan, three seven-passenger Vauxhall sedans, an old five-passenger Vauxhall that had done more than 160,000 kilometres, and an old Armstrong car in poor condition. The 10 serviceable vehicles were not considered adequate when parliament was in session. Approval was granted for the acquisition of an additional six new vehicles with another two to replace the old vehicles.¹⁷

The notion of a car being allocated to the deputy prime minister became accepted when, with the approval of the prime minister, a car was allocated to Sir Earle Page, leader of the Country Party and Deputy Prime Minister.¹⁸

Similarly the idea of particular drivers being dedicated to ministers was established early. A memo of 25 May 1938 indicated that "Sir Earle Page ... stressed particularly the desire that Mr. George Edwards should be transferred to this Department [of Commerce] as Ministerial driver".¹⁹ Soon afterwards a vehicle from the Transport Office at Kingston, with driver George Edwards, was made available to the Commerce Department to drive Acting Minister for Commerce, Archie Cameron.²⁰

The car in question was a Vauxhall, C*102, originally purchased in August 1937. The car was to be made available to Earle Page in his capacity as Deputy Prime Minister, but Cabinet decided that the total number of cars and drivers in the Department of Commerce should not be increased, meaning it was to replace another car.²¹ The Department of the Interior was to service and fuel the car and be reimbursed for doing so. The car was expected to spend a lot of time outside Canberra.

This began a state of confusion. The car was acquired by the Department of Commerce, but in April 1939 was involved in a crash and required repair in Sydney. In the meantime, Page had retired from the government and the Department of Commerce no longer required the vehicle and wanted the Department of the Interior to take it over.²² Interior inspected the vehicle, considered it unsuitable as a ministerial vehicle and recommended that Commerce sell it by tender.²³

High Court judges were entitled to allowances when required to travel, though not necessarily exclusive use of a vehicle. In December 1932, High Court Justice Owen Dixon and his associates claimed expenses when travelling by car from Sydney to Melbourne after the sitting of the High Court. They would normally have travelled by train, but on this occasion took three days to make the journey by car.²⁴

1934 Royal Visit

The various Commonwealth car services were also used to assist with visits by guests of government. These were few during the period, with the most significant being the Royal Visit of Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester, from 4 October to 10 December 1934, to mark the centenary of the state of Victoria. The Duke's first Australian landing was in Western Australia. After touring parts of that state he took a train to Kalgoorlie and on to South Australia, where he re-boarded the *Sussex* and arrived in Melbourne on 18 October to inaugurate the official celebrations.

Remote preparations for the visit had begun many months before, on 20 January 1934, when Charles William Marr, Minister for Health and Repatriation, was charged with organising the visit, with assistance from Frank S Strahan of the Prime Minister's Department. Captain Frederick Lawrence Coldwell-Smith was appointed Transport Officer for the visit. The organisation was undertaken by the Royal Visit Secretariat in the Prime Minister's Department in collaboration with organisations in each state.

Charles EF Roach, the Department of the Interior's Transport Officer in Canberra, was appointed Commonwealth Transport Officer to arrange matters in Canberra. The requirements here were to transport official guests to and from the railway station and official functions, along with transport of their luggage. Guests began arriving by train from Sydney and Melbourne at 7.00 am on 23 October.

Six vehicles had to be hired from Hughes Motor Service of Sydney because available taxis nearer at hand had been drawn for invitees. Another 10 cars were required for media, a photographer, broadcaster, the visit secretary the officer in charge of the Canberra arrangements, state directors, with one car as a spare. All of these were to be local cars.²⁵ Twenty-three drivers were required.

The arrangements did not proceed as smoothly as all had hoped concerning car C*87, one of the Sydney vehicles. Roach later reported when there were negotiations about the proper charges :

The car was allocated to the use of Lord and Lady Milne, who were staying at Government House, and was first called for by Mr. Knight on the morning of October, 24th, who was advised that Hughes' had no car bearing that number; Pressure of work was too great to permit of any enquiry, and car C 90 was then allocated to this duty. This occurred several times during the day.

Further at 6.30pm on October, 24th, while Mr. Knight was engaged in another office, Leading hand Strachan ordered C 87, not knowing what had previously transpired, and received the same answer – 'that there was no car of that number.'²⁶

Several motor vehicles were hired from Wilsons Motor Service in Melbourne, with which the Commonwealth had a contract, to service the visit of the Duke of Gloucester while in Melbourne, and to ensure an adequate motor service for ministers.

The Duke returned from Canberra to Melbourne for the Melbourne Cup carnival, before proceeding to Tasmania, Sydney and Brisbane and finally, New Zealand. The visit was funded by the Prime Minister's Department against 'Royal Visit funds'.²⁷

World War II

The outbreak of World War II prompted a virtual explosion in the number of motor vehicles owned and operated by Commonwealth Government agencies and complicated their control. There were only about 250 Commonwealth registered motor vehicles in total prior to the war. The war also laid the foundation for the more regular organisation of the government's passenger transport services that grew out of those provided by the Department of Defence.

There occurred a major change in administrative arrangements when significant defence agencies ceased to be part of the Department of Defence and were transferred to a new Department of Supply and Development established on 26 April 1939, though it did not begin operations until 17 June 1939.

Transport of munitions had been the responsibility of the Ordnance Factory under control of the Munitions Supply Board prior to World War II. The likelihood of war had prompted the amalgamation of storage and transport functions, and creation of the Stores and Transport Branch of the Department of Supply and Development in July 1939.

Organisational re-arrangements continued, with a Department of Munitions being separated from the Department of Supply and Development on 15 June 1940. This new department was to take responsibility for munitions, aircraft production and all Commonwealth factories other than the clothing factory, along with storage and transport of war material, while the Department of Supply and Development retained responsibility for filling all other government needs. The Stores and Transport Branch became part of the new Munitions Department.

A lingering feature of the creation of the Stores and Transport Branch meant that drivers, motor mechanics – and other operatives – were employed as weekly-paid wages personnel, rather than permanent employees of the public service. This situation persisted for more than 30 years even as the Commonwealth car service extended its scope. The rationale for this was that the Department of Supply and Development, of which the branch formed a part, was essentially a business undertaking, and effective management required the ability “to increase, diminish, transfer, promote or demote, or in any other reasonable way adjust the labour force to meet changing requirements”. There was no provision under the Supply and Development Act for permanent appointment, though wages personnel were able to enjoy leave entitlements similar to those provided under the Public Service Act and apply to become a contributor under the Superannuation Act.²⁸



From top:

A Commonwealth car leaving the Perth city depot, 50 Murray Street, 1945.

Munitions Department car fleet and drivers – including women drivers – in Perth, 1945.

When Prime Minister Robert Menzies declared war in September 1939, the Stores and Transport Directorate – considered the Cinderella of the department – had one area of nine hectares at the Government Ordnance Factory at Maribyrnong, where Controller George E Ravenhall had responsibility for a staff of 30 and a fleet of 20 motor and horse-drawn vehicles. By June 1940, when the head-office was transferred to Cordite Avenue at Maribyrnong and the Director-General of Munitions took charge,²⁹ the Directorate had a staff of 95, and a transport fleet of 47 motor and 17 horse-drawn vehicles. In the following six years the scope of the branch increased exponentially as it struggled to meet war-time demands, with the number of stores owned by the government increasing to 363 and another 20 premises leased; there were also 347 magazines. Munitions Directorate vehicle numbers of all types grew to 574 including cars, trucks, buses, motor cycles, ambulances, fire tenders and fork lifts.³⁰ The branch also took on the responsibility for shipping arrangements and customs clearances.

The rapid expansion extended beyond Victoria when Munitions Stores and Transport, based in Victoria, became responsible for organising Stores and Transport throughout Australia after the Factory Board approved the appointment of separate Stores and Transport Officers in each state in September 1941.

W Harry Spencer from Victoria was appointed Stores and Transport Officer in South Australia in October 1940 and established a temporary depot, with two office staff and two storemen at the rear of Pengelley's Furniture Factory on South Road at Edwardstown. The depot moved to more suitable premises at Finsbury North in March 1941. Harry Spencer was transferred to Sydney at the end of November 1940 and was succeeded in Adelaide by RC Simpson, who remained in the position of Stores and Transport Officer until his retirement in May 1956. Passenger services were provided for all departments though there was no express authority for doing so. The first passenger vehicle associated with the depot was a Chevrolet Pullman Sedan number C*890.³¹

Harry Spencer established the New South Wales branch on 25 November 1940 at 49 Forbes Street, Woolloomooloo, with a staff of three and six storemen. Under pressure for additional space, additional depots were opened at Villawood and Lord Street, Botany, in May 1942, and at St Marys in June 1942.³²



Part of the Munitions Department car pool at Maribyrnong, Victoria, with women drivers, c 1942.

WH Jones, recently retired from the Victorian Railways, was prevailed upon to open a branch in Brisbane on 19 May 1941, in premises leased from the Adelaide Steamship Company at Stanley Wharf. The office was moved to government buildings at Rocklea in March 1942.³³ TW Wakeman began operations in Perth on 14 June 1941 in hired premises in Murray Street.

Responsibility for the Stores and Transport Branch nation-wide belonged to Cecil John Gillan, Assistant Secretary (Finance), until September 1940 when Harold Breen was seconded from the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) to become Assistant Secretary (Administration) in the Department of Munitions. The central administration of the Department of Munitions Stores and Transport Branch was established at 83 William Street, Melbourne, in June 1941 and became responsible for operations across the country under Controller George Ravenhall. John MA Gough became the Stores and Transport Officer in Victoria on 2 June 1941 with headquarters at Maribyrnong. The Victorian office originally operated on a Trust Fund, to operate on a basis of 'no profit, no loss'.³⁴

Defence production increased rapidly along with the need for more extensive storage facilities. In addition to local manufactured goods, materiel was diverted to Australia after Japan's entry into the war. All required storage and transport throughout the country. The transport fleet increased accordingly. The largest increase occurred in 1942 when 630 motor vehicles were acquired, with the Stores and Transport Directorate reaching a peak of 1033 motor vehicles and 149 horse-drawn vehicles. The Directorate had responsibility for 875 motor vehicles and other plant throughout Australia by 30 June 1945, with many vehicles having been requisitioned from private agencies.³⁵

The transport officer in each state organised transport functions as two operations, namely: heavy traffic, which covered motor trucks, trailers, semi-trailers, horse-drawn vehicles and horses; and light traffic – the Cinderella of the Directorate – which encompassed passenger cars, utilities, ambulances and panel vans, motor cycles and bicycles, each managed by a superintendent. The duty statement for the Superintendent (Light Traffic) highlighted his responsibilities:

1. The allotment of work to drivers.
2. The allotment of cars to drivers.
3. Seeing that requisitions are received for use of cars.
4. Hiring City Motor Service Cars when necessary.
5. Seeing that all requisitions for cars, drivers' vouchers, and daily worksheets, are received and checked, and a charge docket rendered for each job done.
6. Seeing that a Daily Log is kept of all activities.
7. Seeing that all cars and utilities are kept in good order and condition.
8. Seeing that all unnecessary running is eliminated.
9. The conduct and appearance of all drivers when on duty.
10. The instruction of all drivers in connection with their duties.³⁶



Four of the five lady drivers in Perth, January 1946.
Left to right Mesdames O Lovell, L Kelly, P Howe, J Mace (T Baker is absent).

The essential organisational structure was replicated in each state with uniform operational procedures and accounting practices operating throughout the country.

Staff in the Stores and Transport Directorate increased from 54 in 1939 to almost 3000 in 1943. Most were associated with heavy transport and storage and warehousing operations, though there was also a large growth in the light transport fleet.³⁷ An important aspect of the growth of the latter was the provision of car transport for dignitaries and personnel of the larger factories, and the removal of furniture for Commonwealth officers. It also maintained bus services within some of the larger factories and from these to rail and tram stations for factory workers.

While primarily concerned with the transport of defence personnel and materiel, other departments such as Aircraft Production, Commerce and Agriculture availed themselves of the directorate's services as its administration became more efficient.³⁸

A major new depot was opened in Melbourne at Ashley Street, Braybrook, on the Ballarat Road about 10 kilometres from the city centre on 7 June 1944. This provided accommodation for the majority of the transport fleet that peaked at nearly 400 trucks and 200 passenger vehicles.

Manpower shortages during the war and the demand for drivers led to the employment of women in this role and elsewhere within the Stores and Transport Directorate; the Stores and Transport Branch in Victoria had 237 personnel on 31 October 1940, including seven women.³⁹ The women drivers were employed in accordance with provisions established by the Women's Employment Board effective from 1 October 1942. There were no women drivers in the Prime Minister's Department after that date, but Miss KS Richardson had been employed as a chauffeur for the Hon William Hughes in August 1942.⁴⁰

Women also took other roles within the department. There were 190 women among the 1754 storemen, drivers and tradespeople of the directorate at 30 June 1945. This included 58 in both Victoria and New South Wales, 34 in South Australia, seven in Western Australia, five in Queensland and one in Tasmania.⁴¹

Joyce Richardson became a driver in Victoria. She began working at one of the government factories in Melbourne in 1942 and heard there was a need for truck drivers. Her father had a business of his own and she had learned to drive, so applied for a position and was allocated to a battery truck and based at the general store in Gordon Street, Footscray. Several months later she and another young woman successfully applied to be car drivers. Joyce began working from the two passenger transport pools at Maribyrnong and Western Market in the city; there was also a parcels service operated from Western Market. Later, she and another woman were sent on loan to the ICI factory at Deer Park, where she worked as driver for the manager for 12 months, before returning to Maribyrnong for the remainder of the war. During the course of the war she met other women drivers from factories at Ballarat and Bendigo who sometimes found themselves driving to Melbourne and having to call at the depot for petrol.⁴²

The women were issued with khaki uniforms that on occasion led people to confuse them with Americans.

Access to cars was never a problem. Joyce Richardson recalled driving Studebakers at one stage which were evidently destined for another country but were landed in Australia after the outbreak of the war; these were memorable because the speedometers were calibrated in kilometers. The work varied daily and on occasion included the transfer of wages from a bank to various factories, when there was need of another vehicle as an escort. There were the usual long periods of waiting. Joyce Richardson recalled one evening at about 8pm when her client asked her to wait outside the ammunition factory for a short time while he attended to business. She waited alone in the dark for four and a half hours before her passenger returned.

Munitions drivers were assigned to distinguished visitors during the war, one of them being a US Naval Lieutenant Commander, Lyndon Johnson, aged 33 and a Member of Congress. He visited Australia in 1942 on behalf of President Franklin D Roosevelt and had an exciting introduction when the Flying Fortress in which he was flying crash landed near Winton in western Queensland on 11 June 1942. He later visited Melbourne where he had the services of a chauffeured vehicle.⁴³ Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the President, visited in 1943.

Mrs ID Duncan became one of the first women drivers employed in South Australia when she joined the Munitions Stores and Transport Branch at Finsbury North as a Leading Hand Driver on 25 February 1942. She took charge of the light transport drivers who were all women and whose numbers ranged from 10 to 25. She became responsible for the rostering, allocation of drivers and cars and the maintenance of records. She was also the one to drive ministers and other dignitaries when they visited Adelaide.⁴⁴

RC Simpson described the organisation of the light transport fleet in South Australia in 1944:

The passenger fleet is ... equally distributed between Finsbury North and Salisbury, controlled by a woman supervisor [Mrs Duncan], under the direct direction of the Transport Officer. The work performed at Salisbury consists mostly of routine work on the area. Thirty passenger buses are on regular runs conveying workers to and from the rail head. Ferry services are run throughout the day, ambulances ready at call and a certain number of passenger cars are always in readiness in case of emergency trips to the city. All other passenger traffic is controlled from Finsbury North. This is more extensive in its activities than Salisbury traffic, as various Commonwealth Departments are catered for throughout the metropolitan area and country trips, interstate visitors etc. are all catered for by this branch. In addition to a certain number of cars kept at Finsbury North covering a portion of these activities, others are garaged at our central depot in the city and are available on call. The city depot has been a distinct advantage to the works and has resulted in much economy in dead running.⁴⁵

By 30 June 1944, the Western Australian Branch operated a fleet of 24 vehicles that included eight motor cars. A passenger car pool began operations there on 6 November 1944, with women finding work as drivers and with an additional woman driver being taken on during 1944-45. Passenger car services were provided for the Department of Munitions and other government departments, federal ministers, members and distinguished visitors and delegations. Drivers commenced work at 7.45 am and ceased at 5.15 pm, though occasionally were required to operate outside these hours when meeting arriving or departing aircraft. Delegations for whom cars-with-drivers were provided included a British Empire Parliamentary Delegation and an Indian Trade Mission. A report on operations of the Western Australian branch in 1944-45 indicated that drivers made 31 trips to the country on behalf of various departments. Several were made in connection with a dispute at the Collie Coal Mines, when Senator Dorothy Tangney, Justice Edmund Drake-Brockman, Justice Davidson and others were required to attend meetings at Collie.⁴⁶

It was reported that members of both the Indian Trade Mission and Empire Parliamentary Delegation greatly appreciated the courtesy of the women drivers assigned to them.⁴⁷ The women were all married and included P Howe, T Baker, L Kelly, O Lovell and J Mace. Mrs P Howe, a senior driver, travelled 53,000 kilometres which included carrying members of the Indian Trade Commission visiting centres in the South-West; Mrs T Baker drove members of the Empire Parliamentary Delegation and the Indian Trade Mission.⁴⁸

The Stores and Transport Branch passenger car fleet comprised 238 vehicles on 30 June 1945. There were 99 vehicles in Victoria, 81 in New South Wales, 41 in South Australia, five in Queensland, eight in Western Australia and one in Tasmania.⁴⁹ The relative importance of South Australia derived from the work associated with a major explosives factory built at Salisbury, north of Adelaide, in 1942.

Harry Spencer described the light transport operations in Sydney in May 1944, where the Supervisor of Light Traffic managed operations from the central office at 113 Castlereagh Street, Sydney. The pool comprised 39 passenger vehicles and was responsible for providing various ferry services to major departmental factories, and met the requirements of all Commonwealth departments. Phone bookings were made to the central office and allocations made with an endeavour to coordinate journeys in particular areas. Drivers were instructed to wait no longer than 15 minutes for passengers within city areas in order to ensure the economical use of vehicles.

There was another pool of vehicles at the St Mary's factory and bulk store comprising five cars, 13 utilities and four ambulances; all were primarily used within the factory area that extended over 29,000 hectares. A similar service operated at the Villawood factory and store where there were three cars, 10 utilities and two ambulances. The ferry services were begun to provide economical passenger transport from the central office to the store at Botany via Waterloo, to Granville and to St Mary's via Villawood. The ferry service provided to Botany operated half-hourly; the longer service to St Mary's provided two return trips each day. Central office also provided a 24-hour passenger service to meet emergencies after hours. This was provided by four male drivers working shifts. Several women drivers were employed and Spencer recorded that he considered that they compared very favourably with the men. He added:

It is considered, by insisting that all drivers wear the Regulation Dress, it tends to discipline the girls, and in this State very little difficulty has been experienced, and harmony seems to be the order of the day. A good type of Female Driver has been engaged, the predominate feature amongst them being the desire to take part in the war effort, which induces enthusiasm and loyalty.⁵⁰

It seems that female drivers were seen to be a decided asset to the Branch, particularly for special visits. JS Rosevear, Joint President of the Commonwealth branch of the Empire Parliamentary Association that toured Australia in mid-1944 commended them to Harold Breen, Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Munitions:

From my own observations and from reports made to me, I can fully concur with commendatory observations made by many of our visitors as to the smartness, efficiency and esprit de corps in all cities of the drivers, particularly the ladies in Munitions Stores and Transport.

I would be very glad if you would bring this matter under their notice ...

Whilst it may be invidious to single out individuals I cannot conclude without offering my special thanks to Mr. Weaver and his young ladies for having provided early morning car service for the entire delegation on four mornings in succession owing to the delay, for various reasons in the departure of the Qantas Tasman Flying Boat for New Zealand.⁵¹



Mrs Goodhart
and Mrs Baker,
Melbourne,
c 1945.

The ACT fleet

The Canberra fleet operated during the war much as before, and remained independent of the Stores and Transport Branch operations in the states. From 25 January 1942 the costs of motor transport services in Canberra were to be met by a special vote in the estimates under the control of the Department of the Interior. This was aimed at reducing expenditure by reducing inter-departmental adjustments.⁵²

There were 32 vehicles in the ministerial fleet in Canberra in late 1942, the oldest having been acquired in 1935. During busy periods that number was insufficient to handle the work required, particularly when several of them had travelled long distances. C*4 for example had travelled more than 157,000 kilometres. Interior Transport Officer Charles Roach believed there was a need for an additional 12 vehicles to replace those becoming uneconomical to repair. He had heard that 11 Ford vehicles were about to be landed in Australia under the Australian-American Lend-Lease Agreement along with seven Buicks. He was particularly keen to acquire the Buicks, after having learned that passenger vehicles were no longer to be produced in America in the foreseeable future, and that the United States Army was exercising its right to acquire vehicles.⁵³ Arrangements were made to acquire the seven Buicks and five Fords.⁵⁴

The five ministerial Ford vehicles were fitted with gas producers in an endeavour to husband scarce petrol stocks. They were delivered in Melbourne and driven to Canberra, the drivers having taken a train to Melbourne to collect them.

Cabinet decided in early June 1941 that all ministerial vehicles would be fitted with producer gas units and tenders were called for their supply.⁵⁵ Soon afterwards, on 20 June 1941, Senator Hattil Spencer Foll, Minister for the Interior, announced that as far as possible the government's motor vehicles would be run using producer gas. Ministers had become conscious of the public criticism of the apparent waste of petrol by those driving government vehicles when members of the public were forced to suffer petrol rationing.⁵⁶

The Department of the Interior called for tenders for units to be fitted to its ministerial fleet. There was a poor response, but the department arranged to have five units fitted to vehicles in Melbourne on 16 September 1941 before tenders were accepted, in large part to set an example and forestall criticism. The issue then became one of ensuring there were charcoal supplies available between Melbourne and Canberra.⁵⁷ Soon afterwards, Senator Foll extolled the virtues of the unit fixed to his Buick after returning to Canberra after a 1000 mile journey. He suggested that there was little difference in the running costs of a vehicle between petrol and producer gas and there was little noticeable difference in the running of the vehicle.⁵⁸

On 21 May 1942 Prime Minister John Curtin wrote to all ministers highlighting the need to conserve fuel and urging them to ensure that at least 50 per cent of their departmental vehicles be fitted with gas units.⁵⁹ Interior Transport Officer Charles Roach reported on 20 July 1942 that there were 27 units fitted to vehicles in Canberra, including the 13 ministerial vehicles used for interstate and intrastate travel. He suggested they were a mixed success:

It takes from three to five miles of running before the vehicle can be changed over to gas operation and it has been found impossible to make use of the producers for the short services from point to point which is required to be performed at Canberra.⁶⁰

The gas producers also created extra work in the regular maintenance of vehicles and hastened wear and deterioration.

In 1944, the Passenger Section of the Transport Office of the Department of the Interior in Canberra, which was responsible for the whole of government transport services in the Australian Capital Territory, had a staff of 96. These included 35 bus drivers, nine male bus conductors, 22 female bus conductors, 24 ministerial drivers, four leading hands in the bus section and two bowser attendants. This was distinct from the Goods Section and the Workshop Section. It operated more than 200 vehicles and services and repaired vehicles for the Governor-General's fleet, Postmaster-General's vehicles, and virtually all 'official' vehicles in Canberra.⁶¹

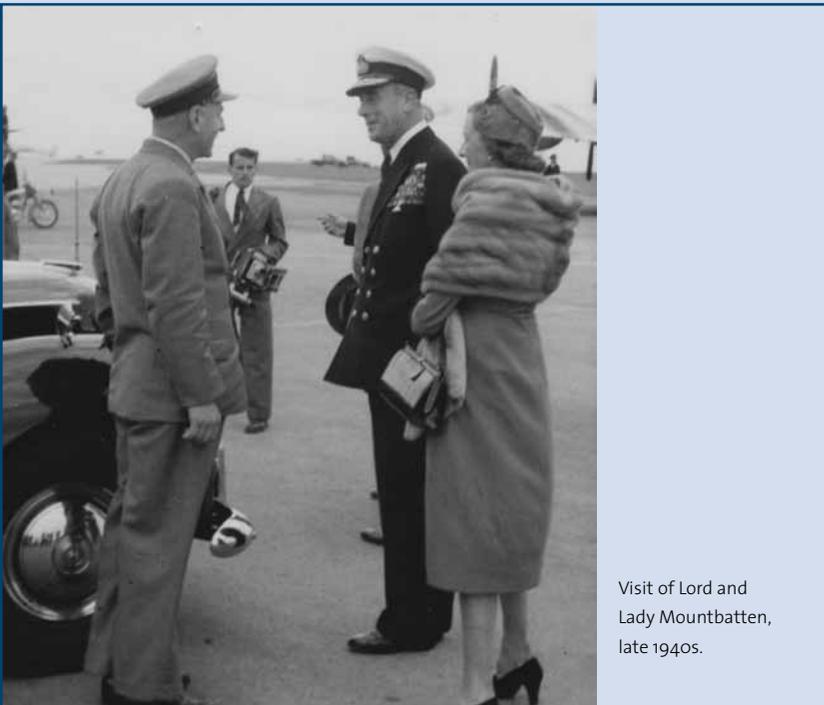
There were 45 vehicles in the car section in Canberra in 1944: "these cars are used for departmental work as well as Ministerial work in Canberra, intrastate and interstate".⁶² In mid-1944, another 25 Chrysler cars and spares were acquired for the ministerial fleet.⁶³ The acquisition during war time caused some criticism, though the department maintained that the older vehicles were worn-out, no longer safe or reliable, and that the ministerial vehicles travelled long distances.⁶⁴

At this stage, drivers were employed on a roster system. Previously drivers were allocated to particular cars, but a later government directive had allocated cars to individual members and a roster system was introduced.⁶⁵ The life of drivers was a varied one. There were occasions when they were away from home for periods of three or four weeks – even months on end – as their ministers tended to parliamentary business. On these occasions drivers from Canberra remained with their ministers while on interstate trips.

Close friendships developed between driver and minister because of the time they spent together. There were perhaps few closer relationships than that between driver Ray Tracy – who had returned to Canberra – and Prime Minister John Curtin. Mr Tracy became a friend, confidant and 'billiard companion' of Prime Minister Curtin and was one of the last people to see him alive on the evening of 4 July 1945. The Prime Minister had been ailing for some time and had been confined to bed. Mr Tracy went to see him about 10.00 pm to say goodnight. The *Sydney Morning Herald* recorded:

*During the evening he smiled good naturedly to his official chauffeur, Ray Tracey, saying 'How are you Ray? I have had a tough day today.'*⁶⁶

Mr Tracy did not remain for long. Mrs Curtin later had tea with her husband until he suggested she get some sleep. She was called by the nurse in attendance at 4.00 am to be told that the Prime Minister had died. Curtin had survived long enough to welcome the end of the European war, but not that in the Pacific, which had been his major concern.



Visit of Lord and Lady Mountbatten, late 1940s.

Return to peacetime

The car-with-driver service in the states had grown significantly during World War II, but it remained a relatively small part of the Munitions Department Stores and Transport Branch, which was characterised by large transports and large warehouses. Even so, there was a steady reduction in vehicle numbers during the latter part of the war as emergency conditions eased. In October 1944, for instance, the light traffic section had 211 vehicles on charge. There were 23 available for general hire, 138 on weekly hire to factories, 14 undergoing maintenance and another 35 awaiting repair, with one vehicle idle.⁶⁷

The growth of the service had not gone unnoticed. In July 1947, Senator John Armstrong, Minister for Munitions from 1946 to 1948, had evidently received a complaint about its misuse. The complaint read in part:

Cars should be strictly confined to departmental requirements. At present, almost every senior members of the staff at city offices, factories, and suburban establishments, has the unrestricted use of cars ... A great parade of luxury cars, loaded with overpaid and underworked heads, “panniken” bosses, and their friends, glide out, conveying scores of free riders to their homes or to the city ... This brazen and unscrupulous conversion of Commonwealth cars to the private use of privileged officials constitutes a disgrace to the general functions of this transport service ... cars and light vehicles should be used for departmental purposes only.

John Jensen, Secretary of the Department, to whom Armstrong referred the criticisms, gave the anonymous complainant scant regard and questioned the standing of the informant. He added:

I am not aware of the conditions obtaining in respect of other Departments, but I have no doubt that the respective Permanent Heads have as good reason as I have for approving of the purposes for which the cars are allocated. That is not to say that they and I are lacking in a sense of responsibility, and in fact I can say that as we have been moving over from the war pressure to normal peacetime conditions, the uses of official cars are becoming more and more restricted. The reconversion is still demanding long hours, however, from most of the senior officers; most of them filling two or more normal positions, and as long as that obtains, I feel that I must help them with reasonable transport.⁶⁸

Criticisms such as Jensen confronted were to be made periodically, despite constant efforts to regulate the use of Commonwealth vehicles.

Part of the ‘reconversion’ to which Jensen referred meant the replacement of women drivers – and males over the age of 65 – by returned servicemen in accordance with government policy embodied in the *Re-establishment and Employment Act, 1945*. The five women drivers in Western Australia ceased working for the Munitions Stores and Transport Branch on 26 January 1946. Joyce Richardson in Melbourne remained for only six months after the end of the war. In that time, however, she met Syd Baker, who became a driver immediately after being discharged. They worked together for three or four months, started going out together and married about 18 months later.

Norm McCleer, formerly a bombardier with the 2/9th Field Regiment, believed there were still eight or nine women drivers in Sydney when he began in 1947, but they were soon replaced as male drivers became available and received preference.⁶⁹

Mrs ID Duncan in Adelaide proved something of an exception for a time, even though the Transport Workers' Union (TWU) had insisted that female drivers be replaced by males. She had become very experienced in managing the passenger transport services during the war and was retained afterwards, but reclassified as a female factory clerk in charge of the city depot then in Currie Street. Though not retained as a driver, she retained her license and was sometimes called upon to drive departmental heads when they visited Adelaide. Still, as the TWU had pointed out, "ex-servicemen are objecting to being given instructions by a woman driver". The anomalous situation did not persist for long. Mrs Duncan resigned her position on 26 July 1946 and was replaced by D Smeaton from the Transport Section at Finsbury North. Smeaton, in turn, was replaced by a former serviceman.⁷⁰

Max Bradford, formerly a member of the 2/6th Australian Armoured Regiment, became a light transport driver soon after being demobilised on 27 June 1946. He was typical of many ex-servicemen. He returned briefly to his former job in a grocery shop, found it hard to settle down and jumped at the chance to follow a friend into a job with the Commonwealth as a driver.

The demands of war had extended the Commonwealth's passenger car service throughout Australia and underscored its usefulness. The main challenge after the war was to impose a measure of control and uniformity over the service and obviate criticisms of government extravagance.



Women drivers of the Munitions Department car pool, Maribyrnong, Victoria, c 1945.